

B E C O M E
Like the Angels



O R I G E N ' S
Doctrine of the Soul



Benjamin P. Blosser

BECOME LIKE THE ANGELS

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Origen's Doctrine of the Soul



BENJAMIN P. BLOSSER



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We may entertain the hope that by a virtuous life, and by acting in all things agreeably to reason, we may rise to a likeness with all these; that men, when made perfect, become like the angels.

—*Against Celsus* 4, 29

Introduction



None today can doubt that Origen of Alexandria (c. AD 185–254), a catechist, presbyter, and confessor of the ancient church, is a foundational figure in the establishment of early Christian theology. Yet, in part due to the posthumous condemnation of certain (supposed) propositions from his works at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, his legacy has always remained somewhat ambiguous. The present work is an attempt to explore that legacy, and particularly that element which appears to be at its core: Origen’s teaching about the origin, nature, and destiny of the human person. While this work does not intend to be part of the present attempt at a theological rehabilitation of Origen, neither does it in any way oppose this attempt: it is a sympathetic exploration of Origen’s theological anthropology, with the intention of recovering those elements within it that may be of perennial value.

The fact that each of the fifteen Anathemas against Origen issued at the Fifth Ecumenical Council concerns Origen’s theological anthropology, that is, his teaching on the nature of man, itself reveals how central is his teaching on the human soul to his theological legacy.¹ Theological anthropology, while often viewed as

1. That is to say, each of the anathemas contains, in its central proposition, a reference to one of the characteristic elements—body, soul, mind, spirit—that Origen believes constitute the human person. Nearly all of them contain the word “soul” (or “mind,” which for Origen is a parallel or even equivalent term). Even those that relate to other theological areas—Christology (the eighth and ninth) and the resurrection

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a supplemental field within the larger discipline of theology, is in fact the necessary foundation for all other fields of theology. In the case of Origen, at least, one could hardly offer an assessment of his spirituality, moral theology, exegesis, or ecclesiology without a prior analysis of his anthropology. A theological anthropology was at the core of the *kerygma* proclaimed by the early Christians—a message about what kind of being man is, and what are his origin and destiny. Celsus, the pagan, anti-Christian polemicist of the second century, recognized right away that Christian doctrine rested upon a certain anthropology, that is, on the assumption that mankind was a unique, privileged being in the universe, and Celsus spent much of his discourse against the Christians railing against just this assumption.² And, naturally, Origen's defense *Against Celsus* rests largely upon a defense of Christian anthropology, that is, what kind of beings Christians believe themselves to be: beings that are created, deemed, and sustained in existence by a benevolent God.

Notwithstanding Origen's deep interest in anthropology, and the centrality of this topic in his theological system, some are still reluctant to give serious attention to Origen's views. After all, within the Catholic Church he is one of only a handful of ecclesiastical writers not recognized as saints; he also seems, to the embarrassment of his admirers, to have been anathematized by name by the Fifth Ecumenical Council, as mentioned above. His theology has long been unpopular among theologians, his anthropology even more so, largely due to the condemnation of much of it by the said council. One critical commentator has called Origen's state of mind "purely intellectualist and idealist," with "nothing scientific about it," his psychology one "which assuredly was not based on the study of human nature."³

Yet, the explosion of new patristics research that accompanied

(the tenth), nonetheless relate to anthropological concerns. See *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, ed. Henry R. Percival (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 318–19; cf. Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (London: Herder, 1957), no. 212–28.

2. See *Against Celsus* 4, 23.

3. Eugène de Faye, *Origen and His Work*, trans. Fred Rothwell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 28–29.

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the rise of the *ressourcement* (or *nouvelle théologie*) school in the mid-twentieth century also occasioned a fresh look at Origen's theological legacy, most notably by famed scholars such as Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Jean Daniélou, among others. The result was such a dramatic reversal of Origen's reputation that the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* cites Origen six times, and the *Liturgy of the Hours* includes numerous selections of his writings.⁴ Not only have historians noted the massive debt that Christian theology, spirituality, and monasticism owe to Origen, due to the extent to which he influenced so many other Christian thinkers, but theologians have also recognized the comprehensive and penetrating theological vision of Origen himself, whose insights remain of perennial value. It is hardly possible, then, to offer a Christian theological anthropology without at least taking into account the insights of the man known to his contemporaries as *Origenes Adamantius*, or "Origen the Unconquerable."

If the theological anthropology of Origen is worth exploring, then why should the soul be the focus of it? Why not his view of the body, which has proven far more controversial—due to its supposed taint of Gnostic dualism—or his view of the human spirit, which is his most original contribution to anthropology?⁵ Aside from the simple fact of the treatments that already exist of these subjects, there is the additional question of their centrality to anthropology. Because neither the body nor the human spirit (*pneuma*), in Origen's view, is particularly central to the human person as such: the body is a part of the sensible cosmos that is shared by all embodied beings, and the human spirit is a divine gift that remains extraneous to the human personality.⁶ The soul, on the other hand, constitutes the very heart of the human person.⁷ It is the soul that defines the

4. See, e.g., CCC 113, 137, 498, 817, 2061, and 2114; the antiphon for Psalm 65 in *Christian Prayer: Liturgy of the Hours* (Boston, Mass.: Daughters of St. Paul, 1976), 705.

5. The most comprehensive treatment of this subject is that of Jacques Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme: étude sur l'anthropologie religieuse d'Origène* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967).

6. See Henri Crouzel, "L'anthropologie d'Origène: de l'archè au telos," in *Archè e Telos: l'antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa: analisi storico-religiosa: atti del colloquio* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1981), 38.

7. *Ibid.*, 39.

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person, both morally and ontologically, and it is the soul that determines his destiny. Delicately balanced between the carnal influence of the body and the enlivening power of the spirit, the soul is the locus of freedom and self-determination. Hence, it is difficult to imagine how Origen's theological anthropology can be assessed, in any genuine manner, without beginning with his treatment of the soul. It might be added that Origen's teaching on the soul is embedded in his contemporary cultural and intellectual context, whereas his teaching on the spirit appears to be a largely original contribution.

Finally, if Origen's view of the soul is to be assessed, what is to be gained by a comparison of Origen's doctrine with that of the Middle Platonists?⁸ Scholars of Origen have thankfully, albeit belatedly, begun moving toward a consensus that Origen was, as Henri de Lubac calls him, a man "truly ecclesiastic,"⁹ or as he calls himself, "a man of the Church"¹⁰—that is, a devout Christian and full-fledged theologian in his own right—rather than a second-rate Platonizing philosopher of dubious intellectual merit. The latter evaluation—that Origen simply "restated . . . what he knew of traditional Christianity in the borrowed terminology of the eclectic-Stoic and Neoplatonic schools"¹¹—prevailed for far too long, but Origen's "authentic Christian mysticism"¹² has finally received its due. Yet this has often led to a belittling of Origen's indebtedness to the philosophical schools, as though the genuineness of his Christianity could be measured by his antagonism toward Plato. Henry Chadwick may be nearer the point when he concludes that it was precisely Origen's "easy familiarity"

8. For the purposes of this treatment, the somewhat vague term "Middle Platonists" is taken to refer to philosophers in the Platonic tradition who wrote between 80 BC and AD 220 between the Old Academy and the rise of Plotinus. This delineation, in any case, is that utilized by John Dillon in his *The Middle Platonists*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1996).

9. *Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 241.

10. *Homilies on Luke* 16.

11. Herbert Musurillo, "The Recent Revival of Origen Studies," *Theological Studies* 24 (1963): 253.

12. *Ibid.*, 255.

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with the philosophical schools that allowed him to “set one school against another” and “use expressions of cold disparagement” against their errors.¹³ In other words, Origen’s hostility toward the Middle Platonic philosophers was made possible by the very fact that he was himself a Middle Platonic philosopher, living and breathing the same philosophical legacy of Plato. Origen’s anthropology was not designed in a vacuum, or drawn up *ex nihilo* from the pages of Scripture: it developed in an organic manner from the multitude of intellectual and cultural influences that swarmed about the ancient city of Alexandria.¹⁴ Chief among these influences was the philosophical school¹⁵ now known as Middle Platonism, embodied in Origen’s case by his mentor, Ammonius Saccas, whom Porphyry calls “the most distinguished philosopher of our time.”¹⁶ Of Origen’s training in his youth, Porphyry adds this: “In his metaphysical and theological ideas he played the Greek. . . . He associated himself at all times with Plato, and was at home among the writings of Numenius and Cronius, Apollphanes, Longinus, and Moderatus, Nicomachus, and the more eminent followers of Pythagoras.”¹⁷ And if Origen’s Platonic background, and more importantly, his indebtedness to Platonic thought, cannot be ignored, then a comparison of his own theological system to the Middle Platonic can throw into relief the originality and distinctiveness of his own system.

In sum, a treatment of Origen’s view of the soul, as compared with Middle Platonism, has the potential to provide an invaluable contribution to the development of a Christian theological anthropology, and to enrich other fields of theology in turn.

13. Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 103.

14. See René Cadiou, *La jeunesse d’Origène: histoire de l’École d’Alexandrie au début du IIIe siècle* (Paris: G. Beauchesne et ses fils, 1935).

15. “School” here should be taken very loosely. There was, of course, no proper “school” of Middle Platonism, but rather various philosophers who taught within the same Platonic tradition, at least vaguely speaking.

16. Cited in Eusebius, *The History of the Church* 6, 19.

17. *Ibid.*

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Methodology, Outline, and Sources

The outline of the present treatment is not self-explanatory; its complex organization results from the complex nature of the subject at hand. Origen does not draw a clear distinction between philosophy and theology, nor can one find a clear demarcation in his writings between the philosophical and the theological influences upon his thought. The evidence for his beliefs, then, will come from diverse strata of his literary *corpus*, each of which is subject to various influences, and appears in various genres—systematic expositions, biblical exegesis, pastoral catechesis, and violent polemic. Although Origen's opinion of philosophy is far from uniformly negative, his own theological anthropology is defined in large part by deliberate modifications, and even outright rejections, of Middle Platonic formulations. It is necessary, then, to carry out a close textual analysis of passages in which Origen addresses Middle Platonic formulations before establishing his own systematic teaching on the subject. This will constitute the first part of the text. Subsequently, when Origen's systematic teaching on the soul is assessed, this will be carried out in two distinct ways, proceeding as follows: first, as a discrete and comprehensible theological anthropology in its own right, and second, as an aspect of Origen's comprehensive theological vision of sacred history—that is, as a system in itself, and as a unit in a larger system. These will constitute the second and third parts of the text. In total, the three parts of the present treatment will be as follows: (1) Origen's response to Middle Platonic formulations of the soul ("Inner Moral Conflict: In Search of an Explanation"), (2) Origen's view of the soul *as such* ("The Two Souls: An Analysis of Origen's Explanation"), and (3) the place of Origen's view of the soul in his theological system ("History of the Two Souls: An Examination of Their Relationship").

A number of distinct chapters will be included under each of these three parts, each of which will be preceded by a synthetic explanation of its contents. The first part will include three chapters, each treating a distinct philosophical theory or model that Origen ex-

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amines and evaluates in his work:¹⁸ (1) soul division, (2) embodiment, and (3) two souls. The second part will include two chapters, each devoted to one aspect or “part” of the soul: (4) the higher soul, and (5) the lower soul. The third and final part will include three further chapters, one on each stage of sacred history in which the soul plays a part: (6) the preexistence, (7) the fall, and (8) the eschaton. These eight chapters, taken together, will provide a comprehensive assessment of Origen’s view on the soul—in itself, in relation to Middle Platonism, and in relation to his theological system as a whole.

A few notes must be made regarding the primary texts to be utilized in this study.¹⁹ Origen’s *On First Principles*, also known by its Latin (*De principiis*) and Greek (*Peri archōn*) titles, has been called “the first Christian system of theology and the first manual of dogma.”²⁰ If this is overstating the case, it does not in any way minimize the importance of this work for an assessment of Origen’s theological system. It is true that past scholars put too much weight on the *On First Principles*, and have only recently learned to give equal attention to Origen’s exegetical works, but this should not cause us to ignore Origen’s only systematic exposition of his theological views.²¹

Origen’s work *Against Celsus* is important as a representation of Origen’s polemics against Hellenistic philosophy, and as such is “an important source for the history of religion” in general.²² While Ori-

18. A specific focus will be given to *On First Principles* 3, 4, where Origen carries out his most systematic exploration of these views.

19. In general, the most up-to-date editions and translations of Origen’s works are listed in Henri Crouzel’s “Current Theology: The Literature on Origen 1970–1988,” *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 501–4. Exceptions to this will be noted.

20. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2 (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, Inc., 1992), 57.

21. For the purposes of brevity, the long and fruitful debate about the reliability of *On First Principles* will not be rehearsed here. The present treatment assumes that the extant Latin text is essentially dependable, though preferably cross-checked against surviving Greek fragments whenever possible. See Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, eds., *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History*, vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 284–85; John Rist, “The Greek and Latin Texts of the Discussion on Free Will in *De principiis*, Book III,” in *Origeniana: premier colloque international des études origénienne*s ed. H. Crouzel, et al. (Bari: Università Istituto di Letteratura Christiana Antica, 1975), 111.

22. Quasten, *Patrology*, 56.

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gen's adversary, Celsus, had no pretenses of being a philosopher,²³ he did draw deeply from Platonic and Epicurean themes in his attack upon Christianity, and thus Origen's response to him can be seen as capturing, at least in part, his nuanced relationship to the Greek philosophical tradition, broadly speaking.

Origen's exegetical work, by far the bulk of his *corpus*, is divided among *scholia*, commentaries, and homilies. Though these are manifold, and appropriate references are made to many of them, special emphasis is given to Origen's *Commentary on John* and his *Commentary on Romans*, both due to their size and comprehensiveness and due to the focus that each gives to anthropology (e.g., the strong role that the human "spirit," or *pneuma*, plays in both Pauline and Johannine theology is well known).²⁴ Although it is not an exegetical work, Origen's *Dialogue with Heraclides* includes some improvised exegesis, set in the context of a heresy trial, which is highly relevant to a treatment of Origen's anthropology, since one of the questions raised during the trial concerns the immortality of the soul.

State of Scholarship

Rowan A. Greer, an Origen scholar teaching at the Yale Divinity School, claims that the disputes over Origen's legacy can be divided into three periods.²⁵ The first, running for two centuries after Origen's death, saw tentative attacks upon and defenses of Origen's legacy—from Methodius of Olympus to the *Philocalia*—without challenging the right of Origen to a place in the Christian tradition. The second period includes the fiery debates over "Origenism" in the fourth century, starting with Epiphanius of Salamis in 375 and including the contributions of Jerome and Rufinus, where this right was seriously challenged. The third period is that immediately preceding the condemnation of "Origenism" at the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553, where this right was decisively rejected.²⁶

23. Though Quasten does call him "a Platonic philosopher." *Ibid.*, 52.

24. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 20.

25. Origen, trans. and intro. Rowan A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 29.

26. See Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, nos. 212–28.

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The essential charge made there against Origen, that “his theology was adulterated by his philosophy,” arose from the assumption that his teachings “could be understood by their philosophical logic more than by their function in Origen’s thought as a whole.”²⁷ Origen’s thought was viewed through the lens of Greek philosophy, and therefore was assessed *as* a philosophy and, as such, found wanting.

One might add to Greer’s presentation that this basic charge, and the assumption behind it, continued to dominate interpretations of Origen’s legacy well into the twentieth century. Throughout the Middle Ages and the early modern period, no matter how much a theologian might value Origen’s mysticism or exegesis, his opinion of Origen as a theologian generally echoed that of the council at Constantinople. Modern scholarship did little to change this, as much of it painted Origen as a half-rate philosopher who packaged Middle Platonism in a thin Christian veneer and whose system can “only with difficulty be called truly Christian,” since “he had no feeling for the deeper, objective problems of a truly Christian theology.”²⁸ So the judgment of Constantinople stood, and would scarcely change until the watershed of Origenian scholarship in the middle of the twentieth century.

Of this transformation, Herbert Musurillo wrote in 1963, “No comparable period in the history of the Church has seen such a renaissance of Origen studies.”²⁹ This “renaissance” was spurred by German scholars who produced a flood of new critical editions of Origen’s works, motivated by a flurry of discoveries of Greek fragments in 1941–42.³⁰ Consequently, scores of scholars, most of them belonging to the largely French *ressourcement* or *nouvelle théologie* school, offered a more positive reevaluation of Origen’s contributions to Christian theology. It soon became clear that Origen’s system was based upon an authentic Christian mysticism—a mystical and Christocentric point of view—and not a rationalistic, philosophical

27. Greer, *Origen*, 30.

28. Musurillo, “Recent Revival,” 252–53.

29. *Ibid.*, 250.

30. *Ibid.*

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cosmology.³¹ Although the former view of Origen as a systematizing philosopher still lingers, the majority of modern patristics scholars have accepted “the more constructive view of Origen, the mystic of the Church, the Greek philosopher who has transcended the limited categories of eclectic Neoplatonism.”³²

In addition, many contemporary treatments of Origen’s anthropology have shown that his teaching ought not to be viewed primarily in light of the static conceptual models of the philosophical schools, but rather in light of the moral, mystical, and biblical concept of man’s creation in the divine image, along with his vocation to return to God.³³ Past scholars were often too preoccupied, even obsessed, with controversies over Origen’s doctrine of the preexistence of souls that they were prevented from developing an appreciation for Origen’s anthropology as a whole. It has emerged repeatedly that Origen’s anthropology is not as imbued with dualism as was previously suspected.³⁴ Origen’s anthropology is far more informed by biblical motifs, and Christology in particular, than by Platonic philosophical assumptions.³⁵

31. See, as representative works in this vein, Walther Völker, *Das Vollkommenheitssideale des Origenes* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1931) and Marguerite Harl, *Origène et la fonction révélatrice du verbe incarné* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1958); Henri Crouzel, *Théologie de l’image de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1956), *Origène et la ‘Connaissance Mystique’* (Paris, 1961), and *Origène et la philosophie* (Paris: Aubier, 1962). A full bibliography on Origen is provided by Henri Crouzel, *Bibliographie Critique d’Origène* (Steenbrugge, Belgium: Abbey of St. Peter, 1971), along with *Supplément 1* (1982) and *Supplément 2* (1996). See also the recent entry on “Philosophy” by David T. Runia in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John A. McGuckin (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989).

32. Musurillo, “Recent Revival,” 262.

33. Among other treatments, one might mention Henri Crouzel’s groundbreaking article, “L’anthropologie d’Origène dans la perspective du combat spirituel,” *Revue d’Ascétique et de Mystique* 31 (1955), 354–385, along with his *Théologie de l’Image de Dieu*. Also, cf. Jacques Dupuis’s 1967 published dissertation on Origen’s notion of the human *pneuma*: *L’esprit de l’homme*.

34. See, e.g., the conference led by Ugo Bianchi in Milan on this subject, whose results were subsequently published as *Arché e Telos: l’anthropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa: analisi storico-religiosa: atti del colloquio* (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1981).

35. See, e.g., Rowan Williams, “Origen on the Soul of Jesus,” in *Origeniana Tertia*, ed. R. Hanson and H. Crouzel (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1985), 131–37; Mark J. Edwards, “Christ or Plato: Origen on Revelation and Anthropology,” in *Christian Origins*,

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Origen's relationship to Platonism has always been at the forefront of scholarship on Origen, especially inasmuch as earlier scholarship tended to view him fundamentally as a Platonic philosopher. Even if this view no longer carries the day, the subject—Origen's relationship to Platonism—remains central to the study of his theology. The primary shift in contemporary scholarship has been toward a recognition of Origen as a genuinely Christian mystic *cum* theologian, rather than as a syncretistic philosopher.³⁶ Origen's sharp criticism of the philosophical schools has emerged more clearly,³⁷ along with the observation that his borrowing of philosophical language is often superficial.³⁸ The emerging consensus is that, even when Origen adopts Platonic language and concepts, he reworks them into an overall system that is distinctively and self-consciously Christian.

This emerging consensus has made possible a more balanced assessment of Origen's indebtedness to the Middle Platonic philosophical tradition. Scholars are now more prepared not only to acknowledge the influence of this tradition on Origen's thought, but also to recognize the extent to which his Christian convictions led him to oppose many of its principal tenets. In the area of Origen's theological anthropology, however, this assessment remains an incomplete task. Earlier scholars had emphasized those elements of Origen's anthropology most reminiscent of Middle Platonism, such as his low esteem

ed. L. Ayers and G. Jones (London: Routledge, 1997), 11–25; John McGuckin, ed., *Westminster Handbook to Origen*, s.v. "Anthropology."

36. René Cadiou's *Origen: His Life at Alexandria*, trans. John A. Southwell (St. Louis: Herder, 1944) was probably the last monumental work to mark the older view.

37. See Crouzel, *Origène et la Philosophie*; cf. Crouzel, *Origène et Plotin: comparaisons doctrinales* (Paris: Téquis, 1992).

38. See Mark J. Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002). John Dillon, Regius Professor of Greek at Trinity College in Dublin, and perhaps the best-known scholar of Middle Platonism, concluded in 1997 that "rather than adopting Platonism or the doctrine of any other Hellenic school, [Origen] has forged a system of his own out of the Christian Scriptures and tradition, to which he lays Platonism in tribute for concepts and formulations which he finds useful, without surrendering to the Greeks any principle whatever." "Origen and Plotinus: The Platonic Influence on Early Christianity," in *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992), 8.

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of matter and his belief in a preexistent state. More recent scholars have stressed the more distinctively Christian elements, such as Origen's doctrine of the human spirit, or *pneuma*. Yet none has attempted a comprehensive study of Origen's doctrine of the soul,³⁹ which would necessarily involve a comparison of Origen's doctrine with the various positions of his Middle Platonist contemporaries. This present work will provide a comparison of Origen's doctrine of the soul with that of the philosophical schools of his day, and with Middle Platonism in particular. Some of the recent treatments of Origen's theological anthropology have significantly furthered this assessment, but none has attempted to examine this doctrine in relationship to Middle Platonism. A treatment of Origen's theology of the human soul will shed further light on his understanding of human personhood, human psychology, and human action. This in turn will offer new perspectives from which to view many other perennial questions relating to his thought, and will further relate Origen's anthropology to the broader Christian theological tradition.

Thesis

"A philosophical writer," writes Mark Edwards, a lecturer in patristics at Oxford University, "has no choice but to avail himself of the language coined by earlier philosophers; he is not, however, obliged—and, if he aims at originality, will refuse—to redeem the wares for which that currency was exchanged on the ancient markets."⁴⁰ Origen wrote within the broad philosophical tradition known today as Middle Platonism, and it cannot be denied that he frequently made use of vocabulary, concepts, and even arguments from that tradition. Yet the perspective and framework within which Origen wrote was fundamentally that of a "man of the church," informed primarily by Christian revelation, as found in Scripture and the Christian tradition. Consequently, the chief purpose of Origen's

39. The recent *Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John McGuckin, includes an entry on "Souls" that is well balanced and insightful, albeit hardly comprehensive.

40. Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 114.

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anthropology was not to establish a speculative philosophical ontology, but rather to understand the place of the human person in the divine economy of salvation, especially the moral and ascetical dynamics of the spiritual life, whereby the soul is reunited with the divine *Logos* in whose image it was created. In this context, Origen sees the soul as the theater where the drama of creation, sin, and redemption is played out, where the rational mind struggles for supremacy over the fleshly pull of the carnal soul, and where the fate of free, rational creatures hangs in the balance.

PART I

INNER MORAL CONFLICT

In Search of an Explanation



CHAPTER I

Soul Division



Before establishing Origen's own teaching on the soul, it is necessary to explore Origen's analysis of, and response to, the teaching of his Middle Platonic contemporaries, where these can be found. In the following three chapters, three distinct Middle Platonic formulations will be examined—soul division, embodiment, and dual souls—with a view toward grasping Origen's treatment of each formulation. As all three of these formulations are treated most explicitly in one section of his *On First Principles* (3, 4), that passage will be at the forefront of these chapters. A beginning will be made with the question of soul division, or soul composition.

A serious discussion of the soul and its purpose cannot go far without addressing the fundamental problem of the soul's composition. For the philosophical schools of the second century AD this meant the sometimes controverted question of whether the soul is divided. Origen himself recognized that a considerable amount of theological weight rested upon one's answer to this question.¹

The Middle Platonic tradition possessed no unanimous, coherent theory of soul partition, as this had long been a subject of contentious debate among the schools. Positions ranged from Platonic tripartition to Peripatetic bipartition and Stoic monism, not includ-

1. He points out, for example, that the very definition of "righteousness" depends upon which part of the soul, if any, is seen as responsible for it. See *Against Celsus* 5, 47.

ing numerous attempts to intermingle these models. Origen assesses each of these theories in light of the norm of biblical revelation, accepting insights from each theory while rejecting from each what is incompatible with this revelation. Origen's own position on soul division, taken as a general theory, is somewhat more complex than any of these alternatives, though it tends toward a modified version of soul bipartition, albeit inspired by motivations altogether different from those of the Middle Platonists. In the end, Origen attempts to incorporate the insights of these various philosophical schools into a genuinely Christian anthropological schema, a schema that is not only theological but fundamentally ascetic and spiritual. Origen views the soul as suffering not from an ontological partition into distinct metaphysical units, but rather from a moral crisis, the confrontation of its transcendent spiritual vocation with its current fleshly condition.²

To establish this point it will first be necessary to survey briefly the doctrine of soul division as it emerged from Plato's dialogues and was further developed in the Middle Platonic schools, resulting in three distinct strands of speculation. An assessment of Origen's works will follow, focusing on his critique and partial assimilation of each of these three strands, and concluding with a general comparison of his doctrine with that of the Middle Platonic schools.

Plato and Soul Division

Origen, like most of his peers in Alexandria, worked in the shadow of Plato, whose unsystematic and often ambiguous body of philosophical teaching left to his successors as many questions as answers. Part and parcel of this ambiguity are the two different pictures of the soul that emerge from Plato's surviving dialogues: the apparent

2. This moral crisis, which strikes at the heart of the human person, is discussed by Origen in both its interior and exterior elements. Interiorly, it is the conflict between the image of God and the fleshly or earthly image within him; exteriorly, it is the spiritual combat between the angels and demons who compete over his soul. These two aspects are both explored by Henri Crouzel. See *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène* and "L'anthropologie d'Origène dans la perspective du combat spirituel."

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soul-body dualism of the *Phaedo* and the apparent soul tripartition of the *Republic*.

The *Phaedo* represents Plato's earliest, dualistic tendency of attributing all sins and sufferings of the *psychē* to pollution arising from contact with the body.³ In this view, moral conflict arises not from any irrational element in the soul itself, nor from any strictly interior conflict or division within the soul, but solely from the soul's regrettable association with the body.⁴ The soul itself is thereby preserved from any internal discord and remains entirely uniform throughout. As a result, for example, Plato is able to argue from the premise of the soul's homogeneity to its immortality: because the soul is incomposite (*asyntheton*), it cannot dissolve into component parts and hence must live forever.⁵

In the later dialogues such as the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*, however, a different picture seems to emerge. Here moral conflict is no longer a mere epiphenomenon of the body but rages within the soul of man itself, a soul that finds itself divided into three "parts": the rational (*to logistikon*), the irrational (*to epithumetikon*), and the spirited (*to thumoeides*).⁶ The body in the later dialogues is not the enemy of the soul, nor do its demands represent threats to its well-being. Rather, each part of the soul possesses its own desires and ends, none of which is intrinsically evil or even unhealthy to the soul. The

3. Cf. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 212–13.

4. "[T]he soul is looked upon as more or less pure intelligence, and desires other than those involved in the search for knowledge are not considered part of the true self." T. M. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 33. It might be suggested that, since embodied life entails such functions as sense perception and physical desires, which are in fact principles of life, even the *Phaedo* assumes some kind of "life principle" or lower soul. But the aforementioned point holds: even if such a principle exists, it is not the true self or person.

5. Cf. *Phaedo* 78–84b.

6. Cf. *Republic* 4, 436 a 9ff., esp. 439 d 5–e 4 and 440 e 2–441 a 3; 8, 580 d 3ff.; *Phaedrus* 246 a 66ff. for the metaphor of the charioteer; and *Timaeus* 69 c–70 a for the assignment of these parts to bodily organs (head, diaphragm, and chest, respectively). A helpful study is that of J. V. Robinson, "The Tripartite Soul in the *Timaeus*," *Phronesis* 35, no. 1 (1990): 103–10. In the *Timaeus* the soul seems to have two parts—the appetitive/spirited and the rational—rather than three.

passions are thereby given a neutral, if not positive, significance. A certain degree of internal conflict is not seen as dangerous or even undesirable to the soul—it can be healthy and even productive. Virtue in the *Timaeus* is not the liberation of the soul from the demands of the body, but rather a rational harmonization of the desires of each of the soul's parts, as each is progressively brought under the supreme governance of reason. In fact, tripartition itself appears to function as a way of ensuring the greatest possible rule of reason, given the complications presented by the soul's embodiment.

The apparent soul-body dualism of the *Phaedo* is therefore enriched in Plato's later dialogues by the introduction of the third part, the *thumos*, to an independent status.⁷ The lowest part of the soul, for its part, does not represent the bodily constitution per se, but rather the experiencing of the sensible world *apart from the guidance of reason*, just as the middle part represents competitive action *apart from reason*.

Yet the exact nature of the soul's partition in the *Republic* (and, perhaps, the *Timaeus*) is not as self-evident as it seems. It does not seem that they could be "aggregative" parts (e.g., marbles in a pile of marbles) or "organic" parts (e.g., an organ in the body), since both of these would compromise the essential simplicity and irreducibility of the soul, both of which seem to be nonnegotiable for Plato. It is more likely that they are merely "conceptual" parts (e.g., a man's baldness, or the terminus of a line), since these would not exclude an essential, underlying unity.⁸ Even more to the point, each "part" represents an unrealized life choice, role, or mode of behavior. Each is a

7. The complaint is often heard that few modern scholars take Plato's third part seriously. Most consider it a superficial attempt to make the soul's structure parallel to that of the *polis* in Plato's *Republic*. For attempts to downplay the significance of the spirited part, cf., e.g., Francis M. Cornford, "Psychology and Social Structure in the *Republic*," *Classical Quarterly* 6 (1912): 262–64. For an attempt to take it more seriously, cf. John M. Cooper, "Plato's Theory of Human Motivation," in *Plato 2: Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 265–75.

8. I am indebted for these categories (and examples) to Christopher Shields, "Simple Souls", in *Essays in Plato's Psychology*, ed. Ellen Wagner (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001).

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“possible self” to which the individual is drawn, and which he must harmonize into his life.⁹

If this is the case, the apparent divergence between the unitary soul of Plato’s *Phaedo* and the complex soul of the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* is more easily resolvable, since there is no reason to view the two models as incompatible.¹⁰ Plato’s analogy of the sea-god Glaucus in the *Republic* implies that, for Plato, the soul is unified in its primordial essence, and that its parts (again, only conceptually distinct) are an accidental feature emerging from its embodiment, to be cast off once again in the soul’s final disembodiment.¹¹ Tripartition appears as a sort of “damage control” mechanism, actualized upon embodiment to minimize the encroachment of irrationality upon the rational soul.¹² That is, a soul previously unified, when confronted with the hazards of embodiment, “differentiates itself” into three parts in order to provide a sort of “buffer” against the potential damage to its integrity. One might suggest, in addition, that the rational soul of the *Phaedo* is the equivalent of the highest, rational “part” of the soul in the *Timaeus*, and that the lower two “parts” described in the *Timaeus* are associated exclusively with the body, and have no function apart from it. In any case, all of this points to an essential and primordial simplicity in the soul, which precedes and underlies any superficial partition.¹³

9. John Rist, “Plato Says That We Have Tripartite Souls. If He is Right, What Can We Do about It?” in *Sophies Maietores: Chercheurs de sagesse*, ed. Jean Pepin (Paris: Institute d’Etudes Augustinennes, 1992), 103–24. Additionally, John Rist has argued that Plato cannot mean “parts” literally since the soul is immaterial. For similar views, cf. Lloyd Gerson, “A Note on Tripartition and Immortality in Plato,” *Apeiron* 20 (1987): 81–96; and J. L. Stocks, “Plato and the Tripartite Soul,” *Mind* 24 (1915): 207–21.

10. The competing explanation, of course, is that Plato’s thought underwent a development. Cf. M. Frede, “Introduction”, in *Plato: Protagoras*, trans. S. Lombardo and K. Bell (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992); T. Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 287; and F. Miller, “Plato on the Parts of the Soul,” in *Plato and Platonism*, ed. J. Van Ophuijsen (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999): 84–101.

11. Shields, “Simple Souls,” 143–44.

12. Thomas K. Johansen, *Plato’s Natural Philosophy: A Study of the Timaeus-Critas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

13. “What Plato seems to be doubting [in the *Republic*] is his own artificial triparti-

The intellectual inheritance left by Plato, then, is one of apparent ambiguity: an essentially unified soul that is conceptually divisible into three parts. This tension, however, is not without resolution, since it is possible that the unicity of the soul takes ontological (and perhaps chronological) precedence over its tripartition. While Plato was able to keep the two poles—i.e., unity and complexity—in creative tension, this tension was to be strained in the work of his disciples.

The Middle Platonic Schools and Soul Division

Plato's precarious balancing of the soul's unicity with its multiplicity, in the hands of the Middle Platonic schools that followed in his wake, suffers the fate of the syncretism that is so characteristic of these schools. In the end, we can detect the intermingling of three lines of thought amongst these thinkers: (1) soul tripartition, indebted directly to Plato; (2) soul unicity, indebted in part to Plato's *Phaedo* but more often to the rising influence of Stoicism; and (3) soul bipartition, indebted to an ascendant Peripateticism.

As for the first point, the ardent tripartism of the Middle Platonic thinkers, of course, hardly requires illustration, as it is the most apparent aspect of their anthropology. Alcinous, author of the second-century *Handbook of Platonism*, repeatedly professes a belief in Platonic tripartism. His defense of soul division is all the more spirited as a stratagem in his campaign against the Stoics, who defended a unitary, undivided soul.¹⁴ Of special interest regarding Alcinous's understanding of tripartition, as an illustration of his

tion of soul; while serving a practical purpose when we talk of the soul here and now, it may turn out to be useless when applied to the soul 'as such,' that is, soul in its disincarnate state. True soul may be an undifferentiated unity, and its apparent fragmentation into parts just the result of association with the bodily." T. M. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 54. "[T]he soul's true nature is revealed or recovered by it when it is disembodied. And that entails that its embodied form is somehow defective. It is defective when, as tripartite, it exists in a human life." Lloyd Gerson, *Knowing Persons: A Study in Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 127.

14. Cf. Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, *Les Stoïciens et l'âme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996).

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loyalty to the tripartite theory, is his extension of the concept to disembodied souls, or gods. The disembodied tripartism consists of the cognitive (*gnōstikon*), appetitive/dispositional (*parastatikon*), and appropriative (*oikeiotikon*) parts, which are transformed into the more conventional rational, spirited, and libidinous parts upon embodiment.¹⁵ In Philo, similarly, we find a clear repetition of Plato's tripartite formula (rational, spirited, and passionate).¹⁶

Regarding the second strand of thought, the influence of Stoicism upon the Middle Platonists can hardly be overstated, and it is not difficult to spot the traces of a Stoicized view of the soul in many Middle Platonic thinkers. A detailed account of Stoic anthropology need not detain this analysis, except to note that its essentially materialist conception of the soul excluded any sort of partition, permitting only multiple "faculties," as the soul (conceived as psychic "breath," or *pneuma*) is spread throughout the body and takes up various functions in the process.¹⁷ Plato's *Phaedo*, of course, had also suggested a unitary soul, but on entirely different reasoning: Plato's soul was unified because it was incorporeal and impassible; the Stoics' soul was neither. Even if the Middle Platonic writers would hardly have endorsed the materialist underpinnings of the Stoic view, which they often go to great lengths to oppose, Stoic terminology is nonetheless adopted, perhaps unreflexively (especially, e.g., that of the highest faculty, the *hēgemonikon*). Numerous Middle Platonists show influence of a Stoicized anthropology. We can note Antiochus of Ascalon, a typical Stoicizing Platonist, who speaks of the soul's uniformity.¹⁸ We might also point to Philo, who echoes the Stoic formula of a unitary soul with eight faculties, as an emblematic figure in this respect.¹⁹

15. Cf. Alkinous, *Handbook on Platonism*, trans. John Dillon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 25.

16. E.g., *De specialibus Legibus* 4, 92. It is quite possible, of course, that it was from Philo that Origen learned of the doctrine, although it was a fairly commonplace doctrine in Hellenistic times.

17. Cf. Gourinat, *Les Stoïciens*.

18. Cf. *Tusculan Disputations* 1, 20, e.g.

19. E.g., *De opificio mundi* 117.

In the last strand of thought we shall consider, as regards the role of bipartition in Middle Platonic thought, reference must be made to the increasing influence of Peripateticism in the period under scrutiny. Aristotelian thinkers, because they thought along more traditional, dichotomic lines, never had much use for the tripartism of Plato's later dialogues and tended both to misunderstand and to misrepresent them.²⁰ Peripatetic readings of Plato tended to blur and eventually eradicate Plato's distinction between the concupiscent and the spirited parts of the soul. Through terminological and reductive misreadings of Plato, Peripatetic thinkers collapsed the *thumoeides* and the *epithumetikon* into a single *alogon*, set in opposition to the *logistikon*, while at the same time explicitly attributing this soul bipartition to Plato himself.²¹ This created "a fundamental but most influential misrepresentation of Plato's psychology that obliterated the differences between Platonic tripartition and Aristotelian bipartition."²²

The Middle Platonists, for their part, tended to read Plato largely through Peripatetic lenses, with the effect that, while they often defended "orthodox" Platonic tripartition with great ardor, in practice they interpreted the doctrine in a functionally bipartite manner.

In Antiochus of Ascalon, by some accounts the founder of Middle Platonism, for example, we already find Platonic tripartition blurring into Aristotelian bipartism. Antiochus is certainly aware that Plato taught a tripartite soul, but he believes that Plato meant it in a purely mythological manner,²³ and so prefers to speak of a bipartite, sensible versus noetic division.²⁴

20. Cf. John M. Rist, "Platonic Soul, Aristotelian Form, Christian Person, in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. A. Baumgarten, J. Assmann, and G. G. Stroumsa (Boston: E. J. Brill, 1988), 347–48.

21. See P. A. Vander Waerdt, "The Peripatetic Interpretation of Plato's Tripartite Psychology," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26 (1985): 283–302; and "Peripatetic Soul-Division, Posidonius, and Middle Platonic Moral Psychology," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26 (1985): 373–94.

22. "The Peripatetic Interpretation," 286.

23. John Dillon draws this conclusion in *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1996), 102.

24. Cf. *Tusculan Disputations* 1, 20 for a recognition of Plato's theory of tripartition; in 1, 80 Antiochus argues from the soul's bipartition to its immortality.

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In Philo of Alexandria, perhaps the most openly syncretistic of our thinkers, we find a free intermingling of multiple and often inherently contradictory anthropological formulas. Hence the tripartism already mentioned in Philo is mingled readily with Peripatetic (rational versus irrational)²⁵ formulas, amongst others. But one quickly notices that the bipartite, rational versus irrational division is the most basic for Philo: he finds little reason to differentiate between Plato's two lower parts except in the abstract. In fact, the bipartite division sharpens with Philo: he can even speak of "two souls" in the human subject.²⁶

The same bipartism holds sway in Plutarch of Chaeroneia, who is heavily influenced by Aristotle and sincerely believes that Plato never *meant* to subdivide the irrational part at all. In his *De virtute morali*, for example, he divides the soul into the *logistikon* and the *alogon*, and either minimizes or altogether abandons tripartite terminology.²⁷ But Plutarch's bipartism is hardened even further, with the rational part becoming an outgrowth of an entirely transcendent entity, the mind.

The anthropology of Alcinous is a thoroughgoing bipartism of rational and irrational (passionate: *pathêtikon*) parts. He imagines this bipartition in crudely spatial terms, with the rational part located in the head.²⁸ Although Alcinous is not without his spirited defenses of tripartition, which have already been mentioned, even he blurs tripartism on nearly every occasion by interpreting it along Peripatetic, bipartite lines.²⁹

Finally and briefly, mention must be made of Numenius of Apamea. Although we can hardly speak of soul division in the thought of Numenius, since he professed two altogether distinct souls, we

25. E.g., *De Allegoriis Legum* 2, 6; *De specialibus Legibus* 1, 333.

26. E.g., *Quaestiones in Genesim* 2, 59.

27. 442A. Cf. Vander Waerdt, "Peripatetic Soul-Division," 278–79.

28. *Handbook* 23.1.

29. Note that R. E. Witt attributes orthodox Platonic tripartism to Alcinous. Cf. *Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 85–86. In fact, Alcinous seems to be inspired by the bipartite soul division of the *Timaeus*.

still find the terminology of partition never quite expunged from his vocabulary. Even in a sentence defending two souls, he can speak of a “passible part of the soul” (*patibilis animae partis*) and a “rational part” (*rationabilis animae pars*), thus demonstrating the extent of Peripatetic influence.³⁰ While other examples could be mentioned,³¹ the trajectory of the development is clear.

In sum, the confluence of these three strands—Platonic tripartism, Stoic unicity, and Peripatetic bipartism—was constitutive for the formation of Middle Platonic terminology for the soul. While we do not find all three influences in every Middle Platonic writer, and while we can hardly posit a “Middle Platonic psychology” broad enough to encompass every relevant figure, the combined effect is clear enough. And it was this synthesis (or, perhaps, syncretism) that was inherited by Origen of Alexandria.

Origen and the Tripartition of the Soul

Origen is highly conscious of the complex ambiguity of the Middle Platonic doctrine on the soul that he inherited, which would likely have been taught to him by his own teacher, Ammonius Saccas. As a Christian thinker, Origen would judge every aspect of this doctrine in light of biblical revelation, as appropriated by the Christian tradition. It is possible to detect Origen consciously interacting with all three of the elements we have noted with respect to the Middle Platonic doctrine: soul tripartition, soul unicity, and soul bipartition. Origen’s own position is somewhat more complex than any of these alternatives, though it most closely approximates soul bipartition, without excluding the most beneficial insights of the other theories. In the end, however, Origen incorporates Middle Platonic thinking on the soul into a fundamentally Christian anthropological schema that is more ascetic and spiritual than it is philosophical. An assessment will follow of Origen’s engagement with each of the

30. *Treatise on the Good* 1, 16.

31. Arius Didymus could also be cited, along with Apuleius. Cf. Vander Waerdt, “Peripatetic Soul-Division,” 378–81, for relevant passages.

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strands we have noted in the Middle Platonic tradition, beginning with the most traditional, soul tripartition.

In this vein, a beginning must be made where he addresses the subject directly in *On First Principles* 3, 4. In this passage, most significant for the subject at hand, Origen addresses three theories regarding the division of the soul, each of which he presents and addresses in turn. One of these theories is Platonic tripartism. As will become clear, Origen in this passage rejects the tripartite theory of soul division, but it is not clear that he rejects the general principle of soul division itself. The passage must therefore be studied with the greatest care—how Origen presents the theory, his judgment upon it, and in what terms this judgment is expressed.

Origen presents the theory of tripartition in these words: “[W]hether, thirdly (which was the opinion of some of the Greek philosophers), although our soul is one in substance, it nevertheless consists of several elements, and one part of it is called rational and another irrational, and that which is termed the irrational part is again separated into two affections—those of covetousness and passion.”³²

Although Plato himself is not mentioned, the theory that Origen presents here can only be a reference to that of the Platonic tradition. Returning to it a moment later, he refers to the theory explicitly as tripartism: “that the soul is tripartite” (*quia tripartita sit anima*).³³ The terms that Origen offers for the lower parts—*cupiditatis et iracundiae*—are standard Latin translations of the stock Platonic terminology (*epithumetikon* and *thumoeides*, respectively), even if we are dependent upon Rufinus’s translation on this point. There is no doubt, then, that the Platonic tradition is under scrutiny.³⁴

32. 4, 3, 1. The theory of tripartition is also discussed explicitly in *Against Celsus* 5, 47. The reference here is fairly indirect, however, and Origen presents no explicit judgment on the theory, for better or worse. It is not difficult, though, to detect a negative attitude toward the theory on the part Origen.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Yet at the same time, what Origen presents here is not the tripartition of the *Republic*, since the two lower elements are not clearly identified as distinct parts, but rather as dual “affections.” These two lower affections are grouped together into a single, irrational *pars*, and opposed to the rational *pars*. The core structure of the soul in the

Of the three theories Origen proposes in this section, the first two receive a thorough and balanced discussion. The third, the theory that occupies us here, is rejected out of hand: “[T]hat [theory] which we have mentioned as being adopted by certain Grecian philosophers, viz., that the soul is tripartite, I do not observe to be greatly confirmed by the authority of holy Scripture.” No discussion or response follows. The doctrine’s lack of biblical foundation is sufficient, in Origen’s mind, to make moot any discussion of its rational or analytical merits. Though one is tempted to project other motivations upon this judgment of Origen’s, there is no reason to doubt the veracity of his intentions. To do so would be to underestimate the weight that biblical prooftexting carries in Origen’s intellectual framework.

It is a more complex task, however, to understand exactly what Origen is rejecting in the ill-fated third theory. It has been noted that Origen, in this passage, is not necessarily rejecting soul division in principle, but only *one form* of soul division, that is, Platonic tripartition.³⁵ While it does seem odd, in this case, that Origen does

rejected theory, then, is not tripartite but dual. Taking into account what has been said above regarding the Peripatetic reinterpretation of Platonic tripartition, it is not hard to identify Origen’s third theory (i.e., the one being rejected) as the Middle Platonic doctrine of the soul, that is, the modification brought about by a Peripatetic reading (or misreading) of the Platonic canon. Most scholars, I think wrongly, tend to assume that the third theory is Plato’s, rather than belonging to a later stage of Platonic thought. On the contrary, this third theory describes a superficial schema for soul tripartition, while the real distinction between the two lower elements is blurred into a functional bipartition into rational and irrational elements. Although the precise identity of the “Greek philosophers” behind this third theory must remain an enigma, the school to which these philosophers belong can be none other than that now known as the Middle Platonic. Cf. *Origène, Traité des Principes*, vol. 4, ed. Henri Cruzel and Manlio Simonetti (Paris: Cerf, 1980), 87.

35. Cf. *Origène, Traité des Principes*, 4:87. To complicate matters, however, we have a handful of passages where Origen *does* speak of these *two lower parts* of the soul, implying soul tripartition. In a fragment on the Gospel of Luke, for example, Origen comments on Luke 11:33–36: “[I]f the intellect, which is by nature light, is dark, then the whole body is dark—i.e., understand that the passible part of the soul, the irascible and concupiscible, will be even more in darkness.” Fragment 79. This fragment uses Plato’s exact terminology for the lower parts of the soul. In fact, this formula seems to be exactly what Origen rejected in *On First Principles* 3, 4 (allowing that Rufinus has followed custom by translating *pathêtikon* as *inrationabilem*, *thumikon* as *cupiditas*, and *epithumetikon* as *iracundiae*). Similar references can be found in at least two other places in

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not propose an alternative form of soul division that he would find acceptable, it may also be that Origen is withholding his own position and solely discussing the views of the philosophers.³⁶ He might, for example, hold to a theory that combines elements of each of these theories.

In conclusion, although Origen clearly rejects Platonic soul tripartition in this passage, it is not clear that he is also rejecting the general principle of soul division. Even if he rejects strict tripartition, however, he may be open to a “soft” tripartition, in the general context of a rational and irrational soul. Consequently, it is appropriate to explore at this point the question of whether or not Origen held to the strict unicity of the soul, or whether he allowed for an internal partitioning. This subject, of course, brings Origen into contact with the second strand of Middle Platonic thinking on the soul, that is, the Stoic doctrine of its internal uniformity.

Origen and the Unicity of the Soul

Having established that Origen rejects the Platonic theory of soul tripartition, we must verify whether there is any evidence, as suggested above, that Origen permits soul division in principle, given that he does not allow tripartite division. Put another way, does his rejection of soul tripartition imply an adherence to the Stoic theory of a unified soul, which would exclude any sort of division whatso-

Origen's works (*Ennarations on the Psalms* 17, 29 and *Homilies on Ezekiel* 1, 16). The only conclusion to be drawn from Origen's apparent endorsement and condemnation of the same formula is that his language for soul partition is inconsistent and somewhat unsystematic. Origen's unsystematic style of theologizing has been treated quite thoroughly elsewhere (Henri Crouzel, "Origène est-il un systématique?" *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 60 [1959]: 81–116), with the generally undisputed conclusion that Origen is more of an exegetical than a systematic theologian. His conclusions are often arrived at from a meditative reflection of whatever text is on hand rather than from the formal exposition of a coherent system of thought. A certain methodological primacy, however, should be given to the passage at hand, since it occurs in the *most* systematic of Origen's works, *On First Principles*. It might also be noted that behind this apparent tripartism is a more essential bipartism, between the intellectual and "pathetic" elements.

36. This is the position of Pdraig O'Cleirigh. Cf. "The Dualism of Origen," in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 349.

ever? It has already been noted that many Middle Platonic thinkers, among them Antiochus of Ascalon, defended the uniformity of the soul using Stoic terminology, while at the same time eschewing any suggestion that the soul was material.

We do, in fact, find Origen defending the unicity of the soul in *On First Principles* 2, 1, 3, in the context of a discussion on the organization of the cosmos, and this passage can suffice as a fairly representative statement on the part of Origen:

Although the whole world is arranged into offices of different kinds, its condition, nevertheless, is not to be supposed as one of internal discrepancies and discordances; but as our one body is provided with many members, and is held together by one soul, so I am of opinion that the whole world also ought to be regarded as some huge and immense animal, which is kept together by the power and reason of God as by one soul.

The passage requires a careful analysis. The analogy, then, can be expressed in the following formula:

a : A :: b : B

or,

parts of cosmos : *Logos* :: parts of body : soul

The first item in each set (cosmos and body) is not a conglomeration of distinct substances, but rather a single substance internally partitioned (as limbs in a body, e.g.). The second item in each set (*Logos* and soul) refers to a source of unity for the first item, a source of unity that is itself undivided. This second item cannot also refer to a single substance internally partitioned, or else the contrast would make no sense. Put differently, it is difficult to imagine how a single-but-partitioned body could be held together by a single-but-partitioned soul, any more than a single-but-partitioned cosmos could be held together by a single-but-partitioned *Logos*. The argument makes sense only if the second item in each set is not only single in number, but also essentially undivided. The comparison between the soul and the divine *Logos* confirms this: Origen could hardly suppose the *Logos* of God to be divisible.

Origen's argument, by way of conclusion, is that the multiple

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components of the human body must have some principle of unity that holds them together (*teneatur*). The body itself is not a sufficient cause of its own unity. This principle of unity is the soul (*anima*), which is not only single in number but also itself essentially undivided.³⁷ The existence of this argument in Origen's work confirms that he does view the soul as a cohesive, unified entity, and not as divided in its essence.³⁸

This conclusion, coupled with that of the last section, would suggest that Origen denied any form of partition whatsoever within the soul. Yet for many Middle Platonic writers, Philo being the most representative, an affirmation of the internal unity of the soul did not preclude allowance for *some form* of partition (or, at the very least, "complexity" of some sort) within it. It remains to be seen, then, whether Origen's defense of the soul's unity might also allow for some "complexity" within the unified soul. Since Origen's resistance to tripartism has already been noted, it is appropriate to turn to the alternative prevailing theory of soul partition, bipartism.

Origen and the Bipartition of the Soul

Even if, as we have seen, Origen defended the unicity of the soul, we also find abundant evidence that Origen acknowledged some form of interior "complexity" of the soul, at least as a general theory. This "complexity" or "partition," for Origen, is primarily a moral and spiritual phenomenon, rather than a question of the soul's philosophical ontology.

As to Origen's allowance for soul partition, only one of many ex-

37. While one could wish for a more explicit assessment of soul unicity on the part of Origen, he simply does not offer one; the present argument can only hope to show that Origen *assumes* the unicity of the soul as the schematic "backdrop" to his anthropology. To support this, one can also note that language of soul partition is almost entirely lacking in Origen's *corpus*. When Origen discusses the complexity of the soul, he speaks of "tendencies" or "images," not parts. See the treatment below, "Evidence for Two Souls in Origen," in chapter 3.

38. This does not settle the question of whether Origen holds to a "two souls" theory, since it is possible that only one of these two souls functions as the unifying principle of the body, the other being involved in some other function. This will be treated thoroughly below, in chapters 4 and 5.

emplary passages need be noted here—a paragraph of *On First Principles* where Origen offers three alternative spiritual interpretations of Jesus' parable of the stewards in Matthew 25, each of which he apparently finds acceptable.³⁹ In reference to the punitive "division" of the unfaithful stewards, Origen's second interpretation attributes this division to the "nature of the soul itself" (*de natura ipsius animae*) and posits a division between the "better" and the "other" parts (*eius melior ... alia autem pars ea*) of the soul. We are dependent upon Rufinus's translation here, but it is likely that *pars* translates *meros* in Origen's Greek text. In any case, the fact that Origen is referring to a division within the "nature of the soul itself" is unquestionable. We have no reason to doubt that this interpretation of the passage is one that Origen approves, and hence we are left with an exegetical argument for a partitioned soul. Additional references can be found elsewhere,⁴⁰ but this is enough to demonstrate that Origen envisioned some sort of partition for the soul.

We are also left, however, with an apparent contradiction: an assumption that the soul is unified coupled with an allowance for its partition. We must put aside the problem for the moment, however, in order to assess more precisely what sort of partition of the soul Origen accepts. Only once this is established will we be prepared to reconcile Origen's respective understandings of the soul's partition with its unity.

If it is established that Origen accepted soul partition as a general theory, it remains to be seen what *form* of partition he found acceptable, and how that partition is understood. The most popular theories of the day, Platonic tripartism and Peripatetic bipartism, differ only on the question of the Platonic subdivision of the lower part of the soul between the *thumoeides* and *epithumetikon*. We have seen already that Origen rejects the theory of tripartism in *On First Principles* 3, 4.

It is clear enough that the bipartite division of the soul—wheth-

39. 2, 10, 7.

40. Cf. *Commentary on John* 32, 9, 12–13; *Homilies on Luke*, frag. 79.

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er rational versus irrational, inner versus outer man, or spirit versus flesh—is a fundamental truth for Origen. We have an abundance of passages in a variety of genres where Origen ignores the distinction between the lower two parts and instead implies a simple, bipartite division between the soul's rational and irrational parts.⁴¹

First, Origen speaks straightforwardly of man's "rational element" (*ton logikon*) and "irrational element" (*alogos*), without any indication that the lower element is subdivided.⁴² But perhaps the most fundamental example of anthropological duality in Origen is that of the "two men." "There are in Scripture," he says, "two men in man."⁴³ The first "man" is the "inner man" of heavenly origin, and was "made" (*poiein*) according to the image of God. The other man is the "outer man" of earthly origins, "fashioned" (*plattēin*) from the dust of the earth.⁴⁴ The dual creation accounts of Genesis are thereby duly exploited by Origen to teach a duality within man himself, rather than being treated as two alternative narratives of the same event.⁴⁵

Having established that Origen accepted what appears to be a bipartition of the soul, we must scrutinize his language more closely, in order to reconcile this point with what has been established above regarding his acceptance of the soul's unity. If the soul is uniform, how can it be divided at all? The solution to this apparent contradiction is that Origen sees a *duality* in the soul, but not a *partition*. The truth is, Origen rarely speaks of "parts" of the soul at all, and when he does so the language is rarely developed or precise. The more developed view in Origen's work is that of a duality of "tendencies" or "possibilities" for man. Man is a synthesis of two divergent powers, each of which represents a real moral path for him, a path that can

41. Henri Crouzel, perhaps the best-known scholar of Origen's anthropology, has catalogued a number of these references. Crouzel's seminal work, of course, is "L'anthropologie d'Origène dans la perspective du combat spirituel." For a concise summary of his views on Origen's anthropology, cf. "L'anthropologie d'Origène: de l'archè au telos."

42. E.g., *Against Celsus* 6, 60, and 5, 23, respectively. Cf. also *Commentary on John* 1, 42.

43. *Dialogue with Heraclides* 11, citing 2 Cor 4:16.

44. Cf., e.g., *Homilies on Jeremiah* 1, 10. On this point, cf. Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 40.

45. Cf. Plato's *Republic* 589a for an interesting parallel.

define him as a person. In those rare instances where Origen does refer to “parts” of the soul, this is most likely what he means. Given that Origen’s anthropology, as we are often reminded, is less of an ontology than a spirituality,⁴⁶ it makes more sense to think of soul division in terms of dual tendencies rather than as real “parts.”

To return to Plato, one of Origen’s dominant influences here, it was noted that Plato’s “parts” were more likely conceptual rather than aggregative or organic. In other words, what Plato described as the soul’s “parts” might be more accurately described as tendencies or possible life choices. The same, it seems, can be said of Origen’s “parts” of the soul, which do not seem to be real, ontological “parts” at all.⁴⁷

Origen speaks of the soul most often in the context of the moral life, and this life is nearly always described in terms of a spiritual conflict between the opposing forces of flesh (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*), not in terms of metaphysical division. In this context Origen is less likely to speak of the “higher part” and the “lower part” of the soul, but rather of the “inner man” and the “outer man.”⁴⁸ Alternatively, he will speak of the “image of God” and the “earthly image,” or even of the “image of the devil.”⁴⁹ This language implies that Origen

46. “He has too much a sense of reality to fail to highlight this or that aspect which that reality presents, but the reconciliation of these aspects can scarcely be made on the level of rational and intellectual expression, but only on the level of mystery, attained by faith, perceived by mystical knowledge, but which can never be expressed by the concepts of a rational system.” Crouzel, “Origène est-il un systématique?” 93, author’s translation. In this article, later included in the author’s *Origène et la Philosophie*, Crouzel rebuts failed attempts to demonstrate that Origen is a systematic philosopher. His chief argument is that all attempts to systematize Origen’s thought lead to glaring inconsistencies, which can be explained away only by either deliberate mendacity on the part of Origen or botched editing on the part of his disciples. Crouzel’s argument is that Origen’s writings are not rational propositions of a philosophical order, but rather “different aspects of a unique reality, essentially mysterious, a reality that rational and discursive knowledge can never capture, but only faith and mystical knowledge can appreciate from a distance, the very object of Christian revelation.” *Ibid.*, 111, author’s translation.

47. See Henri Crouzel, *Origène* (Paris: Éditions Lethielleux, 1985), 124.

48. C.f., e.g., *Ennarations on the Psalms* 36, 1, 4, 1–21.

49. C.f., e.g., *Commentary on John* 20, 182–83. Elsewhere he speaks of the “desire of the Spirit” versus the “desire for sin.” Cf. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 1, 4–5.

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saw the soul not primarily in terms of aggregative or organic parts of a whole, but rather of a simple soul with two possible lifestyles open to it, or even of dual external powers drawing it in two directions. The language of partition is only one of many images utilized by Origen to describe the complex nature of the soul—it is doubtful that Origen intended it to be taken literally.

Conclusion and Comparison

By way of summary, the legacy that Plato left with regard to the soul is one of marked ambiguity: the eternal, monistic soul of the *Phaedo* and the ambivalent, tripartite soul of the *Republic*, with the hint that the former might describe the true essence of the soul and the latter a temporary, less-than-ideal state. Even more, the tripartite division of the soul appears in many contexts to be more conceptual than real. The Middle Platonist schools, for their part, tended to take Plato's thought in three directions—a stronger affirmation of tripartition, a Stoicizing argument for the unity of the soul, and a Peripatetic view of soul bipartition.

Although Origen shows great familiarity with the Platonic doctrine of tripartition, or at least the variation on it current in the Middle Platonic schools, he shows little interest in the theory. When he addresses the theory in *On First Principles* 3, 4 he rejects it without discussion. He also seems to defend a theory of a unified soul, using Stoic terminology, which seems incompatible with any model of soul division at all. And yet he does use language pointing to some sort of duality or tension within the soul, hinting at bipartition but avoiding the strict language of bipartition theory.

Origen is not entirely unsympathetic to the motivations for the doctrine of tripartition, which was developed as a challenge to Socrates's denial of *akrasia* (deliberately chosen evil). Like Plato, Origen has a realistic understanding of the complex nature of human motivation and does not shy away from describing rational and irrational elements within man. Like the Peripatetic readers of Plato, however, he prefers to see man in terms of this fundamental di-

chotomy, and has little use for a third source of moral desire, finding Plato's proposal of tripartism lacking in biblical support.

The division that Origen envisions within the heart of man, however, is a spiritual division, separating God's image from the mud of the earth, man's capacity for God from his cravings for the flesh. Yet as sharp as this division cuts, the Platonic language of soul partition rarely occurs in Origen's work. Even if he consistently allows that human nature itself is complex or composite, he rarely speaks of a real, ontological division between the "parts" of the soul. On the contrary, as we have seen, he even sees good reason to defend the internal unicity of the soul.

In the end, then, Origen's anthropology is not bipartite, at least not in the way that most Middle Platonists would have imagined it. Origen's "parts" of the soul—the rational faculty and the flesh—are only conceptually distinct, not "parts" in the true sense of the word. And here we have, in a sense, come full circle to Plato, for whom the soul was a metaphysical unity in its primordial essence, and was treated as such for the purposes of philosophical reasoning. On this point Origen is more Platonic than the Middle Platonists, who had either hardened their defense of soul division so as to exclude the soul's unity, or else abandoned all language of partition in favor of a Stoicized view.

In the end, the position that Origen finds in the Scriptures is of a soul that, although essentially unified, is possessed of a profound duality at its very heart. If he found Plato's proposal of tripartism lacking in biblical support, he did notice certain echoes of biblical themes in the broader Platonic tradition. Hence, the affirmations of a "rational" and "irrational" element in man—made by Philo and Plutarch, among others—seemed not altogether dissimilar to the "inner man" and "outer man" of St. Paul. While it may be objected that the former were making ontological statements and the latter a moral statement, Origen saw little difference. For him, as should be clear, the realms of ontology and morality were intimately inter-related, or rather, the realm of ontology was subordinated to that of

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morality: hence, to live rationally was nothing else but to live righteously. Hence the “rational” element in man might as well be called the “image of God” or the “spirit.” The philosophers had discovered a spiritual truth, and the Scriptures taught true philosophy. On points where the philosophers contradicted divine revelation—for example, Platonic tripartism or Stoic unicity—the latter must no doubt prevail. But in other areas there is no reason to exclude the possibility of common ground. And it was here, based on the clear teaching of Scripture and the suggestions of the best philosophical schools, that Origen discovered the identity of the soul—inherently unified, yes, but tugged in two directions, in a battle that is as metaphysical as it is spiritual.

CHAPTER 2

The Body and the Soul



Perhaps no question more occupied classical philosophers, especially the Middle Platonists, than the relationship between soul and body, and in particular the question of the effects of embodiment on the life of the soul. In his answer to this question, Origen moves deftly between the Platonic suspicion of matter and the Christian embrace of it, the latter position as embodied in the doctrines of creation and Incarnation. Accordingly, Origen is willing to admit, with Plato, that embodiment is the cause of the soul's evils, so long as this relationship is considered to be "indirect"—that is, matter itself is not to blame, except to the extent that it provides an "occasion" of sin for the soul. But before assessing Origen's response to this theory, it will first be necessary to explore the view of the soul's embodiment as it appears in the philosophy of Plato and in that of the Middle Platonists. This will permit a fuller appreciation of the questions that Origen raises in *On First Principles* and elsewhere on the relationship of soul to body.

Plato and the Embodiment of the Soul

For Plato the question of the soul's *embodiment* was more fundamental than that of its *division*, since the soul's division is an epiphenomenon of its embodiment. Plato left to his disciples a markedly ambivalent view of the body, seeing it both as a source of evil and disorder for the soul and at the same time as a necessary and beneficent

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collaborator with the soul in its engagement with the world. This chapter cannot hope to do justice to Plato's multifaceted perspective on the soul-body relationship, nor will it even address this relationship in the abstract. The focus will instead be on the concrete effects of embodiment on the noetic life of the soul. Plato's answer to this question possesses a marked ambivalence, a tension arising from his twin convictions that the soul's embodiment is undesirable, while at the same time beneficial in some way.

Plato's ambivalent view of the body arises from his ambivalent view of the visible world in general, which in turn reflects the relative value that an imitation bears in relation to the Ideal that it imitates. On the one hand, Plato is no Manichee. There is no hint of a demonization of matter in his writings, or of an evil principle in revolt against the Good. On the contrary, the material world for Plato is both necessary and good, a divinely willed image of the eternal world.¹ One finds in Plato the imagery not of eternal strife, but of a craftsman working on particularly recalcitrant material.² On the other hand, Plato does not shrink from calling the body a "prison" for the soul, a source of trouble that should be shunned whenever possible: "[T]he philosopher's soul utterly despises his body and flees from it, seeking to be alone by itself."³

These apparently contradictory views arise from two competing cosmological models that seem to be at play in Plato's mind: (1) a "two-world dualism" of two parallel *cosmoi* or levels of reality, that is, our normal experience and a higher one, and (2) a "conflict dualism" in which nature is constituted by the meeting and interaction of two opposing principles. The visible, sensible world is viewed in a different light depending upon which model Plato happens to be using in any given passage.⁴ Plato may remain a dualist, but he has stretched

1. Cf., e.g., *Timaeus* 29e–30a; 92b, 7.

2. Cf. A.H. Armstrong, "Dualism: Platonic, Gnostic, and Christian" in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, ed. Richard T. Wallis and Jay Bregman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 37.

3. *Phaedo*, 65d.

4. The various models of dualism are outlined in Armstrong, "Dualism," 33–34.

the limits of conventional dualism as far as possible without ceasing to be a categorically dualistic thinker.⁵

At the root of Plato's view of embodiment is his conviction that the self is to be identified with the soul (*psychē*) alone. The body, as a consequence, can only be a foreign accretion to the soul, regardless of whatever good may come from it. And at least in many of Plato's earlier dialogues, not much good comes from it at all: the body "weighs down" the soul, "pollutes" it, and introduces all sorts of contrary desires to it. The body's presence is "unnatural" to the soul, creating a constant state of warfare between the two. Neither suffering nor moral evil, in this view, is natural to the soul—both are introduced externally from contact with the body. "There is no conflict within soul as such," says T. M. Robinson of the *Phaedo*, "because soul is a simple substance; 'inner' conflict is invariably between body and soul."⁶

But a contrary view can also be derived from the same dialogues, a view that proposes a more nuanced, if not altogether positive, role for the body. In this view the embodiment of the soul is necessary for the perfection of the universe. The insertion of the soul in a particular body, a task undertaken by the "young gods," is carried out in such a way as to ensure the minimal disruption possible to the soul's rational functioning.⁷ In fact, affections created by bodily desires can even be healthy to the soul, a positive source of energy. Commenting on the *Timaeus*, Thomas Johansen states, "The rational order of the soul, post-embodiment, is not one in which *only* the motions of the intellect thrive but a complex order in which other psychic motions operate alongside those of the intellect in common pursuit of the human good."⁸ It is not embodiment per se that disrupts the harmony

5. T. M. Robinson, "The Defining Features of Mind-Body Dualism in Plato," in *Psychē and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, ed. John P. Wright and Paul Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 46.

6. *Ibid.*, 44.

7. Cf., e.g., *Timaeus* 69d6–70a2.

8. Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy*, 152.

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of the soul, but a defect of reason within the soul itself, emerging from an inappropriate (i.e., irrational) interaction with the sensible world.⁹

Plato never attempted to resolve the apparent contradictions in his thought that arise from his highly nuanced view of the soul's embodiment. It may be, of course, that the dialogues are written from distinct but complementary perspectives: the *Timeaus* describing the ideal world wherein the soul is embodied to "fulfil its function in the divine plan by living a life of rational human existence," and the *Phaedo* describing the subjective, existential response of the soul as an "incarcerated intelligence, for which desires are bodily nuisances and not a part of the true self."¹⁰ In any case, he thereby left to his disciples an ambivalent legacy: the soul is both a source of evil and disorder for the soul, and at the same time a necessary and beneficent collaborator with it.

Middle Platonists on Embodiment

The ambivalence of Plato is retained in large part by his later disciples, though it is shifted in significant respects. The deprecations of matter voiced by Plato grow even sharper during this period, although most Middle Platonists are still willing to acknowledge the usefulness of matter, at least to some degree. Although the philosophers of this school differ from one another in many ways, there is enough in common between them to note distinct trends in their thought.

Middle Platonic thinkers are united in a generally "dualistic, hostile view" both toward bodiliness and toward the sensible world in general.¹¹ According to A.H. Armstrong, whereas Plato wavered

9. Cf. Cooper, "Plato's Theory of Human Motivation." Cooper notes that Plato's examples of appetitive desires include some that have nothing to do with the body—e.g., ogling dead bodies and dabbling in philosophy. Cf. *Republic*, 440a and 561c–d, respectively.

10. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, 105. Robinson presents the preceding as "two views of the soul, the one cognitive, the other personal." *Ibid.*, 26.

11. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 294.

between a two-world dualism and a conflict dualism, many of the Middle Platonists worked exclusively with the latter, but with the two principles more diametrically opposite and more violently opposed.¹²

For Alcinous the soul is imperishable, incorporeal, unchanging, invisible, intelligible, uniform, incomposite, and indissoluble, while the body is the opposite of all these (perishable, corporeal, and the like). Accordingly, the soul “becomes dizzy and is thrown into confusion and becomes, as it were, drunk when embodied, and is returned to calm only when returned to the intelligible realm.”¹³ Numenius takes the denigration of matter to new extremes. A rigid dualist, he holds matter to be the eternal and chaotic work of the Indefinite Dyad, eternally opposed to the Monad. It is a fluid, evil force, never indifferent, always turned against the good. “Evil,” he claims, “is added or grown to [the soul] from the outside, i.e. from Matter.”¹⁴ Elsewhere he will state just as bluntly, “the incarnation of all things ... [is] evil.”¹⁵

Yet most Middle Platonists are not prepared to disavow the body entirely. Its usefulness to the soul could still be acknowledged, at least in some limited and altogether secondary respect. Plutarch, normally a rigorous dualist, can admit that the body is an essential component of man, and that bodily passions can contribute to Wisdom.¹⁶ Alcinous, whose lament for embodiment we have already cited, can at the same time claim that the soul has a natural affinity for the body and that its embodiment is both necessary and divinely willed.¹⁷

One question that frequently occupied the philosophical schools, and that can provide a helpful case study in this instance, is whether happiness is obtained by virtue alone or also by bodily goods.¹⁸ Plato

12. Armstrong, “Dualism,” 38–39. Armstrong cites Plutarch and Atticus as representative examples, and suggests Numenius as a more extreme example.

13. *Handbook of Platonism* 25, 1. Much of this language is actually drawn verbatim from Plato’s *Phaedo*, 79c 6–8.

14. *NeoPlatonic Writings*, fragment 49b. 15. *Ibid.* 2.4.50.

16. *On Moral Virtue* 451b, e.g. 17. *Handbook of Platonism* 25, 6.

18. Origen shows a great familiarity with the terms of debate among the schools on this issue. Cf. *Against Celsus* 5, 47.

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himself never quite made up his mind on this question. The Stoics posited quite forcefully that virtue alone was sufficient for happiness, and they were joined in this position by Eudorus and Alcinous of the Middle Platonic schools.¹⁹ The Peripatetics claimed just as forcefully that, given the soul's embodied state, bodily goods were in fact *necessary* to facilitate the soul's search for happiness, and were joined by Antiochus, Philo, and Plutarch of the Middle Platonic schools.²⁰

In conclusion, it can be said that the Middle Platonic schools themselves were divided on the issue of embodiment. While generally regarding the body with distaste, as some sort of regrettable cosmic byproduct best avoided, they were also willing to admit that it had its uses, *given the fact of the soul's embodiment*. And this is very important: embodiment itself never benefits the soul, even if (according to some) it is necessary or divinely willed. But *given the fact* that the soul is to be embodied, the resulting condition of bodiliness could at least be put to some good use, and might even be necessary for the soul to regain its happiness once lost (even if the preembodied soul got along quite well without it). The ambivalence that has become characteristic of the Platonic schools, then, continues in this vein.

The Goodness of Matter in Origen

Although in many ways Origen would carry on the ambivalent view of matter characteristic of the Platonic tradition, he would also modify it substantially in light of Christian revelation. The following survey of Origen's view will establish, successively, that Origen upheld the goodness of the material world, conceived as a pliable substrate capable of varying degrees of materiality, which is an occasion of sin without itself being sinful. These conclusions will then be confirmed by an analysis of Origen's view of the passions, and a close examination of an important text in *On First Principles*.

19. Cf. Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 40, 124, and 299, for respective references. One might also cite Polemon of the Old Academy, who held this position.

20. *Ibid.* 33, 70–71, 146–47, and 197, for respective references. Xenocrates, of the Old Academy, may also be cited.

As a Platonist, Origen could and would occasionally feel the lure of dualism; yet as a Christian, Origen was an unflinching defender of the goodness of the material order. The twin doctrines of creation and redemption hinge upon this stance, and Origen defended them with the tenacity that earned him the moniker Adamantius.

The doctrine of creation was no abstraction for Origen: the Gnostic challenge was literally on his doorstep in second-century Alexandria. Providing an appealing and logically sound defense of creation was the only means of drawing souls from the snare of herodoxy, as his catechetical courses proved daily. The biblical text and early exegetical traditions provided more than adequate resources: the material world sprang not from a fallen or bungling demigod, but from the One and True God of Jesus Christ.

Even more, God has created the visible world so that through it we may have knowledge of the invisible, passing from one to the other. The former serves as a “springboard” toward the latter. This idea is derived from St. Paul,²¹ though it is lent support by Platonic exemplarism.²² To take up once again the categories noted earlier, any form of conflict dualism, of two eternal and opposed principles, was utterly excluded for Origen. The only dualism found in his writings is “two-world dualism,” or dual levels of reality.²³

At the core of the Christian kerygma, of course, was the belief that the divine *Logos* had taken on human flesh, a belief that was repugnant to the Gnostic and a non sequitur to the Greek philosopher. But Origen was not one to shrink from the scandal of the Incarnation. Standing fast against the threat of Docetism, Origen is exceeded by none of the Fathers in the zeal with which he embraced the doctrine. It is a truism for Origen that Christ had to assume the whole man—body, soul, and spirit—if the whole man is to be saved: “For the whole human being would not have been saved if he had not

21. Rom 1:20, and elsewhere.

22. For the image of a “springboard,” as for background on most of this section, I am indebted to Cécile Blanc, “L’attitude d’Origène a l’égard du corps et de la chair,” *Studia Patristica* 17(1986): 843–58. Cf. especially 851.

23. Cf. Armstrong, “Dualism,” 49.

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assumed the whole human being.”²⁴ Origen’s fervor for the mystery of the Incarnation occasionally even borders on the poignant:

But of all the marvelous and mighty acts related of Him, this altogether surpasses human admiration, and is beyond the power of mortal frailness to understand or feel, how that mighty power of divine majesty, that very Word of the Father, and that very wisdom of God, in which were created all things, visible and invisible, can be believed to have existed within the limits of that man who appeared in Judea; nay, that the Wisdom of God can have entered the womb of a woman, and have been born an infant, and have uttered wailings like the cries of little children!²⁵

In sum, Origen would echo other Greek Fathers, such as Irenaeus and Ignatius, in his strident embrace of an incarnational spirituality—the “intimate involvement of God himself with the creaturely, and therefore the material, order”—as an antidote to Gnostic Docetism.²⁶ The starting point of Origen’s doctrine of the body, then, is rooted not in the Platonic denigration of the visible world, but in the Christian doctrines of creation and Incarnation.

Origen’s Understanding of Material Substance

Before continuing toward a full assessment of Origen’s account of the body, it is first necessary to grasp his philosophical understanding of material substance, that is, as a necessary quality of all creatures that is capable of varying degrees of refinement.

Embodiment, for Origen, simply falls under the definition of creatureliness. Or as he himself puts it, “an incorporeal life will rightly be considered a prerogative of the Trinity alone.”²⁷ All created beings as such cannot exist without being affixed to a material body (of some sort), and can be separated from it only by abstraction.²⁸ For Origen this is a simple deduction from the doctrine of creation ex ni-

24. *Dialogue with Heraclides* 7.

25. *On First Principles* 2, 6, 2.

26. The Incarnation “represents the unity of God with humanity and the unity of human history with God. God the Logos takes to himself in Christ the being of Adam—the being of flesh, of materiality,” Richard A. Norris, Jr., trans., *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 11–12.

27. *On First Principles* 2, 2, 2.

28. *Ibid.*

hilo, since purely incorporeal beings could emerge only as an efflux of the divine nature itself.²⁹ To put it another way, to be a created *hypostasis* means not only “being” (*ousia*), but also existence in a discreet and concrete mode, “subsistence,” and subsistence as such requires association with matter.³⁰ Matter is then the principle of differentiation from God, with all the ambiguity that phrase entails.

Origen, along with most of his contemporary thinkers, was aware of the ambiguity of the notion of corporeality, and he resists any simplistic accounts of it.³¹ Hence, he offers two senses of incorporeality, absolute and relative. The former, as we have seen above, applies only to the Holy Trinity; the latter admits of “more or less,” including everything from the earth itself to refined and rarified substances like the air or the angelic bodies. As he defines it in *On First Principles*, matter is an amorphous substructure, “that which is placed under bodies, viz., that by which, through the bestowing and implanting of qualities, bodies exist.”³² Bearing no qualities of its own, it is capable of any degree of transformation: “[It can be] dragged down to beings of a lower order, molded into the crasser and more solid condition of a body ... or, when it becomes the servant of more perfect and more blessed beings, it shines in the splendor of celestial bodies, and adorns either the angels of God or the sons of the resurrection.”³³ In *Against Celsus* he proposes that a given body will adapt itself to the quality or

29. Cf. Edwards, “Christ or Plato,” 17. This does not prevent creatures from being incorporeal in themselves, nor does it prevent rational creatures from being incorporeal “in their proper nature,” cf. *On First Principles* 1, 7, 1. Origen requires only that every creature *have* a body, not that it *is* a body. (For example, there is nothing in Origen’s view to prevent the soul itself—in its proper nature—from being incorporeal, so long as it is joined to, or animates, a body, rather than living a totally disembodied existence.)

30. Cf. Mark J. Edwards, “Origen No Gnostic, or, On the Corporeality of Man,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1992): 31–33. Edwards also points out the similarities with Aristotle’s concept of matter on this point, viz., that Form can never be abstracted from matter except in God. Cf. *ibid.*, 33–37.

31. In fact, in the preface to *On First Principles*, Origen concludes his formulaic account of the *regula fidei* by inserting, somewhat awkwardly, a *caveat* about the commonly held notions of the term *asōmaton*, which the “simple or ignorant” use to designate even the air we breathe. Pref., 8.

32. *On First Principles* 2, 1, 4.

33. *Ibid.* 2, 2, 2.

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habit of the soul that occupies it, becoming more or less subtle as the situation demands.³⁴ Elsewhere in the same work, however, he claims that the quality of the body is modified to suit its particular environment: a creature “exists in no material place, without having a body suited to the nature of that place.”³⁵ This, then, is what Origen means by matter: an amorphous and “morally pliable” substructure underlying all created being as such.

The Relation of Embodiment to Moral Evil

The question thus arises, of course, as to the relation of matter to moral evil in Origen’s system: is there a direct or indirect relationship? Is matter evil in itself, or is it only an “occasion” of evil? The answer, of course, is that the relationship can only be indirect, since for Origen created matter is itself good, and it becomes a source of evil only when the rational creature turns it into a substitute for God. This section will assess this “indirectness” by examining the following concepts: the ambiguity of the term “flesh,” Origen’s attitude toward bodily desires, the “sign” value of sensible realities, and the dominant significance of freedom in Origen’s system.

First of all, there can be no doubt that Origen believed the body to be inferior to the soul. Origen argues that the *locus* of God’s image in man resides in the soul alone: “Is it possible to suppose that the element which is ‘after the image of God’ should exist in the inferior part—I mean the body—of a compound being [*synthetou*] like man ...? For if that which is “after the image of God” be in the body ... the better part, the soul [*psychē*], has been deprived of that which is ‘after His image.’”³⁶

Neither does Origen have many kind words for the soul’s present state of embodiment. Citing Hebrews 4:12, Origen professes that the Word came “to cut through ... the disastrous friendship of soul and body.”³⁷ Embodiment is no boon to the soul, and Origen can speak of “the whole of corporeal nature as a kind of burden that enfeebles

34. *Against Celsus* 1, 33.

36. *Ibid.* 6, 63.

35. *Ibid.* 7, 32.

37. *Commentary on John* 1, 229.

the vigor of the spirit.”³⁸ Origen expounds this in the prologue to *On First Principles*: “So our understanding [*mens*], when shut in by the fetters of flesh and blood, and rendered, on account of its participation in such material substances, duller [*is*] more obtuse, although, in comparison with our bodily nature, it is esteemed to be far superior.”³⁹

In brief, Origen had no doubts about the inferiority of the body vis-à-vis the soul.

And yet the body and materiality, for Origen, are not evil—their relationship has an “indirect” quality. The indirect relationship of embodiment to moral evil is epitomized in the Semitic concept of “flesh,” which refers to man’s terrestrial condition, both exterior and interior, as he stands before God in all his fragility and limitations.⁴⁰ This term, with all its multivalent meanings, was brought into the Christian vocabulary by St. Paul, who in his epistles contrasts it with the spirit (*pneuma*).⁴¹ Origen latches onto this term as a means of avoiding the direct vilification of matter, while at the same time acknowledging the moral problematics created by it.⁴²

But even if Origen is unsparing in his distaste for bodily needs, he insists that they have been frustrated “in hope”:

For, consider the needs of the body: the appetite for food, the embarrassing process of digestion, the sense of shame associated with procuring offspring, how children are conceived, born, and raised. And behold, what great futility is contained in these things, what great corruption to which the creation of the soul, noble and rational, has been subjected, although unwillingly. It was subjected, however, in hope, namely, in hope for the time when it would be set free.⁴³

38. *On First Principles* 1, 7, 5. Crouzel and Simonetti believe Rufinus has mistranslated *spiritus* for Origen’s *psychē* here, and suppose Origen to have written “vigor of the soul.” Cf. *Traité des Principes*, 2:111. I am less inclined to mistrust Rufinus as a translator, since he consistently translates *spiritus* for *anima* in nearly every verifiable instance. N.b. “embodiment” here refers specifically to the present, terrestrial state of embodiment, rather than to embodiment per se. As was stated above, all created beings as such are embodied.

39. Prol., 8.

40. Cf. Blanc, “Lattitude,” 845.

41. Cf. Rom 8:5–13; Gal 5:16–26.

42. Blanc, “Lattitude,” 849.

43. *Commentary on Romans* 7, 4, 9–10. Origen asserts, as if in awe, that even such a

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Origen is hardly puritanical,⁴⁴ nor does he have any Manichae-an hatred for the body's natural desires. It is only wanton excess in satisfying these desires against which he protests. The flesh must be given what it needs, not what it wants; God ordained man to govern his body, not to be governed by it. The just man, inspired by the divine *Logos*, is capable of ruling the irrational elements in his body, whereas the wicked are attached inordinately to material realities, a condition that Origen dubs "the flesh."⁴⁵ This carefully phrased charge is laid out clearly by Origen in the *Commentary on Romans*:

Surely God did not make us in his own image in order that we should be subject to the servitude of the flesh, but instead in order that our soul, by serving its Creator devotedly, might make use of the service and ministry of the flesh. But perhaps someone might say: How can it be that we are not debtors to the flesh, seeing that we are forced by the necessity of nature to provide both nourishment and clothing for it? ... [St. Paul] is not absolutely denying that provision should be made for the flesh in respect to necessary matters, but only in respect to its lusts.⁴⁶

He adds in the *Commentary on John*, "One who is in the body does the things of the body, though unwillingly."⁴⁷

On the other hand, to those who engulf themselves in material things Origen applies the words of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:16–17: "[B]ecause these have craved bodily things and been engrossed in them, they join themselves to the whore, matter, and become one body with her. Those who have been born of God separate themselves from the whore, matter."⁴⁸ The body must be put at the service of the soul, and not vice versa: this is why Origen can define man as a "soul using a body."⁴⁹

brilliant mind as St. Paul, whose "soul and intellect ... certainly surpasses and ascends beyond everything pertaining to the body ... which comprehends the definitions and understanding of heavenly and divine ideas ... was subjected to servitude to the corruptible body and was overcome by its futility."

44. Cf. Henry Chadwick, who dubs Origen the "Illiberal Humanist" in contrast to Clement, the "Liberal Puritan." *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, 31 and 66.

45. Blanc, "L'attitude," 849.

47. *Commentary on John* 1, 17.

49. *Against Celsus* 7, 38.

46. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 14, 2.

48. *Ibid.* 20, 134.

Though good in itself, the terrestrial body constitutes a danger inasmuch as it may prevent one from passing on to higher and more spiritual realities. In Origen's moral theology, the essence of sin is for the perceptible to be taken for an end rather than as a means to a divine end. The flesh is thus an "occasion of sin" even if it is not sinful in itself.⁵⁰ In this aspect of his cosmology Origen actually echoes Plato. For the latter, sensible realities are pale shadows of the Forms, while for the former they are pale shadows of divine realities. For both, the sensible world remains good inasmuch as it serves to draw the subject beyond itself to the higher world that it reflects; but to allow one's gaze to linger on the sensible world itself is to contradict both its purpose and one's own.⁵¹

This is why there can never be a direct relationship between materiality and moral evil for Origen, because the keystone of Origen's system is the providential freedom of rational creatures.⁵² Recall that evil does not possess substantial existence for Origen, in matter or anywhere else, but only in the evil act freely undertaken. It is to the mind in its freedom, therefore, that we must look for the source of evil, not the body: "But to maintain that matter, dwelling among mortal things, is the cause of evils, is in our opinion not true. For it is the mind [*hēgemonikon*] of each individual which is the cause of the evil which arises in him, and this is evil."⁵³ The relationship, then, can only be *indirect*, and this indirection arises from the mediate term "flesh," or a rational creature's free self-subjection to material reality.

50. This is why Origen often seems so hostile to the "letter" of the sacred text—to linger on the letter is to refuse to pass on to the divine spirit of the text.

51. Crouzel, "L'anthropologie d'Origène: de l'archê au telos," 46–47.

52. For an examination of Origen's hermeneutic of free will, see Henri Crouzel, "Theological Construction and Research: Origen on Freewill," in *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine*, ed. B. Drewery and R. Bauckham (Edinburgh: Continuum, 1997), 239–65.

53. *Against Celsus*, 4, 66. He even states in 4, 59 that the body itself is sacred or profane depending on whether the soul which occupied it is sacred or profane. In other words, the value of the body is contingent upon the free choice of the soul. This comment comes in discussion of what honors are appropriate to give a corpse—Origen answers that it depends on the corpse!

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Moral Evaluation of the Passions

This “indirect” relationship between materiality and moral evil can be confirmed by an examination of Origen’s view of the passions. Here we will find Origen once again avoiding two equally unacceptable opinions: he will neither judge the body itself to be evil nor entirely exculpate it from blame. Although emotional impressions arising from the body are not themselves evil, Origen will hold that they become evil when they gain the assent of the will.

The Stoic disapproval of passions was a highly influential theory in the second century, yet the theory itself is often simplified in modern accounts. “Passions,” as understood by the Stoic theorists, are not understood primarily as nonrational impulses, nor as simple sensations. Rather, they result from practical decisions about the value of impressions received through external stimuli, that is, they are rational processes, even if they violate the norms of reason.⁵⁴ They are cases in which impulses toward or away from a certain object exceed the limits of reason and disturb inner tranquility. For example, the passion of anger does not follow immediately from injury, but after an *act of assent* to the impression of injury and to the desirability of vengeance.

This immediate impression, that is, that one has been injured and that one’s injury calls for vengeance, is what the Stoics called *propatheia*.⁵⁵ The word refers to spontaneous and involuntary affective movements over which the subject may yet exercise some rational control. While “psychological inertia” may carry this along into a genuine passion, a well-trained mind will dismiss the impulse as unreasonable. *Propatheia* is therefore not in itself sinful, but only becomes so when the initial movements of passion are given assent by the mind and thereby gain a foothold in the will.

54. Richard Layton, “*Propatheia*: Origen and Didymus on the Origin of the Passions,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 54 (2000): 263. I am indebted to Dr. Layton’s excellent article for the main outlines of this section, and for the relevant references to Origen’s work.

55. Cf. B. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985): 175–81; J. Fillion-Lahille, *Le De ira de Sénèque et la philosophie stoïcienne des passions* (Paris: Aubier, 1984): 163–69.

Origen was familiar with the Stoic theory of *propatheia*, and he found it useful in demarcating the exact relationship between the passions and moral judgment. The soul is subjected to passions because it is spread throughout the body, so that “when the body is weighed down, the soul too is burdened.”⁵⁶ Origen uses the theory, for example, in the account of Christ’s “agony” in the Garden of Gethsemane. Christ did not experience the passion of “grief,” but rather he “began to be grieved,”⁵⁷ a grammatical ambiguity that Origen exploits to exculpate Christ from sinful passions:

For there is a great difference between “to be grieved” and “to begin to be grieved.” ... This happened instead with respect to the human nature only to the extent of the very beginning of grief and trembling, so that by these very things he might show to his disciples ... that “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ... Therefore, he indeed “began to be grieved and distressed” according to human nature, which is subject to such passions, not however, according to the divine power, which is quite distant from passion of this kind.⁵⁸

Origen also uses the Stoic concept of *propatheia* to explain the Psalmist’s apparent justification of anger in Psalm 4:5: “Be angry and do not sin.” Origen here notes that the biblical usage of the verb “to be angry” (*orgizesthe*) can refer to involuntary as well as voluntary actions, and that the Psalmist can here be referring only to the former: “But the term also refers to something involuntary, which some call an originating *propatheia*, which attracts toward itself in circumstances of certain irritations what we previously described as anger.”⁵⁹

In conclusion, Origen’s use of the Stoic concept of *propatheia* shows that he did not regard the body itself as sinful, nor did he believe that embodiment ipso facto involved the soul in moral evil. (If he did, e.g., he would have regarded even *propatheia* as evil, since it is an involuntary reaction provoked by the body.) He did believe, however, that the body was an “occasion of sin,” that it brought influences

56. *Commentary on Luke* 25, 2.

57. Mt 26:37.

58. *Commentary on Matthew* 92.

59. *Scl. Ps.* 4:5.

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to bear upon the will that, if unchecked, would lead to moral evil. As always, the influence of the body is always indirect, and once again it is human freedom that intervenes. So long as freedom, manifested in the power of the rational faculty, maintains a governance over bodily passions, sin can gain no foothold through the body.

Body as Cause of Evil in Origen: A Textual Analysis

Having assessed Origen's nuanced view toward embodiment, we are now able to turn to the most important text in this regard, namely *On First Principles* 3, 4, to assess Origen's explicit treatment of the question. This section of the work proposes three alternative theories to explain the source of moral conflict in the soul. The second theory that Origen here proposes in this section, although its origin is uncertain, appears to reflect the body-soul dualism of the Platonic schools.

Sandwiched between two alternative theories, Origen introduces his second theory in this way: “[W]hether, from the very fact that we inhere in bodily structures which according to their own proper nature are dead, and altogether devoid of life (seeing it is from us, i.e., from our souls, that the material body derives its life, it being contrary and hostile to the spirit), we are drawn on and enticed to the practice of those evils which are agreeable to the body.”⁶⁰

Once again, all three theories in this section are put forward as explanations for the experience of interior moral conflict. If the third theory posited a partitioned soul, where both poles of moral conflict are found within the soul itself, this second theory posits a unified soul whose opposing pole is nothing other than the body itself.

The theory itself seems painfully simple in its introduction, but it becomes more complex when it is laid out in detail in paragraphs four and five. First, we learn that the soul itself is both single and unified: “there is in us one movement, and one life, proceeding from one and the same soul.”

60. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 1.

Second, we learn that so-called interior moral conflict is actually something of an illusion. Although it often *seems* to us, from our psychological experience of moral conflict, that two principles are conflicting within our selves, in point of fact this tension emerges simply from “the natural movements of the body.” These natural movements, for example, for food, drink, or “the natural desire of male seed to be expelled,” simply give rise to some “habit or necessity,” which in turn distracts us from the contemplation of divine things. This theory more or less reduces the moral element in man to the maintenance of biological equilibrium.

Third, Origen specifically denies that any active principle of evil is involved (“not that the flesh really has a soul, or a wisdom of its own”), and interprets biblical texts to the contrary as hyperbole, or “an abuse of language.” This denial that the body could be a principle of evil is, once again, drawn from the Christian doctrine of creation: “[T]here is no other creator of soul and flesh than God. And if we were to assert that the good God created anything in His own creation that was hostile to Himself, it would appear to be a manifest absurdity.” In other words, without minimizing the viciousness of vicious acts, the body’s role in these acts is strictly “natural,” rather than moral—that is, the body’s involvement in moral evil is not willful or malevolent, any more than a sword’s use in an act of murder would reflect badly upon the sword. The sword is an “occasion” of sin inasmuch as it is put in the service of a sinful act by a free will; the same is true of the body and its natural inclinations.

Fourth, Origen admits an argument that weighs against this theory, that is, the Pauline passage that includes among the “works of the flesh” acts that are clearly noncorporeal: heresies, envy, and contention, among others.⁶¹ If all moral evil is to be reduced to the body, what of these sins? Origen’s reply, on behalf of the theory’s defenders, is unexpected, to say the least: “[T]hat the mind (*anima*), being rendered grosser in feeling, from its yielding itself to the passions

61. Gal 5:19–21.

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of the body, and being oppressed by the mass of its vices, and having no refined or spiritual feelings, is said to be made flesh, and derives its name from that in which it exhibits more vigor and force of will.” Origen’s meaning here is not altogether clear, but he seems to be saying that the body’s influence goes beyond the mere spontaneous generation of desires, but actually extends to the corruption of the soul itself, extinguishing all its spiritual feelings and changing its nature to the point that it merits a new name (“flesh”). In this way, Origen shows how the body can be responsible even for noncorporeal sins, by its evisceration of the soul’s health.⁶²

As to the provenance of this theory—that is, the question of whether or not this theory, to which Origen is responding, was actually held by any thinkers in Origen’s day—although Origen presents it almost as a philosophical commonplace, it is difficult to determine its origin with any certainty. The substance and language of the theory seem to fit with no particular philosopher or philosophical school. The rough outlines of the theory are vaguely Platonic—that is, a rather straightforward soul-body dualism, with the body placing unwanted demands upon the soul that governs it—and yet it is not easy to place. Plato clearly taught a tripartite soul division in his later dialogues, which was at least obliquely understood by his disciples and is re-presented here in Origen’s third theory. But the second theory, that is, the theory in question, expressly denies soul division in its very first sentence.

If the third theory (tripartism) is the Platonism of the *Republic*, might we have in the second theory the Platonism of the *Phaedo*? In the latter dialogue Plato portrays a sovereign, unified soul, plunged

62. In the process, however, Origen seems to move the theory into the realm of self-contradiction. It is hard to see how a body that is inanimate and “altogether devoid of life” is able to go on the offensive against the soul, upon which it depends for its vivification. In fact, this suggestion seems to swerve dangerously close to the first, “two souls,” theory, which grants an independent life to the lower principle. To put it another way, Origen seems to be borrowing a chapter from the first theory in order to defend the second, which is not necessarily a disingenuous move (especially if he sees merit in both theories, as I shall argue), but it does call into question the strength of the theory itself.

unwillingly into a wanton, disordered body, whose incessant carnal desires are a continual distraction from the soul's contemplation of its divine Source. If it was this model—that is, a single, unified soul set in opposition to the body—that Origen had in mind with his second theory, he could not have better expressed it. If this is the case, then the second and third theories would be the two variant strands of the Platonic tradition known to Origen, that of a unified soul and that of a tripartite soul. There can be no certainty of this, it is true, but at the very least, the second theory does seem to be Platonic in origin.

Origen never expresses a verdict upon his second theory. This fact will not surprise those familiar with Origen's method, especially that of *On First Principles*, which customarily offers several solutions to a question without choosing among them. He concludes the section with an assurance that he has made the best possible case for each theory (or at least for each that he finds defensible), and that he prefers to "let the reader choose out of them for himself that which he thinks ought to be preferred." We cannot conclude that Origen accepts the theory from the simple fact that he does not condemn it, although the fact that he lets it stand on its own grounds shows at least that he thinks it has merit. Most scholars have concluded that Origen favors this theory, or at least that he finds much in it that rings true.⁶³

The fact that the theory provides a safeguard against Gnostic dualism would certainly make it attractive to Origen. One also notes that the language of the soul's becoming engrossed in fleshly vices to the point of meriting the name "flesh" has many echoes in Origen's writings elsewhere, suggesting that the words may be his own.⁶⁴ All of this suggests, indeed, that even if the theory itself is not Origen's, he undoubtedly found it more than a little helpful.

63. Crouzel and Simonetti cite favorably the judgment of Karl Friedrich Schnitzer to the effect that, in this passage, Origen shows his true opinion. *Traité des Principes*, 4:97.

64. E.g., "[T]he soul of those men had repudiated serving the Spirit and had turned itself to all the vices of the flesh, it even adopted the name 'flesh,' to which it had joined itself and with which it had become one." *Commentary on Romans* 6, 13, 7.

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It seems that, consciously or no, even if the second theory was plausible for Origen, he did not find it entirely satisfactory from a rational perspective. And this is not altogether surprising. The theory, as it stands, is noticeably weak from the perspective of moral asceticism. To suppose that all moral conflict is caused by an imbalance of bodily fluids may be satisfying for a biologist, but it has little to offer the ascetic or the martyr. The theory empties anthropology of all of its moral drama, which is hardly something Origen would want to lose. One suspects that Origen continued to feel the tug of two-principle dualism, far more satisfying from an ascetic perspective, which may explain his inconsistency in defense of the second theory.

If we are permitted to draw these two inferences, that is, that the second theory reflects a soul-body dualism reminiscent of the Platonic school (if not that of Plato himself), and that Origen is at least sympathetic to the theory (if not entirely convinced by it), then some modest conclusions may be drawn. First, we receive confirmation of a point made earlier regarding Origen's views of soul division, that is, that Origen sees the soul as essentially unified and only conceptually divisible.⁶⁵ This is, of course, because the blame for moral evil is attributed to the body, rather than requiring the invention of a culpable element within the soul itself. Second, Origen is willing to see the body as an indirect cause of the soul's evils, so long as it is not seen in terms of two-principle, conflict dualism. In other words, the body is a cause of moral evil only "indirectly," as an "occasion of sin," ultimately hinging upon the free choice of the rational creature.

Conclusion and Comparison

In conclusion, Plato left to his disciples a thoroughly ambivalent view of the visible world, with the body viewed as a source of evil that is nonetheless not entirely without benefit to the embodied soul. Similarly, the Middle Platonists lamented the embodiment of the soul, while at the same time acknowledging that some good may

65. Cf. "Origen and the Bipartition of the Soul," in chapter 1.

come of it, and these philosophers differed among themselves as to whether bodily goods might be necessary for happiness.

Origen, however, begins from the Christian doctrines of creation and Incarnation; he understands matter to be a fluid substratum that is an ontological requirement of created beings. The relationship between materiality and moral evil, therefore, can only be indirect, a relationship that is captured by the tensions between body (*sōma*) and flesh (*sarx*), sign and reality, moderation and excess. This tension, in fact, echoes Plato's view of the sensible world, which is dangerous only if taken as the end in itself; if recognized as a deficient "copy" of the truth and approached with moderation, it may in fact be harnessed so as to become a means to man's ultimate end.⁶⁶ Origen thus shows some degree of sympathy to a theory that attributes the soul's evils to its embodiment, while at the same time denying that the body is an active principle of evil.

In many ways, Origen's essential evaluation of materiality is not unlike that of the Middle Platonists. Most fundamentally, Origen is no less convinced than they that the soul is ontologically higher than the body. The soul alone possesses a primordial dignity, and the body is altogether lifeless without the soul to vivify it. Similarly, for both Origen and the Middle Platonists the soul's evils are associated, directly or indirectly, with its embodiment. The more a soul is inclined (or "declined") toward the body, the further removed it is from God.

At the same time, neither is willing to make materiality the very principle of evil, opposed to the Good in a cosmic dualism. With the exception of radical thinkers such as Numenius (who is markedly atypical of Middle Platonism), the Middle Platonists were just as wary of "conflict"-style dualism as Origen was. Nor did they deny that the body could be of some use to the soul. Origen in many ways echoes those of the Middle Platonic school when he speaks of the merit that the body can accrue on behalf of the soul.

66. This is the point, of course, of Plato's famous allegory of the cave in the *Republic*.

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Yet Origen's account of materiality strikes a different note in some ways. It is difficult to ignore Origen's forthrightness in defending the Christian doctrines of creation and Incarnation, which round out a comparatively innocuous portrayal of materiality. His conviction that materiality is a necessary function of created beings, that it could be put to good or bad use, makes him significantly more of a "friend of the flesh" than most in the Platonic camp. Connected to this is Origen's greater sense of freedom, the driving force behind his *On First Principles*. For Origen the power of matter to impair the soul's influence is contingent upon the soul's freedom of moral choice. No necessity or fatalism drags the soul down. Hence the "indirectness" of Origen's view of matter: it becomes evil only when the mediating influence of the free will turns it toward evil. Although the concept of freedom was not unknown to many Platonists, and many Middle Platonists did argue for a central core of human freedom, we do not find this all-prevailing sovereignty and efficacy of moral choice in their school.

CHAPTER 3

Two Souls



The more conventional debates that have been addressed thus far—soul composition and the soul-body relationship—coexisted at all times with a potentially more radical doctrine of the soul, that of two distinct souls. At first it might seem odd even to raise this doctrine in connection with Origen, since the doctrine of two distinct souls is generally associated with Gnosticism, a religious system that Origen spent his life opposing. Our first task, however, shall be to distinguish between two variations of the two souls doctrine, which may be called the “conflict” and “hierarchical” models. It will become clear that Origen rejects the former, “conflict” model because of its incompatibility with Christian doctrine. Origen accepts the latter, “hierarchical” version of the two souls doctrine, however, and for reasons that carry a good deal of doctrinal and spiritual significance.

This chapter will begin by presenting both forms of the two souls doctrine, as mentioned above. Subsequently, in addressing Origen’s views, the central focus will again be on *On First Principles* 3, 4, where Origen addresses the two souls doctrine directly, although it is not easy to determine which model of the doctrine—“conflict” or “hierarchical”—he is there considering. Finally, Origen’s other writings will be scoured for evidence of one or the other form of two souls doctrine.

Two Souls

Two Souls Theory: "Conflict" Model

The origins of the "conflict" version of the two souls doctrine will delay us only briefly, since the idea seems to have fermented first on Iranian-Persian soil and is more or less foreign to the Greek mind. The curious blend of Mithraism, Zervanism, and Zoroastrianism, merged into a state religion under the Babylonian king Shápúr in the third century AD, created a religious atmosphere favorable to the rigid, earth-denying dualism of the conflict model. Here the cosmos becomes a battleground, with every inch of territory claimed by the competing Kingdoms of Light and Darkness. In this view the lower soul is of matter and is for that reason an evil soul, opposed to the good soul as darkness is to light.¹ The two souls are forever in conflict, giving rise to a vocabulary of militarism and apocalypticism. From the Near East this "conflict" version of the two souls doctrine would seep into other religious systems—first into those Greek thinkers predisposed to Eastern influence, and finally into three religious movements closely linked to the Iranian world: Judaism, Gnosticism, and Christianity.

Although Plato himself had typically avoided depicting the world along the lines of "conflict" dualism, there are suggestions in the *Laws* that, since all motion derives from the soul, pre-cosmic matter must necessarily be moved by some kind of irrational soul.² This notion would be exploited and developed substantially by some Middle Platonic thinkers. Though some more "mainstream" Middle Platonists show hints of this model, it is Numenius who is best known for it. The unrestrained metaphysical dualism of Numenius posits a preexistent soul, both immaterial and immortal, which descends into the body through delusion with earthly pleasures.³ In

1. Cf. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 28–29.

2. See *Laws* 896e, 897c–d.

3. "[There are] two world souls—the one being very beneficent, and the other malevolent, namely, matter." *Treatise on the Good* 1, 16. Elsewhere Numenius refers to them as the "rational and irrational souls." *Ibid.* 4, 53.

the course of its descent through the Milky Way it gathers influences and accretions, which form its "accreted soul" (*prosphyēs psychē*) or "irrational soul" (*alogos psychē*).⁴ Numenius's concept of a second soul builds upon the Middle Platonic notion of the *ochēma*, or the soul's passionate "envelope" or vehicle (also from Aristotle's doctrine of the *pneuma* as the seat of the sensible soul), and serves to resolve the problem of the incorporeal soul's communication with the body.⁵ The notion of two warring souls, while it may have some roots in Plato, is at the very least a radicalization of Plato's ideas, and more than likely has connections with magical-astrological themes, perhaps drawn from Hermetic notions. Here, without a doubt, we have a "conflict" version of the two souls doctrine akin to that of Persian-Iranian Zoroastrianism.

It was in Gnosticism, however, that the Iranian doctrine found its true home, since there the eternal opposition between Spirit and Matter reached its mythological peak. At the hands of the Babylonian prophet Mani the two souls also received a firm doctrinal foundation: the mind or *nous*, the transcendent divine principle, was opposed to the superadded cosmic elements collectively known as *psychē*, which are lowly and perishable. The distinction, of course, is simply the extension to the anthropological sphere of Gnosticism's abhorrence of the material realm. Although not all Gnostic systems utilized the same, "conflict" model of dualism, it is found in most Iranian-derived systems such as Manichaeism and that of the famous Hymn of the Pearl.⁶ Ironically, this is also the least common in the Gnostic systems, even if it is the model that would become most notorious among Christians, due to the popularity of anti-Manichaean apologists such as St. Augustine.

Iranian anthropological concepts also penetrated the world of Jewish thought through the frequent contact that occurred between

4. Fr. 43, 44.

5. Ibid.

6. Cf. Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 112-29; 206-35. Jonas discusses the two variants of dualism, Iranian and Syrian, on 236-37.

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the two peoples.⁷ In this way, dualistic speculations of the Iranian religion became common in Jewish rabbinical literature. The rabbinical concept of the dual instincts (*yester ha-ra* and *yetzer ha-tov*) within the human soul certainly bears the mark of Iranian influence.⁸ The strongest example of this influence, however, is in the Qumran literature, where we find this dualism written into the *Community Rule*: "He has created man to govern the world, and has appointed for him two spirits in which to walk until the time of his visitation: the spirits of truth and of falsehood."⁹ The language of "two souls," of course, is foreign to Judaism, but with the language of "two spirits" or "two angels" the rabbinical literature certainly approached the dualism of Zoroastrianism, since the twin powers within man are clearly in conflict with each other.

In post-apostolic Christianity we do find some hints of a doctrine of two souls in conflict, though these are more distant echoes than real doctrinal similarities. In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, for example, we find references to "two spirits" or "two angels" within man, one good and one evil.¹⁰ The well-known teaching of the *Didache* regarding the two ways, Light and Darkness, follows the same motif. Even if these sources reflect the "conflict" model of dualism, the language is never developed into a full-blown theology of two souls in conflict. Among the Christian writers, and especially among the Alexandrian, the threat of Gnostic dualism was too real, and the need for self-differentiation too compelling.

7. Shaul Shaked has made the strongest case for this influence. See *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994).

8. Cf. O. J. F. Seitz, "Antecedents and Signification of the Term *dipsukhos*," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 66 (1947): 211–19.

9. 3, 18ff. Cf. Guy G. Stroumsa, "The Two Souls and the Divided Will," in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. A. I. Baumgarten, J. Assman and G. G. Stroumsa, (Leiden: Brill, 1998). I am indebted to Stroumsa for these references.

10. *Mandates* 5.2–4, 6.2. A parallel claim can be found in Origen: "Everyone is assisted by two angels, one of justice and one of iniquity." *Homilies on Luke* 12, 4.

Two Souls Theory: "Hierarchical" Model

Not every form of dualism begins from a "conflict" model, however, and there is evidence for a variant of the "two souls" doctrine that emerges from an entirely different model.

The conflict dualism of Persian Zoroastrianism was always foreign to the Greek mind, which could feel only a sort of reverence for nature and never disdain.¹¹ Plato himself does seem to flirt with the idea of an independent force of evil and even refers on occasion to "two souls,"¹² but he ultimately rejects the notion of the "second soul" as an independent entity. Nonetheless, Plato may have paved the way for a variant of the two souls notion by giving Soul (i.e., the World Soul) an intermediary role between the intelligible and physical realms. Subsequent philosophers would further concretize the identification of the Mind (*Nous*) with the One and further downgrade the Soul (*Psychē*) to an altogether distinct metaphysical entity. Once this position on first principles is filtered down to the anthropological level, it does not take long to emerge with a "two souls" doctrine, with soul positioned below mind. And yet this can never be the "conflict" version of the two souls doctrine found in Iranian dualism, since the two entities in this case are hierarchically arranged and not in open conflict.

The first Platonic author in whom we find an explicit doctrine of two hierarchical souls is Philo the Jew (20 BC–AD 50).¹³ "[I]n every soul at its very birth," he says, "there enter two powers [*dynamēis*], the salutary and the destructive."¹⁴ Philo's lower soul (*zōtikē*) is defined by irrationality, its essence the "blood" (*nefesh*) of the Hebrew

11. Cf. R. Ferwarda, "Two Souls: Origen's and Augustine's Attitude toward the Two Souls Doctrine, Its Place in Greek and Christian Philosophy," *Vigiliae Christianae* 37 (1983): 365–66.

12. E.g., *Timaeus* 48a7, 69cd.

13. Two earlier writers, Speusippus and Xenocrates, speak of rational and irrational souls, but the language is murky, and there is insufficient evidence to credit either with a two souls doctrine, properly speaking. Cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 462–63 and 480–81.

14. *Quaest. In Ex.* 1, 23.

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Scriptures.¹⁵ As lifeblood it is also the “life principle” of the body, bearing the nutritive and sense-perceptive faculties. Above this stands the pure mind (*nous*, from the Hebrew *ruach*), man’s true and immortal self, its essence the *pneuma*. Philo finds the creation of the two souls described spiritually in man’s “double creation” in Genesis—the archetypal man of the intellect and the sensible, psychic man.¹⁶ Once again, although Philo is not without dualistic tendencies, his two souls are never in open conflict—they are hierarchically ordered, one above the other.¹⁷ Despite the heightened language—for example, of the “salutary” and “destructive” powers in the soul, Philo is clear that both creations are from the same God, and matter is never seen as an independent, evil force.¹⁸ Although Philo’s impact upon mainstream Middle Platonism is still debated by scholars,¹⁹ his strong influence among the early Christian writers is not in doubt.²⁰

Within the mainstream of Middle Platonism the decisive move to separate soul and mind is made by Plutarch, who argues that “in the same degree as soul is superior to body, so is mind [*nous*] better and more divine than soul.”²¹ Between body and soul Plutarch places the irrational or affective factor (*to alogon*), and between soul and mind is the rational faculty (*logos*). Every soul partakes of mind,

15. E.g., Gn 9:4, Lv 17:11–14, and Dt 12:23, where “the life is in the blood.” *Quaest. in Genesim* 2, 59; *Quod deter. pot. insid. soleat* 82–83.

16. Cf. *Opif.* 134, e.g.

17. John Dillon denies that Philo’s doctrine is an authentic “two souls” doctrine, calling it “more apparent than real” in *The Middle Platonists*, 175. But Dillon is referring to a “conflict” model of the two souls: he does not address the possibility of Philo’s using a “hierarchical” model.

18. Cf. *Opif.* 16.

19. Cf. David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1986). “The regrettable silence which enshrouds Philo’s philosophical training and the preference he shows for using anonymous phrases when referring to Greek philosophers and their schools have as consequence that in his many writings there is not a single explicit reference to Platonists or students of philosophy who profess to follow the teachings of Plato. . . . [Yet b]oth the scope of Philo’s acquaintance with the Platonic corpus and the prominence of the *Timaeus* in his reading of Plato resemble the manner and methods of the Middle Platonists.” *Ibid.*, 485–86.

20. Cf. David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

21. *De Fac.*, 943A.

but to the extent that the soul mingles with the flesh, to that degree it becomes irrational. Some rationality remains, the mind hovering “like a buoy attached to the top,” floating on the surface as the soul is submerged in the depths of passion: “Now the part carried submerged in the body is called the soul, whereas the part left free from corruption is called by the multitude the mind, who take it to be within themselves, as they take reflected objects to be in the mirrors that reflect them; but those who conceive this matter rightly call it a daemon, as being external [*ektos*].”²² But again, even Plutarch’s two souls are hierarchically arranged—the one a *daimōn* suspended above the other—and not opposed as good versus evil.

Although it is common to associate Gnosticism with the “two souls” in conflict, that is, the Manichaean model, not all Gnostic systems were of this type. More often, Gnostic systems used a hierarchical model of dualism such as that found in Syrian-Egyptian systems like the Valentinian or Marcionite. In this model, the two souls are not in opposition, but one is simply below the other and usually derived from it. Though they have different values, one “higher” and the other “lower,” they are not strictly *opposed* as good and evil, light and darkness.²³ Although found first of all on the cosmic level, the difference between the two models also extends to the anthropological level.²⁴

We have already noted hints of conflict dualism in some early Christian sources, notably the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Didache*, which speak of “two spirits” in man. Yet it is more often the hierarchical mode of dualism that we find in early Christianity. For example, in the thought of Tatian in the second century we find the following: “We have knowledge of two different kinds of spirits [*pneumata*], one of which is called the soul, but the other is greater than the soul: it is the image and likeness of God. The first men were endowed with both, so that they might be part of the material world,

22. *Ibid.*, 591D.

23. Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 236–37.

24. Besides Jonas, cf. also R. Ferwerda, “Two Souls.”

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and at the same time above it. This is how things are.”²⁵ In closer proximity to Origen we find another example of hierarchically ordered dualism in Clement, who also uses the language of “two spirits.” The higher soul, the *nous* (alternatively, *pneuma* or *logistikon*), is pure and filled with divine power, while the lower soul is “carnal” and derived from matter.²⁶ What preserves Clement from conflict dualism is that the lower soul is never evil or maleficent, but merely inferior. Again, Christian writers are never willing to allow that the lower soul is truly an evil principle: any language of “two souls” that we find is always explained along hierarchical lines, never those of conflict dualism.

By way of summary, at least two forms of the “two souls” doctrine are discernible in ancient thought. On the one hand we have the “conflict” model, which originates in Iranian Zoroastrianism and posits two souls, one good and the other evil, in open conflict with each other. On the other hand we have the “hierarchical” model more common among the Middle Platonic writers, which posits two souls hierarchically arranged, one of which is superior to the other but neither of which is necessarily evil. Though there is occasional overlap between the two models, the differences should be more or less clear, and these are necessary to keep in mind as we assess Origen’s response to the two souls doctrine.

Origen and the Argument for Two Souls in *On First Principles* 3, 4

Origen shows a great familiarity with the two souls doctrine, both its substance and its essential vocabulary, and he considers a variant of it directly in *On First Principles* 3, 4, along with two other theories intended to explain moral conflict in the soul. Origen’s verdict on the doctrine is nuanced: he will reject the extreme two souls model of “conflict” dualism, but seems to be sympathetic toward a more moderate two souls model such as the “hierarchical.” Since

25. *Oration ad Graecos* 12, 1.

26. *Str.* 6, 134–36; 7, 79, 6.

Origen does not state his position on the two souls doctrine outright, it must be deduced from a careful analysis of how he presents and responds to the theory in this passage. As will become clear, Origen seems to be responding here to a “hierarchical” version of the two souls doctrine, a version toward which he seems moderately favorable.

Origen introduces the two souls theory as the first of the three in this section, enunciating it in broad but conventional terms: “[W]hether, viz., as two souls [*duae animae*] are said to co-exist within us, the one is more divine and heavenly and the other inferior.”²⁷

What, first of all, does Origen mean by the “divine and heavenly” soul? Further on he calls it a “good” (*bona*) or “better” (*melior*) soul, and at the end of the section it is also called a “rational” soul.²⁸ In addition, when speaking of the moral conflict between the two souls, the higher power is referred to as the “human mind or spirit” (*menti vel spiritui*). It is difficult to know what to make of this last reference, since Origen’s theology of the spirit, and its relation to the mind and soul, are not simple matters.²⁹ In any case, this “good soul” is certainly preexistent, since it is said to be “implanted within us from heaven.” The biblical examples Origen cites—Jacob, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist—are all cases in which God’s favor is bestowed upon a subject still *in utero*, cases by which Origen means to underline the preexistent origin of the divine soul.³⁰

What, on the other hand, do we make of the lower (*inferior*) soul? It is said to be “earthly and inferior,” and is also dubbed, at least

27. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 1.

28. *Ibid.*, 3, 4, 2–3.

29. These will be treated more fully in an excursus on “The Higher Soul and the Spirit,” in chapter 4.

30. Of course these references only prove that this soul preexists the *birth* of the body, not that it preexists its entry into the body. Theoretically, an insertion of the higher soul *in utero* would satisfy the biblical references. Mark J. Edwards makes much of this point in *Origen against Plato* to prove that Origen does not explicitly teach a preexistent soul *per se* at this juncture. This may be true, but a preexistent soul is certainly what he means. God’s favor resting upon the unborn subject, in Origen’s view, presupposes merit on the part of that subject, and unless we can imagine a fetus carrying out meritorious works, these must be projected backward to a preexistent state.

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by the defenders of the doctrine, “flesh” (*carnem*).³¹ For this reason it can also be called the soul of the flesh (*carnis anima*).³² It is produced with the body and dies with the body, along the lines traditionally associated with the doctrine of traducianism: “[It] is produced, they allege, along with the body itself out of the seed of the body, whence they say it cannot live or subsist beyond the body.”³³ As a result, it itself can only be corporeal, and is thus called a “corporeal soul” (*corporalem animam*). In a reference that should be familiar by this time, Origen associates this lower soul with the lifeblood, using a reference to Leviticus 17:14: “For, from the circumstance that it is the diffusion of the blood throughout the whole flesh which produces life in the flesh, they assert that this soul, which is said to be the life of all flesh [*totius carnis esse anima*], is contained in the blood.”³⁴ The phrase “life of all flesh” implies that, inasmuch as it is associated with lifeblood, the *carnis anima* is that which animates and vivifies every living being.

But even if this *carnis anima* is coextensive with the body and is even corporeal, it is not *simply* a constituent element of the body. Origen refers to it as the “wisdom of the flesh” (*sapientiam carnis*), which rebels against the laws of God because “it has earthly wishes and bodily desires.” He explicitly speaks of it “having a will of its own.”³⁵ This soul, then, is self-conscious and intelligent, as distinct from the body itself, which has no “wishes or desires” of its own. The defenders of this doctrine find their proof in St. Paul’s enumeration

31. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 2. Interestingly, in the same paragraph Origen refers to “flesh” in a way that clearly refers not to the *carnis anima* or lower power, but to the physical body: “[A]ll such movements [i.e., the passions] are to be regarded as inherent in that substance which has not a soul, i.e., the flesh [*carnis*].” One could rightly conclude that the term “flesh” rightly belongs to the physical body, but that it is commonly applied to the “soul,” which animates this body by a misappropriation. Hence, it is never easy in this section to determine which Origen means when he says “flesh.” As a general rule, I assume he means the body unless he specifies otherwise.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.* Origen refers to the doctrine of traducianism by name in the same paragraph.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

of the "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19–21, a list that includes many noncorporeal sins. The implication, they say, is that *carnis* must refer not to the body, but to an intelligent power that transcends the body.

The theme of the section, of course, is moral conflict, and the *carnis anima* is immediately associated with the Pauline "flesh" that "lusts against the spirit."³⁶ It is "the cause of all . . . evils." Inasmuch as this soul has a will, its will "is certainly opposed to the will of the spirit."³⁷ If the *carnis anima* is opposed to the spirit, is it then evil? This might presume too much. Origen never calls it an evil soul, or even a bad soul. He simply calls it *inferior*, and associates it with the terrestrial and the carnal. The *carnis anima* belongs to a lower sphere, that of the body that it governs and animates, and as such acts as the de facto enemy of the spirit. But this does not seem to demand an evil soul of the sort found in a "conflict" dualism. It is perfectly reconcilable with a "hierarchical" model, in which the two souls are hierarchically arranged, one superior and the other inferior, but not opposed as good to evil.

As Origen proceeds with his discussion of the lower principle in *On First Principles*, he offers an extended reflection as to the relation of the *anima* (i.e., the *carnis anima*) to the "flesh" (*carnem*) and the "spirit" (*spiritus*). By *carnem* here Origen can only mean the physical body. By *spiritus* it is less clear, since this word possesses many meanings in Origen, whose relationship is never easy to make out.³⁸ In any case, the purpose of the section is to demonstrate that it is best for the soul to submit to the spirit, but if it cannot, it is better to go the way of the sinful flesh than to remain as it is. The irony of

36. Gal 5:20–22.

37. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 2.

38. In at least one sentence here Origen equates *pneuma* with "mind" (*menti*), and throughout the section it is simply the counterpart of "flesh" (*carnem*), an opposition drawn from St. Paul. It is unclear whether the *spiritus* is the higher soul (*bona anima*) or something entirely different. Incidentally, Crouzel believes that Origen's equation of *pneuma* with "mind" is due to a translation error on the part of Rufinus. Cf. *Traité des principes*, 90. Origen's view of the *pneuma* will be discussed in an excursus on "The Higher Soul and the Spirit," in chapter 4.

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this conclusion is not lost on Origen, and his reasoning is ripe with spiritual significance. The fleshly soul will soon grow heavy and satiated with sin, and may turn toward the spirit out of sheer weariness. To remain as it is, in its inferior state, is to remain tepid and lifeless, devoid of all spiritual vigor.

At this point we are in a position to return to *On First Principles* 3, 4, as a whole, and take a guess (for it can only be a guess) at the source of Origen's "first theory." Our first task must be to determine whether the "two souls" model in Origen's first theory belongs to the "conflict" or "hierarchical" tradition. It does not seem, despite assertions made to the contrary,³⁹ that it is addressing the "conflict" dualism of, say, Numenius in this passage. True, the lower soul described therein has an independent will and desires that are set against the law of God. But this need not make the *carnis anima* evil. It is inferior, earthly, carnal, and mortal—in short, it has all the characteristics of an *animal* soul. But the harsh and brutal language of Iranian-Persian dualism is noticeably lacking here.⁴⁰

Origen's third theory has much more in common with the "hierarchical" model of the two souls doctrine that is found in the mainstream of the Middle Platonic tradition, in which the lower soul is not evil but simply inferior. The phrase *duae animae* with which Origen presents the theory is already reminiscent of Plato's language in the *Timaeus*.⁴¹ Origen presents the higher, rational soul as "mind or spirit" (*menti vel spiritui*), both of which terms echo Philo's language. (This soul is also preexistent in Philo.⁴²) Similarly, recall that for Philo the lower soul is the lifeblood and life principle of the body, another theme that recurs in this theory. If Philo is Origen's main

39. See Crouzel, *Traité des principes*, 4:88, where the author proposes Numenius or, alternatively, an anonymous Gnostic writer as the object of Origen's critique.

40. "The subservience of the soul [in Gnosticism] to the cosmic powers follows from its very origination from those powers. . . . [I]f the soul represents the cosmos in the inwardness of man, or through the soul 'the world' is in man himself, then man's inwardness is the natural scene for demonic activity and his self is exposed to the play of forces which it does not control." Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 281–82.

41. *Timaeus* 48a7, 69cd.

42. Cf. *Opif.* 134, e.g.

source for the “first theory,” echoes can also be found in Plutarch and Porphyry, among others. In *On First Principles* 3, 4, then, the third theory to which Origen responds embodies the “hierarchical” dualism reminiscent of Philo and other Middle Platonists, not “conflict” dualism.

With this established, we are better prepared to assess Origen’s judgment on the doctrine. Origen closes the section with these words: “These points we have now discussed, in our desire to consider each individual opinion, at greater length than we intended, that those views might not be supposed to have escaped our notice which are generally brought forward by [the defenders of the two souls doctrine].”⁴³ Origen offers no verdict or judgment on the truth of the doctrine, except for what is given at the conclusion of the chapter, indicating that he has “brought forward to the best of our ability ... what might be advanced by way of argument regarding the several views,” and wishes the reader to “choose out of them for himself that which he thinks ought to be preferred.”⁴⁴ We are left guessing, then, at Origen’s actual opinion as to the truth of this theory, although there are at least three good reasons to suspect that Origen actually endorses this theory as his own.⁴⁵ First, Origen devotes significant time to a consideration of the theory, whereas he invalidates the theory of tripartism from the outset. Secondly, Origen notes from the beginning that he sees much biblical support for this theory.⁴⁶ Lastly, Origen offers several strong arguments in favor of this theory without offering rebuttals of them.

In fact, one may take Origen’s closing words, which allow the reader to choose which theory he prefers, as evidence that Origen has no opposition to this theory. It is likely that Origen’s actual view

43. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 3.

44. *Ibid.* 3, 4, 5.

45. Cf., for a contrasting view, K.F.Schnitzer, *Origenes über die Grundlehren des Christentums, ein Wiederherstellungsversuch* (Stuttgart: Imle un Krauss, 1836), 227. Cf. also Heinrich Dörrie, *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, vol. 6: *Die philosophische Lehre des Platonismus* (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1987).

46. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 1.

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is a synthesis of the three theories presented in this chapter, and that he incorporates elements of this theory into his own.⁴⁷ This supposition is supported by several lines of evidence taken from elsewhere in Origen's work. In conclusion, then, a careful analysis of this section of *On First Principles* has shown that Origen expresses sympathy for a "hierarchical" dualism of two souls within man. It remains to be seen, however, whether this conclusion is justified by references elsewhere in Origen's work.

Evidence for the Two Souls in Origen

Although Origen is not a "dualist" in a Gnostic sense, he does tend to see reality, and man in particular, in terms of a duality. This duality emerges in several images that are used consistently in Origen's writings.

First, that of the "inner man" and the "outer man." "It is the habit of divine Scripture to present two men," he says in the *Ennarations on the Psalms*, "and to use for the one homonyms which relate to the other."⁴⁸ The "inner man" resides within the soul, and his face is the "understanding" (*nous*) where the divine image is impressed.⁴⁹ The "outer man," on the other hand, is "in the body" and "of the body," degraded and lacking in the dignity of the inner man.⁵⁰

Alternatively, he will speak of the "image of God" and the "earthly image," or even of the "image of the devil."⁵¹ Origen bases his theology of the image on the Genesis account of (by Origen's reading) two creations of man—the inner man being "created" (*poiein*) and the outer man being "fashioned" (*plattein*)—an interpretation largely drawn from Philo.⁵² In speaking of the "image of the devil" he considers the devil the principle (*archē*) of the second

47. Such is the view of Henri Crouzel; see *Traité des Principes*, 4:97.

48. 36, 1, 4, 1–21.

49. Cf. *Against Celsus* 5, 60 and 63.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Cf., e.g., *Commentary on John* 20, 182–83. Elsewhere he speaks of the "desire of the Spirit" versus the "desire for sin." Cf. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 1, 4–5.

52. *Ennarations on the Psalms*, 149, 2., e.g.

creation, not in the sense that the devil is the real creator, but only in the sense that the devil is responsible for the Fall, the *sine qua non* of the earthly image.⁵³ The image of God is the “zone” of the spirit’s influence in man, by which he is renewed in the image of the Creator. The lesser image is not the body *per se*, but the love of matter and sin, ever at war with the divine image.⁵⁴

Even more central to Origen’s view of man is the image of the battle between flesh and spirit, inspired by St. Paul’s language.⁵⁵ “Because in that contest which is waged between flesh and spirit,” he says, “the spirit is by no means certain of victory, it being manifest that in very many individuals the flesh has the mastery.”⁵⁶ Each of the two powers exercises an influence upon man, attempting to gain dominion over his moral conduct.

These examples demonstrate that Origen saw man in terms of a moral duality, defined by a tension between two moral poles. Although this is not enough to indicate that Origen believed in two souls *per se*, it is enough to show a certain predisposition toward this doctrine. At the very least, there are similarities between Origen’s position and that of the two souls. What is essential is to notice that, in terms of the human person, the existence of a *moral* polarity is more important for Origen than that of a real *ontological* division. That is, the division within man is real for Origen, but it is essentially moral and spiritual in character, and only secondarily ontological.

In order to analyze Origen’s position more deeply, it is necessary first of all to note that he never identifies the lower principle as matter or bodiliness. The previous chapter has demonstrated Origen’s firm commitment to the Christian doctrine of creation—the justice of God the Creator and the goodness of both the material and spiritual orders. The lower principle is always seen as *related to* the body, but it is never *identified with* it. Secondly, the lower principle of Ori-

53. Cf. *Commentary on John* 1, 17.

54. The classic treatment is still Henri Crouzel’s *Théologie de l’Image de Dieu chez Origène*, especially 147–60.

55. E.g., Gal 5:17.

56. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 2.

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gen is not a “passive” principle, as the material body would be. It is an active principle, with its own will and desires, ever seeking to gain dominion over man.⁵⁷

Lastly, Origen could never accept the existence of an evil principle within man. In *On First Principles* he propounds his inability to accept an “evil sense” as a part of creation:

Who will be found, or who will be said to be, the creator of this evil sense [*mali sensus*], called the sense of the flesh? ... [For] there is no other creator of soul and flesh [*animae et carnis*] than God. And if we were to assert that the good God created anything in His own creation that was hostile to Himself, it would appear to be a manifest absurdity.⁵⁸

This does not, of course, prevent him from placing some degree of culpability upon the lower principle in man. As we have seen, Origen is willing to see the body itself as a secondary cause (or sufficient condition) of evil, so long as the primary cause is assigned to the human will. Origen might very well imagine a lower soul an “occasion” of evil, so long as it was not an evil principle per se.

By way of conclusion, these observations do not necessarily prove that Origen accepted a doctrine of two souls. But they do demonstrate a duality of two principles in Origen’s view of man, a duality in which the lower of the two principles, while not evil, remains an occasion of sinfulness in man. This is enough to confirm the analysis made above of *On First Principles* 3, 4, where Origen appeared sympathetic to an explanation of moral conflict that utilized a “hierarchical” notion of two souls. Origen recognizes the truth in this explanation of moral conflict, although he utilizes Christian imagery of spiritual warfare to specify further that the conflict is more spiritual than ontological.

Conclusion and Comparison

While Origen does not offer an explicit judgment on the two souls theory in *On First Principles* 3, 4, we know enough of his theo-

57. Cf., e.g., *Commentary on Romans* 6, 1, 4–5.

58. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 5.

logical system to venture some conclusions as to his opinion. There is certainly much to attract him to the two souls theory. Origen had a strong sense of the spiritual warfare attendant upon the moral life, and the urgency of moral ascesis and struggle in overcoming the poisonous power of sin. A materialist anthropology, one that attributed sins to the influence of the inert, physical body (such as that put forward in the “second theory” of this chapter) failed to provide a sufficient framework for this moral ascesis. As Origen points out in this section, a passive and inert body is an insufficient cause for the multitude of sins, physical and spiritual, which afflict the soul daily. Only an active and self-conscious power—the “flesh” or “wisdom of the flesh”—is sufficient to play the role of the spirit’s nemesis. Thus, the dramatic element of moral struggle must have attracted Origen to the philosophical tradition of the two souls.

On the other hand, there is much in the two souls tradition that would have given Origen pause. The “conflict” model of two souls, which has been discussed above, is beyond the pale of Christian orthodoxy because of its reliance upon an inherently wicked principle within man. As was noted above, Origen believed that “to assert that the good God created anything in His own creation that was hostile to Himself . . . would appear to be a manifest absurdity.”⁵⁹ A “hierarchical” view of two souls, however, would not be vulnerable to this objection, and thus might not be as repugnant to Origen.⁶⁰ It seems, in conclusion, that the “hierarchical” model of two souls does characterize Origen’s thinking on the soul, although with the caution that he conceives this duality in a thoroughly Christian framework.

In order to establish a thorough comparison of Origen’s views of the two souls with that of his Middle Platonist predecessors, it will be necessary to assess more closely Origen’s views on the higher and lower souls. This task will be carried out in the two subsequent chapters.

59. *Ibid.*

60. In addition, however, Origen might dispute the belief that the lower soul was corruptible and derived from the father’s semen through traducianism, though Origen’s specific views of the lower soul will be discussed further.

PART 2

THE TWO SOULS

An Analysis of Origen's Explanation



CHAPTER 4

Higher Soul



Having examined Origen's understanding of the "two souls" doctrine and his conviction that a "hierarchical" relationship between a higher and lower soul could make sense of moral struggle, further study must be carried out as to Origen's conception of the "higher soul." After an examination of the "higher soul" in Plato and the Middle Platonic schools, Origen's own view of the soul will be presented. While Origen accepts the Platonic identification of the higher soul with "mind" or rationality, he enriches this concept by associating the mind with the divine *Logos* incarnated in Christ (Jn 1:18), along with the biblical concepts of the "heart" and the "image of God." These associations allow Origen to incorporate the rational functions of the Platonic mind into the broader schema of the Christian moral and spiritual life, whereby the higher soul finds itself in an ontic and dynamic relationship with the Triune God.

Plato and the Higher Soul

Plato followed Socrates in identifying the higher soul with the human intellect, although he added to this certain qualities of transcendence and immortality. "The crucial step," E. R. Dodds says of Plato's doctrine of the soul, "lay in the identification of the detachable 'occult' self which is the carrier of guilt-feelings and potentially divine with the rational Socratic *psychē* whose virtue is a kind

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of knowledge.”¹ The “occult” self, according to Dodds, was derived from the magico-religious ideas of the northern shamanistic culture, which Plato transposed onto the plane of rational argument. Yet the essential pattern of the “occult” self, or *daemon*, remains vivid in Plato’s imagination: innate divinity, perfect simplicity, detachment from the body through contemplation, reincarnation, and immortality.²

In the thought of Plato this “occult” self is merged with the Socratic self—the *psychē*, the self-sufficient principle of intellect and life—which alone is capable of virtue and happiness. The self for Plato is not bare rationality, since for Plato even the gods were more than that,³ but it is clear that the higher or inner self of Plato is first and foremost the cognitive and moral agent, seen as distinct from the body. Perception, thought, emotions, and imagination round out the Socratic intellect, which alone serves as the subject of the “care of the soul” so central to Socrates’s moral philosophy.⁴

To this resulting “self”—the transcendent, rational soul—a second, mortal “self” is added, together with its irrational impulses. These “selves” seem to represent “Plato’s vision of man as he might be and his estimate of man as he is.”⁵ But the higher, rational self that represents man’s original nature, now “buried” in the mortal part (just as the sea-god Glaucus is buried in barnacles),⁶ remains as an “inner man” that must now struggle to maintain governance over the whole. In the seemingly metaphoric language of the soul’s three parts, Plato attempts to underscore the extent to which the soul’s true nature must now compete with the lower appetites in the contest to define the human person.

Man’s true nature, or the highest part of his soul, is defined largely by mentally subtracting from the person all that is bodily,

1. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 210.

2. *Ibid.*, 209–14.

3. In the *Timaeus* God (defined as *Nous*, or Supreme Mind) has properly ordered desires and may even be tripartite. Cf. 29e, 39c.

4. Cf. T.M. Robinson, “The Defining Features of Mind-Body Dualism in Plato,” 37–39.

5. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 214.

6. *Republic*, 611e.

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sensible, or passionate. This procedure leaves primarily the intellectual element, in addition to the faculties of perception, imagination, memory, and the capacity for moral decision and reasoned action. This element—the *logistikon*—represents the original nature of man, which remains hidden until it emerges from its entrapment in the body, when once again it may rest in the contemplation of the eternal Forms. Until then it remains *in* the body but not *of* the body: it is condemned to the task of maintaining and governing the body's movements for a time, while it pines interiorly for freedom.

The Middle Platonists and the Higher Soul

In the Middle Platonic schools most of these same, familiar themes recur: the divinity of the higher soul, its rational character, its preexistence and its immortality. Very little is new, in fact, except perhaps what comes through the influence of Stoicism, an influence that is more or less limited to a borrowing of terminology. An elitism, also, begins to predominate, in which the higher soul becomes the prerogative of the worthy alone, rather than the common possession of all mankind. But even this, in fact, is not altogether novel.

In Antiochus the mind alone constitutes the self—the mind being a divine gift, even a god itself. (At least, the souls of the “brave and the good” are divine; common souls are immortal, but not divine.) To describe the nature of this mind Antiochus turned to the Stoics. The soul of the Stoa was a unitary soul with seven faculties (the five senses, along with speech and procreation), presided over by an eighth dubbed the “governing principle,” or *hēgemonikon*.⁷ The fact that the Stoa had occasionally used *nous* as a synonym for *hēgemonikon* allowed Antiochus to adopt the *hēgemonikon* as a name for the higher soul of Plato.⁸ It may be debated to what extent Antiochus actually shared Stoic *thinking* regarding the soul, beyond a simple co-opting of terminology.⁹ But in either case, Antiochus

7. Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, *Les Stoïciens et l'âme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996).

8. Cf. *Tusculan Disputations* 1, 80.

9. For instance, for the Stoics the *hēgemonikon* was primarily concerned with the

sets the stage for a train of Middle Platonic thinkers who would do the same.

The same tack is found in Philo, for whom Stoic terminology for the soul was judged to be as fitting as Platonic or Peripatetic. He, too, identifies the Platonic *nous* with the Stoic *hēgemonikon*, in opposition to the irrational or sensible principles.¹⁰ Like Antiochus, he makes immortality the privilege of the sage, but he adds to this the soul's preexistence as well.¹¹ The biblicist in Philo will find the creation of the higher and lower souls in the dual creation accounts of Genesis, with the first creation constituting the "Essential Man," embodying the intelligible and archetypal self of Plato.¹² Even more, the mind is allegorized as Adam, with Eve playing the part of the sensible or irrational soul (*aisthēsis*).¹³

In Plutarch the rationalizing tendency of Plato predominates, and the higher soul becomes characterized as pure and untainted mind (*nous*). Fashioned from the pre-cosmic disordered Soul by the ordering *Logos*, the *nous* is afterward plunged once again into *psychē*, the result being the compound now known as man. The *nous* remains intact, however, and continues to stand above *psychē* as a distinct, transcendent *daemon*:

[The mind] is not dragged in [the body] like the rest, but is like a buoy attached to the top, floating on the surface in contact with the man's head, while he is as it were submerged in the depths... [T]he part left free from corruption is called by the multitude the mind, who take it to be within themselves... but those who conceive this matter rightly call it a daemon, as being external.¹⁴

At the same time, from the nexus of *nous* and *psychē* emerges the rational faculty, the *logos*.¹⁵ While all souls partake of rationality,

maintenance of bodily function, whereas the Middle Platonists were mainly concerned to emphasize its transcendence vis-à-vis the body. Additionally, we can point out that the Stoic *hēgemonikon*—as a faculty of the soul—was material, corruptible, and mortal.

10. *Opif.*, 117.

12. *Ibid.*, 134.

14. *On the Daemon of Socrates*, 591d.

11. *QG*, 3, 2.

13. *Leg. All.*, 2, 24.

15. *De Fac.*, 943a.

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not all possess the *nous*, which remains a privilege of the wise alone. The souls of the many, for Plutarch, lack a charioteer to govern their bodily passions.¹⁶

Alcinous provides one of the rare examples of anti-Stoic impulses within Middle Platonism, and scrupulously avoids the Stoic terminology so popular among his contemporaries. He does, however, typify many of the other themes already noted. He emphasizes the transcendence and divinity of the higher soul, for example, along with its highly rational character.¹⁷

In Numenius, too, the transcendent and divine origin of the higher soul remains the background of this thinker's frequent screeds against the lower soul of matter and flesh. No matter how enmeshed this higher soul becomes in the world of flesh, it never loses its inherent kinship with the intelligible realm from which it sprang. The rational nature of the higher soul (*nous*) is also underscored in Numenius's writings, as opposed to the sheer, blinding irrationality of the lower principles. Numenius was also a strong believer in reincarnation and metempsychosis.¹⁸

In sum, Middle Platonic writers continued to draw out and develop many of the themes present in the dialogues of Plato—the divinity and rational character of the higher soul, for instance. The higher soul's preexistence and immortality become more or less commonly accepted principles, and transmigration (or metempsychosis) becomes a subject of frequent debate. Stoic language for the soul—for example, the concept of the “governing principle,” or *hēgemonikon*—gains entry into the Middle Platonic lexicon, although it seems to have little philosophical impact. We also note a psychic elitism, in which the higher soul—or at least certain prerogatives of the higher soul, such as preexistence or immortality—become the exclusive prerogative of the worthy, generally the “wise.”

Ultimately, the search for the higher soul is the search for the self, and these developments represent attempts to grapple with the

16. *On the Daemon of Socrates*, 591d.

17. *Handbook of Platonism*, 24.

18. Fragments 41–42.

question of the true locus of the self. For all these thinkers the higher soul was the *sine qua non* of the rational creature, all else being reducible to accretions and accidental features, all of which would be stripped away in the end. The relative consensus of the Middle Platonic school, in any case, may be said to reflect the success of Plato's attempt to reconcile the rational self of the Socratic tradition with the divine self of the shamanistic tradition. Both elements come through with equal force.¹⁹

The other tension that lies under the surface, however, is the attempt to affirm the purity of the higher soul—that is, its freedom from all bodily corruption, which is a precondition for its divinity and rationality—while at the same time continuing to make sense of its necessary relationship to the body, whose maintenance has more or less fallen to the soul. It becomes clear in the Middle Platonic writers, however, that the latter aspect of the soul is making less and less sense. The tendency of the Middle Platonists is to emphasize more and more the transcendence of the soul and its kinship with the intelligible realm, minimizing to the greatest degree possible its connection with the body. We see this especially in Plutarch and Numenius, although traces of it are found in every writer. We are not quite at the threshold of Plotinus, for whom the higher soul or *nous* “does not come down” at all, but remains comfortably in the intelligible realm, free from every stain of sin and effortlessly contemplating the Good.²⁰ But we are not far, and the more the higher soul is removed from the realm of the body, the greater and more critical is the role of the “lower soul,” which will now have more or less the sole task of caring for the body.

19. See, e.g., Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 209–10.

20. “The body is not detrimental to the soul which governs it, for the soul dwells in the intelligible heights while ministering to it.” *Enneads*, 4, 3, 9. For Plotinus and the soul a good start can be made with Émile Bréhier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 53–82.

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The Higher Soul in Origen

Origen's development of the Middle Platonic concept of the *nous* will appear as one of his most profound and gratifying theological accomplishments. While Origen accepts the essential philosophical datum of the *nous* as man's supreme rational faculty, he deepens and enriches this concept by bringing it into contact with the biblical and theological tradition of the Church. This treatment will first explore Origen's understanding of the mind, its relationship to God and then specifically to the divine *Logos*. Subsequently, two additional terms that Origen uses for the mind—"heart" and "image"—will be assessed, along with the closely related term of "spirit."

Origen's higher soul is identified explicitly with the Socratic intellect, locating the essence of the person in his rationality, as opposed to the passions of the carnal body. Origen's favored term for the higher soul is the *nous* and its semantic derivatives, coupled with *logos* and its derivatives.²¹ In Rufinus's Latin these generally end up as *mens* or *ratio*, certainly the most proper terms, though occasionally he resorts to the less restrictive *anima*. Used in its technical sense, *nous* is carefully distinguished from the more general category of "soul" (*psychē*). Many creatures, such as animals, have souls that are devoid of reason, while in the case of men Origen can speak of "the soul and its reason,"²² or more concisely, of a "rational soul."²³ *Nous*, then, is something distinct from *psychē*, as something present in some but not all souls. As a synonym for the *nous* Origen also resorts to the Stoic *hēgemonikon*, or "governing principle."²⁴ The use of

21. Cf., e.g., *Against Celsus* 4, 25; 4, 85; *On First Principles* 3, 1, 13.

22. *Against Celsus* 8, 52.

23. Cf. *Against Celsus* 6, 72; 7, 66; 8, 49. Although it must be admitted that Origen occasionally uses the term *psychē* to describe the higher soul, it becomes clear that he is using the term improperly in this way. When he is using the terms in their technical sense, e.g., in *On First Principles* 3, 8, 2–3, he distinguishes very carefully and insistently between "soul" (*anima*) and "mind" (*mens*). *Psychē*, used in its technical sense, refers to the lower soul and not the higher. Significant space will be devoted to this issue in the next chapter. For now, it is sufficient to note that this chapter is devoted exclusively to the higher soul, or *mens/nous*, and not the lower soul (*psychē*).

24. The term is so frequent as hardly to require citation, but cf. *Commentary on*

Stoicizing vocabulary for the soul is a habit Origen picks up from the Middle Platonic authors, and the term carries no distinctive meaning for Origen except to affirm the anthropological primacy of reason as the “controlling principle” in man.²⁵

The *nous* of Origen, like that of Plato, has its home in the supra-sensible world whence it is derived, and which is “its proper object of vision.”²⁶ Hence the mind is a stranger in the material realm, regardless of any meaning that may be discovered for its being there. The mind’s proper vocation, then, is not that of animating the body but that of contemplation (*theōria*), both of God and of all things in God.²⁷ The mind remains “far superior” to the bodily nature to which it is attached, its supremacy untainted by its attachment.²⁸ Concordant with contemplation are the more general functions of “thought” (*ennoia*), “perception” (*sensu*), “knowledge” (*scientiam*), and other mental acts.²⁹ Though these powers are somewhat diminished by participation in material substances,³⁰ they can nonetheless be sharpened and increased by the rigorous exercise of learning.³¹ None of this, of course, is original to Origen, whose terminology thus far simply mimics that of his Platonic forbears.

The Higher Soul in Relation to God

Standing in the Platonic tradition, of course, Origen roots the rationality of mankind in the rationality of God, from whom it emerges and on whom it continually depends. Origen attributes reason, therefore, not only to all men, but “to the Supreme God Himself,” in

John 1, 62; 13, 183; and 13, 198. Cf. also *Commentary on Luke* 32, 6, where the term comes through as *principale cordis* in Jerome’s translation.

25. In *Against Celsus* Origen refers to the “ordering and governing reason,” which he also calls the “guiding principle” of human nature.

26. *Commentary on John* 1, 62.

27. Cf. *ibid.* 28, 37.

28. *On First Principles* 1, 1, 5; cf. also *Against Celsus* 8, 49.

29. *Commentary on John* 28, 37; *On First Principles* 2, 11, 7.

30. *On First Principles* 1, 1, 5.

31. *Ibid.* 1, 1, 6. Origen no doubt has in mind the liberal arts, though not without a privileged role for the study of sacred Scripture.

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whose image man is made.³² God, in fact, is not only intellectual in the sense of *possessing* intellect, but is himself an “uncompounded intellectual nature” without admixture or addition: “[He] is the Mind [*mens*] and source from which all intellectual nature or mind [*mentis*] takes its beginning.”³³ This beginning was a kind of participation, as it were, akin to being set aflame with the fire of divine love.³⁴ This participation continues, albeit not undiminished, even after the soul falls away from God.³⁵

Even in its fallen state, the mind “possesses a certain relationship with God,” a relationship that gives it a capacity for knowledge of God.³⁶ Inasmuch as it emerges from the divine nature, reason is likewise invisible and incorporeal.³⁷ Since it has its beginning in the *logos* of God, human reason can never become wholly separated from the divine nature; its irrationality is an indestructible character.³⁸ Man’s rational nature is also the basis of his moral life, both in the sense of free moral agency and in the sense that it makes him capable of reward and punishment. First, it is “in the nature of reason” to judge the phantasms as they are presented to the eye of the mind, approving some and dismissing others.³⁹ “Every rational creature, therefore, is capable of earning praise or censure: of praise, if, in conformity to that reason which he possesses, he advance[s] to better things; of censure, if he fall[s] away from the plan and course of rectitude.”⁴⁰ In sum, if we find strong reminiscences of the Socratic intellect in Origen, no less do we find Plato’s strong emphasis on the soul’s spiritual character, inasmuch as the soul perpetually links man to the God whence he emerged, and to whom he returns through rationally upright action.

32. *Against Celsus* 4, 85.

34. *Ibid.* 2, 8, 3.

35. More will be said of Origen’s doctrine of the fall in further chapters. For now it is enough to point out that if the Fall diminishes the power of the intellect, it does not change its essence. Cf. *Commentary on John* 13, 427–30.

36. *On First Principles* 1, 1, 7.

38. Cf. *ibid.* 4, 25.

40. *Ibid.* 1, 5, 2.

33. *On First Principles* 1, 1, 6.

37. *Against Celsus* 6, 72.

39. *On First Principles* 3, 1, 3.

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The Higher Soul in Relation to Christ

While Origen followed the Platonic tradition in ascribing the source of reason to God, he also follows the Christian tradition of identifying God's reason with the Incarnate *Logos*, the Son of God:

[A]lthough we may call Him a "second" God, let men know that by the term "second God" we mean nothing else than . . . a Reason capable of containing all reason whatsoever which exists in all things, which have arisen naturally, directly, and for the general advantage, and which "reason," we say, dwelt in the soul of Jesus, and was united to Him in a degree far above all other souls, seeing He alone was enabled completely to receive the highest share in the Absolute Reason [*autologou*], and the absolute wisdom, and the absolute righteousness.⁴¹

Since the Word subsists as Absolute Reason, all souls are rational only inasmuch as they share in the Word, as Origen claims in a passage strongly reminiscent of the later writing of Justin the Martyr: "[A]ll who are rational beings are partakers of the word, i.e., of reason, and by this means bear certain seeds, implanted within them, of wisdom and justice, which is Christ."⁴² This reason exists not only among the wise, however, but is for Origen "the common possession of men," as the guiding principle (*hēgemonikon*) of all rational creatures.⁴³ To round out the Trinitarian framework of his anthropology, Origen insists that the kingdom of the mind is an operation of the Spirit of God.⁴⁴

The possession of reason, however, does not make the human mind divine for Origen, as it does for many Middle Platonic thinkers: the rational creature remains a part of the created order, even if through rationality it partakes in divinity. The partaking of reason begins in every man who reaches young adulthood, but reaches its "consummation" only in one's spiritual conversion to Christ, by whose sovereignty the "irrational elements" within man are finally subdued.⁴⁵ It is Christ, in Origen's words, who "takes away from us

41. *Against Celsus* 5, 39.

42. *On First Principles* 1, 3, 6.

43. Cf. *Against Celsus* 4, 85.

44. Cf. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 4, 9–10.

45. *Commentary on John* 1, 267.

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all that is irrational, and makes us truly reasonable.”⁴⁶ Thus is man’s “taste” for reason piqued, and man learns to rejoice and delight in the “*Logos* most pleasant of all to drink, which takes us off human things, makes us feel ourselves inspired, and intoxicates us with an intoxication which is not irrational but divine.”⁴⁷ Origen is not, however, exalting rationality above holiness, since for him the two are indistinguishable: as he claims in his *Commentary on John*, “the saint alone is reasonable.”⁴⁸ The reason for this identification of sanctity and rationality, of course, is that the goal of the spiritual life is none other than Reason Incarnate.

The Higher Soul as “Heart”

One of the marks of Origen’s genius and originality, however, is to associate the Platonic *nous* (as well as the Stoic *hēgemonikon*, with which it had already come to be identified) with the biblical concept of the *kardia*, or “heart.”⁴⁹ This is an essential anthropological term for Origen, utilized with remarkable consistency across his writings, and remaining close to the term’s usage in the Old and New Testaments.

Origen equates the heart explicitly with the Platonic *nous* or *dianoētikon* and the Stoic *hēgemonikon*, the intellectual faculty that governs the body and carries out rational functioning: “For you will certainly find in all the Scriptures, both old and new, the term ‘heart’ repeatedly used instead of ‘mind,’ i.e., intellectual power.”⁵⁰ The mind, of course, is the organ of contemplation, and it reaches its *telos* in the contemplation of God Himself. Yet Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:8—“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”—give Origen pause. The sight of God is not the natural birthright of the

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid. 1, 206.

48. Ibid. 2, 114.

49. Rufinus translates the Greek *kardia* by the Latin *cor*. An indispensable source for this topic is the article by Henri Crouzel, “Le cœur selon Origène,” *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 85 (1984): 5–16, 99–110.

50. *On First Principles* 1, 1, 9. Cf., also *Commentary on John* 1, 206; 2, 22; and 2, 29, along with *Against Celsus* 6, 69.

human heart, nor can the untrained and unclean heart look upon its Maker:

God, moreover, is in our judgment invisible, because He is not a body, while He can be seen by those who see with the heart that is, the understanding; not indeed with any kind of heart, but with one which is pure. For it is inconsistent with the fitness of things that a polluted heart should look upon God; for that must be itself pure which would worthily behold that which is pure.⁵¹

The pure heart by contemplating God becomes ever purer and more like (*homoïōsis*) God, growing detached from sin and sensible things, ultimately attaining (*prosballei*) to God directly and without mediation.⁵²

The heart is, then, a genuinely *spiritual* organ, and Origen's identification of the *nous* with the *kardia* certainly balances what could otherwise appear as a wholesale rationalization of the spiritual life. Naturally, Origen staves off a purely physical reading of the *kardia* (he rarely uses *kardia* to refer to the biological organ), though he does note its appropriateness as an analogy, inasmuch as it is in the "center" of man.⁵³ Origen makes use of John 1:26 ("In your midst stands one you do not know") to relate the "heart" to Jesus, concretizing the identification of Jesus with Reason: "Consider if, since the heart is in the middle of the whole body, and the ruling principle (*hēgemonikon*) in the heart, the saying, 'In the midst of you stands one you do not know,' can be understood of the reason which is in every man."⁵⁴ The heart, enlightened by its relationship with the Word, is thereby enabled to understand divine teaching, to grasp Christ's parables, and to overcome heresies, all through an intuitive spiritual perception made possible by an immediate relationship with God Himself.⁵⁵

This is possible because the heart is the seat of the five spiritual senses. Basing himself on Proverbs 2:5, which in Origen's translation read, "You will find a divine sense," Origen posited five "divine

51. *Against Celsus* 6, 69. See also *On First Principles* 1, 1, 9: "[W]hat else is seeing God in heart, but, according to our exposition as above, understanding and knowing Him with the mind"?

52. *Fragment on John* 13.

54. *Commentary on John* 2, 29.

53. Cf. *Homilies on Jeremiah* 2, 2.

55. Cf. Crouzel, "Le cœur," 8–9.

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senses” found within the heart, each a counterpart to a bodily sense. These senses allow for a direct and intuitive knowledge of divine mysteries, inasmuch as each organ approximates the nature of that which it perceives:

For the names of the organs of sense are frequently applied to the soul [*animam*], so that it may be said to see with the eyes of the heart, i.e., to perform an intellectual act by means of the power of intelligence. So also it is said to hear with the ears when it perceives the deeper meaning of a statement. So also we say that it makes use of teeth, when it chews and eats the bread of life which cometh down from heaven. In like manner, also, it is said to employ the services of other members, which are transferred from their bodily appellations, and applied to the powers of the soul, according to the words of Solomon, “You will find a divine sense.” For he knew that there were within us two kinds of senses: the one mortal, corruptible, human; the other immortal and intellectual, which he now termed divine. By this divine sense, therefore, not of the eyes, but of a pure heart, which is the mind, God may be seen by those who are worthy.⁵⁶

When, through the spiritual senses, the heart comes to contemplate the divine Word, it finds in Him a true joy, a “sober drunkenness” in Christ, the True Wine.⁵⁷

On the contrary, should the heart not remain pure but corrupt itself through sinful habits, the senses will become deadened and useless: the eyes blinded to God, the ears deaf to his Word, the mouth unable to taste his goodness. In reference to Paul’s reading of Exodus 34 in 2 Corinthians 3:12–16, Origen claims that sin imposes a “veil” over the eyes of the heart.⁵⁸ This is the case with the Jews and also the *spiritual* Jews, the “lovers of the letter” who are blind to the reality behind the image. As always, Origen’s mysticism is never disconnected from the moral and ascetical life. The heart is the source of human action and moral agency, of freedom and self-determination. Ever the opponent of Valentinian determinism, Origen carefully parses the “hardening” of Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus:

56. *On First Principles* 1, 1, 9. Cf. also *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 47.

57. *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles* 1. Cf. Crouzel, “Le coeur,” 8–9.

58. Cf. *Commentary on Matthew* 11, 14.

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But since we acknowledge the God who spoke by Moses to be not only just, but also good, let us carefully inquire how it is in keeping with the character of a just and good Deity to have hardened the heart of Pharaoh.... Now it is not incorrect to say that the sun, by one and the same power of its heat, melts wax indeed, but dries up and hardens mud: not that its power operates one way upon mud, and in another way upon wax; but that the qualities of mud and wax are different, although according to nature they are one thing, both being from the earth. In this way, then, one and the same working upon the part of God, which was administered by Moses in signs and wonders, made manifest the hardness of Pharaoh, which he had conceived in the intensity of his wickedness.... Let us apply these very expressions to Pharaoh, and see if they also are not spoken of him with propriety, since, according to his hardness and impenitent heart, he treasured and stored up for himself wrath on the day of wrath.⁵⁹

In other words, the heart in its freedom faces the choice of hardening itself against God's call, or opening to it in liberality. The heart of man is a spiritual battlefield, with angels and demons warring for control, yet it falls to the heart to give the victory, whether through vigilance or negligence. Like the Queen of Sheba, we must "open our hearts" to the King, becoming "hearts of flesh" rather than "hearts of stone."⁶⁰ In this way Origen uses the biblical image of the "heart" to enrich the Platonic concept of the higher soul, bringing out its function as the source and center of the moral and spiritual life.

The Higher Soul as "Image"

In a parallel concept, that of man as the "image and likeness" of God, a rapprochement between Scripture and Middle Platonic philosophy was a good deal easier.⁶¹ Plato himself had affirmed a kinship between God and the human soul, and Origen knew of an

59. *On First Principles* 3, 1, 10–11.

60. *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles* 3. Cf. Crouzel, "Le cœur," 14–16. Crouzel is right to defend Origen against the anachronistic charge of Pelagianism here, however much one might wish Origen to give a greater emphasis to man's need for divine grace. This latter aspect of the moral life is generally assumed by Origen without being explicitly discussed.

61. The chief monograph remains that of Henri Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*.

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established tradition among Middle Platonic writers of describing man's purpose in terms of attaining a "likeness to God." But for Origen, as for Justin, this truth of the philosophers is merely a derivative one, the Truth in its fullness being found in the holy Scriptures:

The highest good, then, after the attainment of which the whole of rational nature is seeking, which is also called the end of all blessings, is defined by many philosophers as follows: The highest good, they say, is to become as like to God as possible. But this definition I regard not so much as a discovery of theirs, as a view derived from holy Scripture. For this is pointed out by Moses, before all other philosophers, when he describes the first creation of man in these words: "And God said, Let Us make man in Our own image, and after Our likeness"; and then he adds the words: "So God created man in His own image: in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them, and He blessed them."⁶²

The source of Origen's doctrine, then, is Genesis, although even here he would rely upon the exegetical work done by his predecessor Philo, who had already interpreted the dual creation accounts as the creation of man's soul and body, respectively.⁶³ Philo had also noticed that only the "image" is said to be "made" (*poiein*) by God, while the body is said to be "fashioned" (*plattein*). Origen follows Philo here explicitly.⁶⁴

Like Philo, Origen insists that only the higher soul ("rational soul," *logikon*,⁶⁵ or *psychē logikē*), our "true substance," is made in God's image, and that the body plays no part in this. The body, at least in its present state, is a subsequent, postlapsarian product, and can even be said to be the work of the devil:⁶⁶ "Now, our true substance too is in our being according to the image of the Creator, but

62. *On First Principles* 3, 6, 1.

63. Cf. "The Middle Platonists and the Higher Soul" above.

64. Cf. also Crouzel, *Théologie*, 54–55.

65. *Against Celsus* 8, 49.

66. Origen means, of course, only that the devil caused the Fall, which resulted in the body's fashioning, not that the devil is in any way the *creator* or even proximate cause of the body. *Commentary on John* 1, 17. We should also note, of course, that by "body" here is intended the corporeal, earthly body; Origen consistently holds that the soul can never be without *some* kind of body.

the substance resulting from guilt is in the thing molded, which was received from the dust of the earth."⁶⁷ To imagine the alternative, that the body is in the image of God (or even, as Irenaeus claims, that both soul *and* body share the image⁶⁸) is to fall into unutterable heresy, for this would imply that God has a body:

But if that which is "after the image of God" be in both together, then God must necessarily be a compound being, and consist, as it were, of soul and body, in order that the element which is "after God's image," the better part, may be in the soul; while the inferior part, and that which "is according to the body," may be in the body,—an assertion, again, which is made by none of us.⁶⁹

But even beyond this, Origen assumes that the radical inferiority of the body *vis-à-vis* the soul should make it self-evident that only the latter could possibly possess the divine image.⁷⁰ By no means, however, does this detract from the dignity of the body, which is the sanctuary and Temple of God's image, and gains immense dignity by association with it: "The body, moreover, of him who possesses such a soul is a temple of God[, for] in the soul God dwells."⁷¹

But immediately a qualification must be made, for in Origen's proper way of speaking, the human soul is *not* made "in the image," but "after the image." The true Image of God is Christ the *Logos*, since only he "images" God fully, inasmuch as he possesses all of God's divinity and virtues in a substantial fashion. Man, according to Origen, is only "after the image," or in the "image of the image," since he possesses these traits derivatively and, as it were, accidentally, through the intermediation of the *Logos*.⁷² As a result, contrarily to the *Logos*, man during his earthly life always stands at risk of losing the image, and must strive to participate in it more deeply

67. *Ibid.* 20, 182–83.

68. *Against Heresies* 5, 6, 1.

69. *Against Celsus* 6, 64. Cf. also 7, 66, and 8, 49. Apparently Origen knew of some Christians who believed this, i.e., that the "image of God" was found in the body. Cf. *Commentary on Romans* 1, 19.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*

72. Cf. *Ibid.* 7, 66, and Crouzel, *Théologie*.

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and more enduringly. Thus Origen's theology of the image becomes a potent description of the spiritual life, since it is through asceticism and moral struggle that the higher soul "images" God more effectively: "[T]he mind [*mens*] bears a certain relationship to God, of whom the mind itself is an intellectual image, and that by means of this it may come to some knowledge of the nature of divinity, especially if it be purified and separated from bodily matter."⁷³

Lastly, it remains to point out the identification, in Origen's mind, between the higher soul and the "inner man," a term that Origen uses as a synonym for "image of God."⁷⁴ Drawing upon St. Paul (Rom 7:22, 2 Cor 4:16, Eph 3:16), Origen contrasts the "inner man" with the "outer man," the former of which is "invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible and immortal."⁷⁵ This "inner man" possesses a spiritual dynamism, since, when it becomes perfected in virtue, it is renewed in the image of the Creator.⁷⁶ The image of God so infuses the "inner man," that when it gazes upon a mirror it sees the face of God himself:

But we know that if one turns to the Lord (for "the Lord is that spirit"), the veil being taken away, "he beholds, as in a mirror with unveiled face, the glory of the Lord" in those thoughts which are concealed in their literal expression, and to his own glory becomes a participator of the divine glory; the term "face" being used figuratively for the "understanding" [*nou*], as one would call it without a figure, in which is the face of the "inner man," filled with light and glory, flowing from the true comprehension of the contents of the law.⁷⁷

73. *On First Principles* 1, 1, 7.

74. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 4, 9–10; *Dialogue with Heraclides* 23.

75. *Homilies on Genesis* 1, 13.

76. "It remains, therefore, that that which is 'after the image of God' must be understood to be in our 'inner man,' which is also renewed, and whose nature it is to be 'after the image of Him who created it' when a man becomes 'perfect,' as 'our Father in heaven is perfect,' and hears the command, 'Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy,' and learning the precept, 'Be ye followers of God,' receives into his virtuous soul the traits of God's image." *Against Celsus* 6, 64.

77. *Ibid.* 5, 60.

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EXCURSUS: THE HIGHER SOUL AND THE SPIRIT

In order to ward off serious confusion, a brief statement must be made regarding the relationship of the higher soul to the "spirit" in Origen's theology—*pneuma* in Origen's Greek and *spiritus* in Rufinus's Latin. The term "spirit" here refers to a technical anthropological term, that is, it is *human* and does not refer to the divine Spirit, although it is closely related to him. Many commentators, not recognizing that Origen uses the term in a completely original manner, confuse the *pneuma* with the higher soul (*nous*), assuming that the two were synonyms in Origen's mind.⁷⁸ Nothing, in fact, could be further from the truth.⁷⁹

In Origen's thought the *pneuma* is the divine element present in man, though not a proper part of his personality. It is the source of grace and mark of human transcendence. It is a created element, divine by participation, yet it acts as a divine agent—man's teacher, guide, and conscience. It is distinct from the higher soul—the seat of human freedom and moral agency—for which it acts as spiritual guide. When the *nous* submits to the *pneuma* it becomes spiritual; when it rebels against it, it becomes fleshly. The relationship between *pneuma* and *nous* reflects the delicate dialectic between grace and its graced recipient.⁸⁰

Though this distinction is made carefully and consistently throughout Origen's writings, an important passage from the *Dialogue with Heraclides* will suffice at present, where Origen notices St. Paul's distinction between "mind" and "spirit":

We have learned from the holy Scriptures that the human being is a composite. For the Apostle says: May God sanctify your spirit and your soul and your body, and also: May the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and

78. Cf., e.g., Gérard Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma du stoïcisme à s. Augustin* (Louvain: Éditions de L'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1945).

79. This treatment can only begin to summarize the massive work done by Jacques Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'Homme*.

80. See Crouzel, "L'anthropologie d'Origène: de l'arché au telos," 40.

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may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:23). This spirit is not the Holy Spirit, but a part of the human composite, as the same Apostle says: The Spirit bears witness with our spirit (Rom. 8:16).⁸¹

Once again, the mind (*nous*, or *mens*) is a constituent part of the human personality, whereas the spirit (*pneuma*) is not—it is a transcendent gift, almost the equivalent of the *daemon* of classical Greek philosophy, a gift that, in the case of the damned, will be withdrawn. Thus, for the purposes of the present thesis, a prolonged discussion of the *pneuma* will not directly enter into the treatment of the *psychē* in Origen, inasmuch as it is an altogether distinct and largely transcendent element, only indirectly (through the *nous*) relevant to the *psychē*.

Comparison and Conclusion

Seen from the perspective of the Middle Platonic tradition, Origen's debt to that tradition appears especially significant in respect to his doctrine of the higher soul. The essential unification of the divine and the rational self, achieved by Plato and synthesized by Middle Platonists, finds deep echoes in the writings of the Alexandrian. For Origen, as for Plato and his successors, man's true and integral self is found not in the body or in the body's desires, but solely in the rational mind, or *logikon*. Like the Middle Platonic writers, Origen assumes as a given the preexistence and immortality of this rational mind, and like them he is comfortable adopting the Stoic term *hēgemonikon*.

Origen's development of this tradition is not found in any radical departures or even mild disagreements, but rather the enriching of this tradition by the biblical and theological sources of the Church, in what Dominique Bertrand has called an "interpenetration of spirituality and theology," in which respect Origen is exemplary but not unique among the Fathers.⁸² Hence for Origen theology is

81. 6. Cf. also *On First Principles* 2, 8, 2 and *Commentary on Matthew* 13, 2.

82. See Dominique Bertrand, "L'implication du Nous dans la prière chez Origène et

inextricably linked to prayer, which establishes a link between the knowing subject and the object known, in this case God. This development, strengthened by Origen's identification of the Platonic *nous* with the biblical *kardia* and the "image of God," is the ground for the "spiritual senses" that allow man to encounter the divine Word in a mystical union. What is truly new here for Origen is the paradoxical insistence upon the *vulnerability* of the *nous*. The Middle Platonic mind—solitary and unmoving, transcendent and untouched by sin—could not be the subject of a spiritual life, since the latter (at least in the Christian sense of that term) demands vulnerability and at least the capacity for undulation. Origen's *nous* is always threatened by impurity, not because of the body, but because it is always capable, by virtue of what it is, of destroying itself. It is, in the words of Bertrand, "invested with a contemplative dynamic which is not adequate to its own nature."⁸³ The *nous* thus travels the Trinitarian path to salvation, indwelt by the truth of the *Logos* and the sanctification of the Spirit. In this dimension, it is clear, Origen has achieved a true "Christianization" of Middle Platonism.

A special note, however, must be added regarding Origen's aforementioned doctrine of the human *pneuma*, his most innovative "Christian" contribution to the Middle Platonic doctrine. The latter had suffered, as mentioned above, from a failure to resolve the anthropological tension between the immanence and transcendence of human rationality. The desire to "divinize" the *nous* and extricate it from the material realm began the shift toward the Plotinian position, which denied its connection with materiality altogether. This made it impossible to explain in what way such a soul, for example, could animate and govern the body's movements. Origen, for his part, negotiates the immanence-transcendence tension by the insertion of the *pneuma* between the *nous* and God. All transcendent attributions—divinity, impassibility, for example—are attributed to

Évagre le Pontique," in *Origeniana Septima*, ed. W. A. Bienert (Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1999), 360.

83. *Ibid.*, 361.

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the *pneuma*, whereas all immanent attributions—freedom, corruptibility, relation to the body, for example—are attributed to the *nous*. This allows Origen to safeguard the anthropological integrity of the human person, whose genuine human freedom is thereby given full scope for the moral life. The Middle Platonic elitism is also blunted—while every human person possesses a *pneuma*, in the case of the wicked it has become flaccid and lifeless, and in the case of the damned it is withdrawn altogether.

CHAPTER 5

Lower Soul



With Origen's rich and complex understanding of the "higher soul" ("mind" or "heart") established, it remains to examine how he understands the "lower soul" that stands below it. To appreciate Origen's contributions to this discussion, it is necessary to appreciate the problems bequeathed to him by his philosophical predecessors, especially the convoluted and half-successful attempts to integrate the "higher soul" (which carries out cognitive functions) and the "lower soul" (which carries out vital functions). Origen, however, approaches the question not as an exclusively philosophical but also as a theological problem, in light of man's creation in God's image and his reincorporation into the divine *Logos*. In this way he is able to relate the two by positing that they are one and the same principle at different levels of moral functioning. The genius of Origen here is to incorporate the question of the soul into the larger context of the moral and spiritual life, and to relate the task of the soul to the exemplary life lived by the divine soul of Jesus himself.

*Pre-Socratic Psychē as Vital Principle
of the Body*

The first attempts at what might be called philosophical anthropology were carried out in the field of Greek medicine, correlative to the task of understanding the nature of man as an animate being,

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and more precisely, of understanding what it is that *animates* man, that is, makes him a living being.

The very word *psychē*, in fact, entered the Greek vocabulary as a means of describing the “life-force” of man.¹ From the very beginning, then, psychology was necessarily psychosomatic in nature, an attempt to understand the phenomenon of human life or vitality under universal categories of nature: fire for Anaximenes, air for Heraclitus.² Hippocrates, for example, described the soul as “breath” (*pneuma*) generated from the moisture of heated seed, which exercises various vivifying functions in the body as it interacts with this or that bodily component. Parallels exist in Homer and other Greek poets, where *psychē* is the equivalent of “breath,” which departs the body at death—not to enjoy a personal immortality, but to descend to Hades as a mere shadow of the former self, eviscerated by the loss of its body.³ Never is the *psychē* conceived in pre-Socratic thought as the “self” as such, as a being in its own right apart from the body, but rather as a contiguous component of bodily life (the body, if anything, merits the term “self” at this stage). A tension therefore emerges from the beginning of Greek speculation: on the one hand, *psychē* is at least conceptually distinct from the body as that which animates it, yet is also functionally inseparable from the body, especially inasmuch as it is always conceived in materialistic terms, as an extension of the body’s nature.⁴

1. Cf. David B. Claus, *Toward the Soul: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Psychē before Plato* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 8: “The development of *psychē* as a psychological agent in popular usage after Homer does not seem to be owed to the introduction into Greece of new conceptions of the afterlife or to the development of some new sense of psychological self-conception after Homer. Rather, from the beginning, *psychē* is a word whose psychological qualities depend on its ability to be felt as a life-force word.... In late tragedy *psychē* succeeds as a psychological agent at the expense of other ‘soul’ words by its capacity to preserve fully the psychosomatic connotations of the archaic ‘life-force.’”

2. Cf. George S. Brett, *Psychology Ancient and Patristic*, vol. 1: *A History of Psychology* (London: G. Allen, 1912), 34–35.

3. Beate Gundert, “Sōma and Psychē in Hippocratic Medicine,” in *Psychē and Sōma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, ed. John P. Wright and Paul Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 13.

4. See Heinrich Von Staden, “Body, Soul, and Nerves: Epicurus, Herophilus,

Naturally, inasmuch as the body's animation is related to sensation and perception, such examinations lead inevitably toward a consideration of what is unique about *human* life, that is, the human intellect. Hippocrates and other Greek medical writers, of course, always give intellectual functions a somatic explanation: intelligence, judgment and comprehension are all generated by the flow of air to the brain, or by a balanced mixture of fire and water therein.⁵ In this way, the phenomenon of psychosomatic illness is explained, whereby damage to the body results in damage to the intellect. Thus, the term *psychē* also comes to serve as the equivalent of "mind" (*nous, dianōia, gnōmē*) in medical treatises of the period. Even when the *psychē* is distinguished from the body as a *cognitive* agent, however, it is nonetheless always explained in terms of bodily structures and processes, accounted for by the same explanatory model—human nature or *physis*. Even when used to describe higher intellectual functions, *psychē* remains always essentially a *bodily* agent, and is never granted an independent or "trans-corporeal" existence *vis-à-vis* the body.⁶

Relevant here are the views of the Stoics, who (like the Epicureans) argued that the soul is essentially corporeal while at the same time distinct from the body, inasmuch as it carries out specifically "psychic" functions. The soul is conceived here as rarified or refined matter—fire or air—as opposed to the body, which is crude and inert matter. Some Stoa posited a rational "faculty" or "part" within the soul, the *hēgemonikon*, localized in the heart, which remained nonetheless contiguous with the rest of the soul diffused through-

Erisistratus, the Stoics, and Galen," in *Psychē and Sōma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, ed. John P. Wright and Paul Porter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 79: "The belief cluster shared by Hellenistic philosophers and physicians includes, for example, that all *psychē* is *sōma* but not all *sōma* is *psychē*; that only what is spatially extended, three-dimensional, and capable of acting or being acted upon exists; that the soul meets these criteria of existence; that this corporeal *psychē*, like the rest of the body, is mortal and transient; that the *psychē* is generated with the body; that it neither exists before the body nor exists eternally after its separation from the body—that is, the soul does not exist independently of the body in which it exists."

5. Gundert, "Sōma and Psychē in Hippocratic Medicine," 20–25.

6. *Ibid.*, 31–35.

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out the body.⁷ An obvious philosophical problem emerges from this view: if the soul is in some fashion reducible to the body, or at least to the realm of physical processes, then why should the existence of a soul be posited at all? And in fact, in the third century BC numerous philosophers and physicians can be found who deny its existence altogether, attributing psychic functions simply to the body “disposed in a certain way.”⁸ Another problem also emerges, since a thoroughgoing physicalist account of the soul hardly leaves sufficient room for a satisfyingly robust explanation of rational activity. Put another way, a psychology that collapses nutritive and cognitive functions and attributes them to one and the same entity, devoid of nuance or distinction, cannot provide a satisfying account of human functioning in either realm.⁹

Plato and the Distinction between Cognitive and Vital Functions in the Soul

Plato attempts to resolve exactly this dilemma, recognizing the difficulties in the affirmation that one and the same organ is responsible for both cognition and vital functions, even if Plato’s solution may prove no more satisfying in the end. Plato initiates the first attempt to distinguish sharply between these two principles (i.e., the cognitive and vital), attributing them to two distinct “souls,” while at the same time he takes great pains to avoid a complete sundering of the human person in the process, by insisting that both principles are (or may be) harmoniously ordered to each another.

The distinction between the two principles is already discernible in the mythology of the *Timaeus*, where the rational soul (the “divine and guiding principle”) is fashioned by God and placed within the

7. See Gourinat, *Les Stoïciens et l’âme*, 22–24.

8. The quotation is from Andreas, a Ptolemaic court physician. See Von Staden, “Body, Soul, and Nerves,” 105. Cf. also the approach of the Epicureans, which essentially reduced psychology to a branch of physics. See Brett’s *History of Psychology*, 183–84.

9. For further study on this topic, see James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine* (London: Routledge, 1993), and William Henry Samuel Jones, *Philosophy and Medicine in Ancient Greece* (Manchester, N.H.: Ayer Publishing, 1979).

brain, and the nutritive soul ("mortal, subject to terrible affections") is implanted in the chest by the young gods.¹⁰ The nutritive soul is not only a "plant soul," the passive principle of organic growth, but also the locus of irrational and chaotic movement. In respect to the latter, Plato's real development upon the medical writers of earlier centuries is his resoundingly negative *ethical* judgment upon the vital soul. The irrational soul represents man's ever-present potentiality of choosing to be *defined* by irrational impulses, of embracing a "passionate" lifestyle.¹¹ It is more than a mere animator of the body: it is a monstrous amalgam of irrational impulses, a "shadow self" that could at any moment overwhelm the proper hegemony of reason. It is true, as has been said already, that the bodily impulses of the lower soul are not necessarily malevolent and can in fact be constructive, so long as they are exercised under the scrupulous watchfulness of the higher, rational soul.¹² But Plato's linking of bodily functions (which encompass even innocent activities such as bodily growth) with ethically dubious passionate impulses is decisive for the suspicion of the body that will plague later Platonic thinkers.

Plato will contrast this negative view of bodily impulses with a new element of philosophical speculation, probably derived from Orphism, that is, that the higher, divine element of the soul may in fact survive the death of the body.¹³ This latter element, identified by Plato with reason, is also increasingly understood as the "self" (or at least as the "best self"), and also as possessing, at least potentially, a relative independence vis-à-vis the body.¹⁴ A dramatic fissure thus emerges in Plato's psychology between cognitive and nutritive principles, leading E. R. Dodds to conclude that in Plato "the human personality has virtually broken in two."¹⁵ Yet for all this, the fission is somewhat mitigated, or at least restrained, in Plato's thought. Plato's

10. *Timaeus* 69c.

11. See Rist, "Platonic Soul, Aristotelian Form, Christian Person," 347-62.

12. See Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy*.

13. Brett's *History of Psychology*, 79-81.

14. In the *Timaeus* (90a) he refers to it as a *daemon*.

15. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 214.

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first attempt at avoiding such a fissure may be the soul tripartition of the *Republic*, wherein bodily passions are attributed not to the “exterior” influence of the body, but rather to an “interior” part of the soul itself, along with the *Republic’s* goal of a proper “integration” of these impulses. In this view, bodily desires need not be shunned entirely, but can be “harmonized,” at least to some extent, with the ends of reason.

The other restraining element is Plato’s physicalist view of the soul, inherited from his medical precursors, which he never entirely overcomes. Even in the *Timaeus*, as we have seen, both “souls” (i.e., the cognitive and the nutritive) are more or less reduced to biological organs, the desires of both being generated by the fluids exchanged between liver and spleen.¹⁶ It is difficult for even Plato to imagine an altogether *immaterial* soul: even Plato’s rational soul, since it is defined by circular movement, must in some way be conceived in terms of spatial extension.¹⁷ The idea of a soul-body interdependency, or “sympathy,” lies in the background of all of Plato’s psychological theorizing, which also has the effect of providing a means of preventing the complete extrication of the rational element from the human compound.

In the end, amidst these ambiguities, we may make a few observations. Plato has advanced beyond his predecessors in the medical field by nuancing the previously universal assumption that one and the same human element must be responsible for nutritive and cognitive functions, an assumption that has become increasingly difficult to sustain. He does this by separating reason (*logistikon*) from the body’s desires (*epithumetikon*), positing each as a distinct element of the human person. Yet he retains the anthropological “integrity” of the human person by asserting that these are distinct elements of *the same human soul*, rather than competing entities, and by insisting that the former (at least in this life) retains an immediate relationship with the body. In fact, one of the most compelling achievements

16. See Brett’s *History of Psychology*, 69.

17. Johansen, “Plato’s Natural Philosophy,” 139–41.

of Plato is to propose a vision of the soul in which all psychic activity, from noetic contemplation to the external activities by which the soul governs the body, are continuous and ordered to each other, rather than in a sharp disjunction.¹⁸ In sum, then, Plato's thought introduces a distinction between cognitive and nutritive-vital principles while arranging for their synthetic and harmonious ordering in relation to each other.

*The Middle Platonists and the Separation of
Vital and Cognitive Principles*

The continuity between these functions would be explored, tested, and ultimately severed in later Platonic thinkers, however, as the incongruity between them became more and more apparent. The Middle Platonists, to make a general observation, found the intelligent and sensitive functions to be so dissimilar as to require entirely different principles of operation. While bringing to bear certain strands of Plato's thinking on this question, these thinkers emerged with conclusions that strained the anthropological integrity that Plato had sought to protect.

A beginning here must be made with Plato's approximation of God with the *Nous* or Mind, along with his conception of a Demiurge, itself approximated with the World Soul. The World Soul, for Plato, was the mediator between the intelligible and physical realms, influencing and influenced by both. The anthropological correlations with these pseudo-mythological cosmic principles were not unknown even to Plato, who had already speculated that different levels of human cognition might be fashioned by the interplay between them.¹⁹ Xenocrates, in the fourth century BC, solidified Plato's suggestions that a different level of cognition correlated to each level

18. See Hilary Armstrong, "Aristotle in Plotinus: The Continuity and Discontinuity of *Psychê* and *Nous*," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, suppl. volume (1991), ed. Henry Blumenthal and Howard Robinson (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1991), 117. Armstrong contrasts Plato's approach with that of Aristotle, positing Plotinus as a medium between the two.

19. For Plato there are four levels of cognition—intuitive knowledge (*nous*), discursive

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of the universe, although Xenocrates has reduced Plato's four forms to three (intelligible, sensible, and "lunar").²⁰ Later Middle Platonic authors adopted the same principle, correlating cosmic, anthropological, and epistemic categories, while the number of forms has been more or less reduced to two: the Divine Mind correlates to the human mind, which in turn correlates to contemplative knowledge (*nous*); the World Soul correlates to the human soul, which in turn correlates to sensible knowledge (*aisthēsis*).²¹ The underlying principle, of course, is that a particular being's level of functioning corresponds directly to the nature of its relationship with God, that is, to its place in the cosmic hierarchy.

The focus of these types of exercise inevitably narrows in upon the crucial distinction, between higher intellectual activity (defined as reason, contemplation, or wisdom) and what might be called "sensitive" functions. The latter are defined variously, but are consistently described by means of three characteristics. First, they are always related to the animation, growth, and sustenance of the body, along with the satisfaction of bodily needs, thereby corresponding to the desires of the body—for food, sex, and other objects. Secondly, inasmuch as they transcend the body at all, they do so only minimally, since the only psychic functions engaged by such activities are purely *passive* in nature, such as sensation and perception. They involve no *self-directed activity* by the intellect, but only the passive reception of, or impression by, external stimuli. (To the extent to which the satisfaction of bodily needs requires such active intellectual agency, such

sive knowledge (*epistēmē*), opinion (*doxa*), and sense-perception (*aisthēsis*)—corresponding to the four elements and formed by the projection of the World Soul into the material realm. See Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*.

20. Xenocrates eliminates discursive knowledge (*epistēmē*), while elevating *doxa* to a higher level of epistemic certitude.

21. Numenius's take on this is interesting only because one of his cosmic principles is Matter, which correlates to the irrational soul of man: "Two world-souls [exist]:—the one being very beneficent, and the other malevolent, namely, matter... This (matter) is also the cause and director of the passible part of the soul, which contains something corporeal, mortal and similar to the body, just as the rational part of the soul derives from reasoning and God. For the world is created out of (a commingling of) God and matter." *The Neoplatonic Writings of Numenius* 1, 1, 16.

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as the calculation necessary to hunt and trap an animal, higher reasoning is involved and we no longer have a purely sensitive action.) Thirdly, as follows, such activities are usually conceived as irrational, or at best, nonrational. It should be obvious, as it was to the Middle Platonists, that activities of this variety are shared by humans and animals alike, whereas higher intellectual functions are restricted to humans (and perhaps other rational creatures, such as *daemones* or heavenly bodies).

The ongoing struggle, however, remained to configure how the two sets of faculties were to interrelate. Antiochus of Ascalon rejected a strict dichotomy between the two and sought to establish a relationship of instrumentality, but this was possible only because the mind (*nous*) for him was material.²² The adoption of a Stoic psychology, where the mind was merely the highest of eight faculties of the soul (including the five senses), enabled Antiochus to retain a firm connection between the two.²³ But the task was more difficult for others, such as Posidonius, who wanted to preserve Plato's idea of the mind's personal immortality, impossible if the mind were material in the strictest sense.²⁴ Thinkers such as Alcinous would locate sensitive functions in Plato's "lower part" of the soul, and claim that irrational animals possessed this part alone in the absence of the "higher part" (*nous*): "It is plausible that irrational souls, driven as they are by mere representations, and not making use of reason or judgment, nor of theorems and the assembling of these into systems, nor yet of general concepts, nor having any conception at all of intelligible reality, should not be of the same essence as rational souls, and should be mortal and perishable."²⁵ But here an important proposal has been made, that is, that the element responsible for lower, sensitive functions could be abstracted from the whole, isolated, and attributed by itself to particular creatures. From here it is not a great step to posit that this lower element, even within the human crea-

22. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 52–53.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 110–11.

25. *Handbook of Platonism* 25.5.

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ture, constitutes a distinct entity in its own right, functionally and not only conceptually distinguishable from the higher element.

This latter step is taken first by Philo, if for no other reason than it enables him to reconcile Hebrew and Greek anthropology. The Hebrew Bible, at least in Philo's reading, described the creation of animals from the least sensitive (the fish) to the most (man), sensitivity being the characteristic mark of animate creatures. The principle of sensitivity, whose essence is the lifeblood, is referred to as the "sensible" soul or "life principle" (*zōtikē*) by Philo: it is a universal natural principle, transmitted through biological generation and therefore mortal and perishable.²⁶ The only psychic function of this "soul" is sensation (*aisthēsis*), the passive reception of external stimuli. Rational creatures alone have, in addition to this "soul," the superior faculty of "mind," which allows them to judge between these perceptions, owing to their creation in the divine image. Philo tends to avoid, however, the language of "two souls," and prefers to call this lower element a "part" of the soul, even when it has functionally become a distinct principle in his thought.

The most decisive movement, however, is made in the second century by Plutarch, who once for all severs the vital principle from the mind. The distinction between them, as we have seen, had become a commonplace in philosophical speculation, but their radical separation is something altogether new:²⁷

26. See *Quaest. In Genesim* 2, 59 and *Quod deter. Pot. Insid. Soleat* 82–83. Cf. Brett's *History of Psychology*, 164. Philo uses the Hebrew *ruach* for "mind," and *nefesh* for "soul." It is true that Philo also uses the language of Platonic tripartition and Stoic materialism to describe the soul, but these are not well developed in his thought.

27. Although interesting parallels could be drawn with Aristotle, whose separation of the "active intellect" from the "passive intellect" is almost identical in motivation. See Armstrong, "Aristotle in Plotinus," 117, along with Philip J. Van der Eijk, "Aristotle's Psycho-Physiological Account of the Soul-Body Relationship," in *Psychē and Sōma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, ed. John P. Wright and Paul Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 57–77. Another comparison could be made with Numenius, for whom "we have two souls, a rational one, and an irrational one." *The Neoplatonic Writings of Numenius* 2, 4, 53.

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Most people rightly hold a man to be composite, but wrongly hold him to be composed of only two parts [i.e., soul and body]. The reason is that they suppose mind [*nous*] to be somehow a part of soul [*psychē*], thus erring no less than those who believe soul to be part of body, for in the same degree as soul is superior to body, so is mind better and more divine than soul. The result of soul and body commingled is the irrational or the affective factor, whereas of mind and soul the conjunction produces reason; and of these the former is the source of pleasure and pain, the latter of virtue and vice.²⁸

Now the part carried submerged in the body is called the soul [*psychē*], whereas the part left free from corruption is called . . . the mind [*nous*].²⁹

In addition to the complete severing of vital and cognitive principles, Plutarch has made another fascinating move, that of attaching the term *psychē* to the former. Rather, it may be said that he “reattaches” the term *psychē*, since—it may be remembered—this term had entered the Greek vocabulary in drama and medicine as a term used to describe the human life-force.³⁰ Attempts to correlate the two faculties are nearly abandoned by Plutarch, except for the vague statement regarding their “conjunction,” but this is difficult to imagine, since for Plutarch the *nous* is immaterial: Plutarch even suggests that it is entirely external to the person.³¹ Plutarch has completed the inevitable schism between cognitive and vital functions, but only by sacrificing the “integrity” of the human person, and by completely avoiding the question of how these functions are held together and interrelated.

By way of summary, as we approach the time of Origen, psychological speculation has reached a sort of impasse. A consensus holds that the wide array of nutritive-vital functions that humans share with animals (called *epithumetikon* by Plato, *psychē* by Plutarch), already pronounced ethically dubious by most philosophers, should be carefully distinguished from higher intellectual activities (typically referred to as *nous*). The latter, it is clear, possess a dignity, transcen-

28. *On the Face of the Moon* 943a.

29. *On the Daemon of Socrates* 591d.

30. Cf. above, “Socratic *Psychē* as Vital Principle of the Body.”

31. *On the Daemon of Socrates*, 591d.

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dence, and potential for immortality that is lacking in the lower functions. Each set of activities, it seems, requires some sort of organizing or governing principle to coordinate them. The difficulty, once again, is how to explain the relation between the two, and the relation of each to the body. To fail in this task is to risk a dualistic fragmentation of the human person, along with providing an account of human existence that is philosophically untenable. While it is obvious that the vital principle must relate in some way to the body, the rational principle must possess at least a relative independence, since it has become a philosophical commonplace that excessive bodily indulgence places unwarranted obstacles on mental activity. Yet the mind cannot become utterly external to the bodily compound, lest the integrity of the human person once again be put at risk.

Origen and the Nature of the Vital Principle

When we turn to Origen we find a full and robust treatment of the “vital principle” (which he calls “blood” or “soul”) that echoes the observations of his predecessors and contemporaries—its role as animator of the natural body, regulator of biological impulses, of sensation and imagination, shared alike by men and beasts. In Origen’s writings, however, we also find a recurring stress on the inadequacy of this principle as a locus of the moral life, a call to transcend this level of human functioning through vigorous spiritual combat, to re-integrate it with the higher life of the primeval mind, a process modeled by the iconic soul of Jesus himself. In this way, while drawing upon Middle Platonic themes, Origen places these into the context of the Christian spiritual life, in which the goal is not flight from the body but personal and spiritual transformation in the pattern of Jesus Christ.

The first question to be asked, of course, is whether or not one can discern in Origen’s thought a distinct and consistent conception of a vital principle. To this question one must answer in the affirmative. This vital principle (Origen’s exact terminology for this prin-

principle will be discussed below) is first and foremost that which animates, or “energizes,” the human body.³² Inasmuch as this principle “vivifies and moves the body, which of itself has not the natural power of motion like a living being,” Origen even compares it to the role of the *Logos* that vivifies the Church.³³ This principle of movement, in fact, enters into the very definition of a living being (which *as such* requires motion) and distinguishes it from inanimate objects such as rocks or wood.³⁴ The vital principle uses the body as an instrument, and “exerts its force over everything on which it operates.”³⁵ As such it can also be called the body’s “form” or “character,”³⁶ holding together its members.³⁷ While properly distinct from the body itself, it is the body’s “organizing principle” (*archē* or *hēgemonikon*) on the biological level.³⁸

Related to this is the vital principle’s role as the source of biological impulses and for the satisfaction of bodily needs and desires, which of course are necessary (at least minimally) to retain the body’s animation and power of self-motion. When the body is thus “set in motion . . . by impulse and fancy, in conjunction with a certain natural apparatus,”³⁹ there is no clear moral blame involved, but only a certain “futility,” inasmuch as such activities—“the embarrassing

32. See *Commentary on Luke* 9d and *1 Corinthians Frag.*

33. “As a soul [*psychē*] vivifies and moves the body . . . so the Word, arousing and moving the whole body, the Church, to befitting action, awakens, moreover, each individual member belonging to the Church, so that they do nothing apart from the Word.” *Against Celsus* 6, 48.

34. “[N]or can living things be at any time without motion.” *On First Principles* 1, 7, 3. Origen distinguishes creatures that are (1) “moved from without,” i.e., inanimate objects; (2) “moved from within,” but only “out of themselves,” such as plant life; (3) “moved from within” and “by themselves,” such as animal life; and (4) rational creatures, which have freedom of judgment over their own movements. See *On First Principles* 3, 1, 3.

35. *Ibid.* 2, 8, 5. See *1 Corinthians Frag.*

36. See *Commentary on John* 2, 15, where this element is contrasted with the *pneuma* or “spirit,” which transcends the constitution of man, and hence does not enter into his definition.

37. See *On First Principles* 2, 1, 3, where it is compared to the *Logos*, identified as the Soul of God, which holds together the parts of the universe.

38. *Against Celsus* 4, 85.

39. *Ibid.*

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process of digestion, the sense of shame associated with procuring offspring—are unworthy of the soul's primeval dignity.⁴⁰ It is not necessary to shun these activities, so long as the soul prevents itself from becoming "relaxed by indulgence and unsteady through the influence of those pleasures for which it feels a natural delight."⁴¹ The vital principle cannot hope to avoid involvement in such activities, since it is "spread throughout the whole body and is subject to its passions."⁴² In this respect, Origen's vital principle certainly echoes Plato's lower part of the soul, even if, as we have seen, Origen rejects Plato's theory of the tripartition of the soul.⁴³

Also relevant here is the connection between biological life and the lower psychic functions of sensation, imagination, and perception, a connection necessitated by the dependence of such functions upon one's insertion into the material order.⁴⁴ Creatures that are self-moving, as opposed to plant life (which possesses only "natural life," *naturalem vitam*, rather than a vital principle as such), are excited to movement by the presentation of sensible phantasms that correspond to interior desires. When this happens, "a kind of natural instinct calls them forth, and arouses them to orderly and regular motion."⁴⁵ Thus, these lower levels of psychic functioning, as distinguished from discursive or contemplative reasoning, are necessarily carried out by this same vital principle.⁴⁶

40. *Commentary on Romans* 7, 4, 9–10.

41. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 4. Henri Crouzel plausibly compares this element to the Latin doctrine of concupiscence, noting this distinction, that Origen's vital principle can be transformed without being destroyed. See *L'anthropologie d'Origène: de l'archè au telos*, 40–41.

42. *Commentary on Luke* 25, 2. See Blanc, "L'attitude d'Origène," 843–58, however, for a reminder that such activities are blameworthy only if carried out to excess, whereas mere bodily sustenance itself hardly implies personal culpability.

43. See "Origen and the Tripartition of the Soul," in chapter 1.

44. A connection not present, however, with higher cognitive functions such as contemplation, which can be carried out perfectly well (perhaps even most suitably) by a disembodied creature, given a Platonic understanding of the world.

45. *On First Principles* 3, 1, 3. Cf. 2, 8, 1.

46. It is not altogether clear to this author whether or not discursive reasoning falls under the domain of this vital principle, since it transcends the body while at the same time remaining at least indirectly dependent upon it.

Because this principle cannot perform, and in some way is opposed to, higher levels of reasoning, it is often described by Origen as an “irrational” principle. As opposed to the *logikon hēgemonikon*, the vital principle can be called an *alogon hēgemonikon*, or “irrational principle,” generating nothing but the random or instinctual responses to external stimuli, absent any act of judgment or rational intuition.⁴⁷ The vital principle itself is incapable of approving or disapproving such stimuli, and thereby of appropriating merit or blame.⁴⁸ It is established, in summary, that this vital principle carries out the functions of animating the body, giving voice to its desires, and establishing psychic relations *through* the body to the material world.⁴⁹

Aside from these observations about the functions and qualities of what we have called the “vital principle,” does Origen have any proper or technical term for such an element? The most natural term for Origen, which he clearly inherits from Philo, is that of the “lifeblood.” Drawing upon Leviticus 17:14, “You shall not eat the blood, because the life of all flesh is its blood,” Origen follows Philo in understanding “life” (Septuagint: *psychē*) as the “life principle” or “sensible soul.” The thinking here is as scientific as it is mystical: “the blood of every animal is its life,” and it does not take advanced biology to note that the loss of blood brings about the loss of life.⁵⁰ Origen makes the scientific basis for his argument clear later in the

47. *Against Celsus* 4, 85. It can also simply be called the *alogon*, “the irrational.” See *Commentary on John* 1, 42.

48. See *On First Principles* 3, 1, 3.

49. A discussion of the vital principle’s *incorporeality* and *immortality* has been deliberately avoided here, since Origen never directly answers these questions. Despite the claims of Gérard Verbeke in *L'évolution de la Doctrine du Pneuma*, a passage from the *Commentary on John* suggests that such a radical transformation—of an incorporeal, immortal being (the *nous*) into a corporeal, mortal being (the *psychē*) is an absurdity. Thus, if the mind is incorporeal and immortal, and if the vital principle is simply a degraded mind (see the next section, “Origen and the Origin of the Vital Principle”), then it follows that the vital principle must be equally incorporeal and immortal. See *Commentary on John* 13, 427–30.

50. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 1. In the case of those animals, from ants to oysters, that lack red blood, Origen claims that whatever biological liquid sustains their life is the equivalent of “blood.”

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same text: "For, from the circumstance that it is the diffusion of the blood throughout the whole flesh which produces life in the flesh ... this soul, which is said to be the life of all flesh, is contained in the blood."⁵¹

A second and more important term, however, emerges from the above considerations, and this term requires closer analysis. Once again, Origen found in the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 17:14 the statement that "the soul [*psychē*] of all flesh is its blood." We have seen above that Plutarch, a century before Origen, had identified the vital principle by the term "soul" (*psychē*), as distinguished from the rational "mind" (*nous*). In his *On First Principles*, we find Origen doing exactly the same thing: "For soul [*anima/psychē*] is defined as follows: a substance *phantastikē* and *hormētikē*, which may be rendered into Latin, although not so appropriately, *sensibilis et mobilis*."⁵² In the same passage Origen goes on to distinguish "soul" (*anima*) from "mind" (*mens*). In a later passage in the same work, this time in the extant Greek, Origen similarly distinguishes "soul" (*psychē*) from "mind" (*logikon*).⁵³ In both cases, "soul" is designated as the lower, vital principle: it is "imperfect" in its substance, "censurable" as it appears in Scripture.⁵⁴ In both cases it is contrasted with "reason," since Origen claims to find a clear and consistent differentiation between the two in the Bible.⁵⁵ It must be granted that Origen is nowhere near consistent with his terminology, nor could he be expected to be. The term "soul" (whether *anima* or *psychē*) had for too long been used as a generalized term for any supracorporeal principle, used in increasingly diverse and even contradictory ways. Thus it is easy to find instances where Origen uses "soul" for the

51. *Ibid.* 3, 4, 2. Granted, in the textual context Origen is repeating the position of an unnamed interlocutor, but given the parallels with earlier passages (2, 8, 1, above) it is clear that he accepts at least this part of the position. It should also be noted that Origen's position here seems to contradict his position in the *Dialogue with Heraclides* 10–12, where he flatly denies that the soul is blood. This apparent contradiction is rather easily resolved, since in that dialogue Origen is discussing not the vital principle but the human mind (*nous*), what he describes as the "inner man," both immortal and incorporeal.

52. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 1.

53. *Ibid.* 3, 1, 3.

54. *Ibid.* 2, 8, 1; 3, 1, 3.

55. *Ibid.* 2, 8, 3.

higher, rational principle—although often he is cautious enough to specify this as a “rational soul”—and hence we must judge these to be “general” or even “improper” uses of the term. But clearly in the passages quoted here Origen is being unusually precise, quoting a proper definition, under the proper heading (“On the Soul”) in his most systematic work, and hence the said definition (“sensible and mobile substance”) should be taken as his “proper” understanding of the term *psychē*. Of the relation between *nous* and *psychē* more will be said below, but for now it is enough to note that Origen has recognized a clear distinction between them, as man’s rational and vital principles, respectively.

Given the definition of “soul” that Origen has advanced above, however—a “sensible and mobile substance”—another aspect comes into focus: that this category is broader than mankind alone, but is “common to rational beings and to beings without reason.”⁵⁶ It is narrow enough to exclude plant life, which is not self-moving, but broad enough to include all animal life, mankind, angels, Christ himself, and even, at least analogically speaking, God.⁵⁷ Yet what all of these have in common is the possession of the lowest and most inferior form of life, the “outer shell.”⁵⁸ This common element is defined in contradistinction to the faculty of reason, which is possessed only by a smaller subcategory of these creatures, who by means of this faculty can freely judge and choose between sensible phantasms experienced by the *psychē*.⁵⁹ Thus Origen points out, by way of ex-

56. *Commentary on John* 2, 19.

57. See *On First Principles* 3, 1, 3, and especially 2, 8, 1–5. Origen’s exploration of what beings possess a *psychē* is as fascinating as it is torturous, involving as it must the attempt to correlate biblical, philosophical, and common-sense data. The claim that angels have souls is complex, since they are certainly self-moving yet also lack terrestrial bodies—hence they are “mobile” but not “sensible.” The claim that God has a soul is even more vexing, since God is altogether incorporeal and hence not truly “mobile” at all, in the normal way of speaking. Yet Origen’s hand is forced by frequent biblical references to God’s “soul,” so he concludes that God’s “soul” must be the *Logos* himself, spiritually speaking.

58. *Against Celsus* 4, 74.

59. For a fascinating and well-crafted analysis of Origen’s doctrine of freedom, especially in respect to the way it distinguishes rational creatures from common animals,

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ample, that spiders have a natural desire to spin webs, and bees to form honeycombs, not through a free choice but through a natural instinct: “such a phantasm, i.e. a will or feeling, as by a kind of natural instinct calls them forth, and arouses them to orderly and regular motion.”⁶⁰ That all living, self-moving creatures possess this *psychē* is demonstrated both by common sense (the “general opinion of all men”) and by the testimony of Scripture.⁶¹ And yet the great difference between those that possess this vital faculty alone and those that possess the *additional* faculty of reason is equally apparent, such that “it is absurd to suppose” otherwise.⁶² Man consists of both elements, the higher faculty associating him with God himself, the lower faculty associating him with common beasts. Origen identifies the latter with St. Paul’s “natural man” (*psychikos anthrōpos*, which comes across as *animalem hominem* in Rufinus’s Latin) of 1 Corinthians 2:14, the “animalistic” element of man.⁶³

But at exactly this point, a question arises of an apparent incongruity: on the one hand, this natural principle constitutes an “indifferent” and ambivalent life, as free from blame as it is from merit, while on the other hand it is morally precarious, since St. Paul says that the natural man “does not accept the things of God” (1 Cor 2:14). Is the “natural” life that we share with animals—bodily desires, imagination, sensation, perception, nutrition, growth—some-

see D.B.Jackson, “Sources of Origen’s Doctrine of Freedom,” *Church History* 35 (1966), 13–23. Jackson demonstrates how Origen’s doctrine of freedom is derived from Middle Platonic and Stoic philosophy, even if Origen derives the *fact* of human freedom from Scripture. Because the *psychē* of itself does not offer the possibility of merit or blame, Origen calls it the “indifferent life which is neither good nor bad, according to which we call both the wicked and [the] irrational animals ‘living.’” *Commentary on John* 20, 31.

60. *On First Principles* 3, 1, 3. Origen admits that the behavior of some animals, such as hunting dogs or warhorses, gives the appearance of a more rational and orderly form of behavior, but he insists that this is not true reason, but only a well-developed natural instinct.

61. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 1. And “no one entertains any doubt” that man possesses the same.

62. *Against Celsus* 4, 85.

63. See *On First Principles* 2, 8, 2, and also 3, 4, 3, where he claims that this element makes man “animalistic,” forcing him to “retain the position of an irrational animal.”

thing harmless and acceptable, or suspicious and potentially harmful? The answer, of course, is that it is both, since man possesses this natural life only in order to surpass it, for he is called to a higher kind of life.

Even if this natural life is “indifferent . . . neither good nor bad,”⁶⁴ it is nonetheless an “inferior aspect” when compared to that higher life.⁶⁵ This “substance . . . in [very] respect of its being ‘soul,’ is imperfect.”⁶⁶ Origen notes that Scripture always uses the term *psychē* “accompanied with expressions of censure,” to describe “suffering or perturbation,” laxity or distraction from the spiritual life.⁶⁷ Because of its connection with the “natural movements of the body,” it remains an ever-present occasion of sin,⁶⁸ and by it we are “drawn on and enticed to the practice of those evils which are agreeable to the body.”⁶⁹ Even the man “who wishes to devote himself to the Word of God is, on account of his bodily necessities and habits, which like a sort of law are ingrained in the body, distracted, divided, and impeded.”⁷⁰ Even if the vital *psychē* is “far superior” to the body that it animates, by virtue of its “participation in such material substances” it is rendered incapable of spiritual comprehension.⁷¹ Even if man may immerse himself in this “natural life”—the life of the body and the body’s instinctual desires—without blame, he risks sacrificing the very thing that makes him human—his capacity to surpass this natural life. Origen denies, in fact, that there is anything uniquely *human* about the bodily desires and instincts that humans feel—they are that which he has in common with animals, and while they may be gratified as nature demands, they will never satisfy the heart of the human person, who has a supernatural calling.

And it is exactly this spiritual comprehension to which man has

64. *Commentary on John* 20, 31.

65. “[W]hen man needs to be identified by the better aspect, as one who ought to be understood as spiritual, he is called spirit; when, by his inferior aspect he is identified, he is called soul; and when his lower aspect is being identified, he is called flesh.” *Commentary on Romans* 9, 25, 1.

66. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 2.

68. *Ibid.* 3, 2, 3.

70. *Ibid.* 3, 4, 4.

67. *Ibid.* 2, 8, 3–4.

69. *Ibid.* 3, 4, 1.

71. *Ibid.* 1, 1, 5.

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been called. To remain on the level of an irrational animal is to shirk man's supernatural vocation. Although there is "a certain indifferent life which is neither good nor bad," there is also "another life which is not indifferent but good."⁷² The natural life that is common to rational and irrational beings is a "life in appearance only, not in truth," whereas "we yearn to be filled with the true life."⁷³ While the soul is "indifferent," neither good nor evil, the spirit is "incapable of receiving things that are inferior, for the best things are said to be fruits of the spirit."⁷⁴ Man is called to something more than a common nature with beasts, but to become "one spirit" with God Himself.⁷⁵ Although the soul is for now subjected to such a life, "it was subjected, however, in hope, namely, in hope for the time when it would be set free."⁷⁶ In sum, even if the "natural life" that man shares with beasts is neither avoidable nor blameworthy, man is created for a higher kind of life. Origen, ever the fiery ascetic, expresses a vivid repulsion in the face of such "neutrality" and "indifference," and claims that even outright wickedness is preferable to such a "natural" life:

The soul [*anima*] . . . during its adherence to the body, and its meditation of carnal things, [is] neither in a good condition nor in a manifestly bad one, but resembles, so to speak, an animal. It is better, however, for it, if possible, to be rendered spiritual through adherence to the spirit; but if that cannot be done, it is more expedient for it to follow even the wickedness of the flesh, than, placed under the influence of its own will, to retain the position of an irrational animal.⁷⁷

In sum, we have seen that Origen echoes the observations of his Middle Platonic predecessors regarding the "vital principle," drawing out its role as animator of the natural body, regulator of biological impulses, of sensation and imagination, shared alike by men and beasts. Yet in Origen's writings we find a recurring stress on the inadequacy of this principle as a locus of the moral life, against which he poses man's vocation—as a rational being—to radical personal trans-

72. *Commentary on John* 20, 31.

74. *Ibid.* 32, 218–19.

76. *Ibid.* 6, 13, 7.

73. *Ibid.* 2, 19.

75. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 1, 4–5.

77. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 3.

formation patterned after the Incarnate Word. This transformation, however, is undergone by the “vital principle” itself, and hence makes sense only against the background of Origen’s understanding of the *origin* of this principle.

Origen and the Origin of the Vital Principle

Having outlined Origen’s understanding of the vital principle, which he calls *psychē*, and having examined the ambiguous moral character of this principle, we now must examine the origin of this vital principle and its relation to the mind or *nous*. And here we come to the most original contribution of Origen, where he makes his most decisive break from the Middle Platonic authors and impresses the mark of his own genius upon the questions left to him. For although Origen distinguishes between the intellectual and vital principles, he refuses to consider them as independent from each other, or even as altogether distinct principles at all: they are, in fact, the same principle, only in different states.⁷⁸ The best-known statement of this doctrine is expressed in *On First Principles*: “the mind [*mens*], falling away from its status and dignity, was made or named soul [*anima*] ... [whereas] if repaired and corrected, it returns to the condition of the mind [*mens*].”⁷⁹ Origen’s proposal here makes sense only in light of his doctrine of the human fall, which will be considered in chapter 7, but for the time being the following observations may be made. While the primeval and original condition of man is as pure, unpoluted mind (*mens* or *nous*), this condition is not permanent, a “given,” but rather susceptible to change due to man’s freedom. Because of this freedom, which is always the most fundamental mark of the rational creature, we are always capable of becoming “forgetful, as it were, of the superior essence in us,”⁸⁰ “cooled from that natural and divine warmth” of God’s love,⁸¹ and “waxed cold from the fervor of

78. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 62–64. Dupuis demonstrates both the originality of Origen with regard to his philosophical predecessors and how this aspect of Origen’s originality has been drastically misinterpreted by recent scholars of Origen.

79. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 3.

80. *Commentary on John* 20, 182.

81. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 3.

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just things and from participation in the divine fire.”⁸² Indeed, Origen even makes the suggestion that the term *psychē* may be a derivation from the term *psychēsthai*, “cold,” in an etymological theory already popular among Platonists and Stoics.⁸³

Such a spiritual lapse, in Origen’s view, cannot help but have what might be called an ontological effect on the human mind itself. That is, once the human mind becomes preoccupied with the material order, as opposed to God, its own nature is “adapted” to this new occupation, and transformed from a “mind” into a vital principle, or “soul.” Its new form is in fact “contrary to its original condition of purity,”⁸⁴ since it is rendered “duller and more obtuse” by its preoccupation with the material order.⁸⁵ Even more, souls that fell from the habit of spiritual contemplation—which is, in fact, the “food” on which they are nurtured—thereby “lost their distinctive character.”⁸⁶ When we recall that the “distinctive character” of rational creatures—what makes them distinct from beasts—is the possession of a rational mind, we understand this “fall” as a fall from humanity itself, whereby one ceases to be different, at least on a moral level, from animals. Of course, this theory is to be distinguished sharply from the theory of metempsychosis, whereby the souls of men are transplanted into the bodies of animals: this latter theory is one that is consistently and explicitly rejected by Origen, and is “by no means to be admitted.”⁸⁷ No rational mind *entirely* loses its distinctive character—only “to a greater or lesser degree in different instances,” since the complete abolition of the *nous* would put the rational creature beyond the pale of redemption.

But a genuine change takes place nonetheless, for if “we subordinate ourselves to that which is molded from dust, even the superior part [the *nous*] will take on the image of the earthly,”⁸⁸ even to the point of meriting a new name: “Because the soul of those men had

82. *Ibid.*

83. The background of the theory is described in Dupuis, *L’esprit de l’homme*, 34–35.

84. *On First Principles* 2, 10, 7.

85. *Ibid.* 1, 1, 5.

86. *Commentary on John* 13, 205.

87. *On First Principles* 1, 8, 4.

88. *Commentary on John* 20, 18.

repudiated serving the Spirit and had turned itself to all the vices of the flesh, it even adopted the name 'flesh,' to which it had joined itself and with which it had become one."⁸⁹ In his discussion of the vital principle (*psychē*) in *On First Principles*, Origen insists that the soul is not a distinct and permanent element of man, but a transitory phase: "the soul which is said to have perished will appear to have been something at one time, when as yet it had not perished, and on that account would be termed *anima*." Once again, the "cooling" (*psychesthai*) of divine love on the part of the original mind led to its transformation into a "soul" (*psychē*), and it need stay in this phase only as long as it freely chooses to do so. Origen's emphasis here, one notes, is not philosophical but spiritual, not on the nature of the transformation that takes place but on the fallen soul's estrangement from itself, given the fact that, so long as the human soul does not return into God, it cannot return into itself.⁹⁰

This last point highlights yet another distinctive feature of Origen's anthropology, that the lowest elements of the human person—those that distract him from divine things and lead him to sinful behaviors—are not destroyed by the glorification of the human person, but rather transformed by being "spiritualized."⁹¹ That which is currently termed *psychē*, Origen suggests, "when it has been placed in a state of salvation will receive a name from the Word that denotes its more perfect condition," that is, "mind."⁹² This is occasioned by a return to its primeval state: "being again freed from its destruction, it may become a second time what it was before it perished,"⁹³ so that

89. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 13, 7.

90. "But that does not mean that the pre-existent soul ... has by its sin become another substance, but only that 'soul,' when it does not dwell in God, when it lives wholly in itself, is necessarily imperfect, indeed 'lost.' It is a being made in such a way that it can fulfill its essential destination only in a higher medium, just as a fish can live only in water." Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Origen: Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, trans. Robert J. Daly (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 501.

91. See Crouzel, *L'anthropologie d'Origène*, 40–41.

92. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 3.

93. *Ibid.*

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“if repaired and corrected, it returns to the condition of the mind [*mens*].”⁹⁴ In another statement, which brings out Origen’s views most starkly, he claims that men are called to be sons of God, a task that requires their “rising above not only their corporeal nature, but even the uncertain and fragile movements of the soul [*animae*] itself.”⁹⁵ That is, as much as the vital principle largely defines the condition of man in his current state, it is a principle to be transcended, as the mind returns to its state of spiritual contemplation.

It should be noted, of course, that the most explicit description of the mind/soul transformation occurs in *On First Principles*, Origen’s most speculative work, and the transformation itself is treated there as a hypothesis, not as dogma: “Our statement, however, that the mind is converted into a soul [*mentem . . . animam*], or whatever else seems to have such a meaning, the reader must carefully consider and settle for himself, as these views are not to be regarded as advanced by us in a dogmatic manner, but simply as opinions, treated in the style of investigation and discussion.”⁹⁶ A practiced reader of Origen, however, is aware that such disclaimers are not inconsistent with Origen’s personal adherence to the position, and only mean to clarify that the position in question is not found in the rule of faith. Hence, the reader should not feel bound by it, even if Origen himself considers it the most reasonable of hypotheses. And, in fact, the consistency of this theory with Origen’s anthropology as a whole cannot be denied, especially since (as we have shown above) explicit restatements of it can be found in various other works. It may be best to consider this theory a “working model” of Origen’s, which he incorporates into his overall theological system while at the same time remaining “open to revision” should the rule of faith demand it.

If man as we know him is defined by this radical transformation—from contemplative mind to the bodily preoccupied soul—then what does this tell us about Origen’s anthropology? What, then, constitutes the *essential* nature of man? There are, of course,

94. *Ibid.*

95. *Ibid.* 1, 8, 4, emphasis added.

96. *Ibid.* 2, 8, 4.

two answers: man as he is, and man as he should be. Certainly, in the state in which man was originally created, his essential being is found in the rational mind, or *nous*.⁹⁷ Yet this mind never exists without a body, which, while it does not properly enter into the definition of man, nevertheless is an indispensable accoutrement to it, a function of adaptation to man's environment⁹⁸ and a necessary condition for creaturely subsistence.⁹⁹ In Origen the body is always viewed as the instrument of the soul,¹⁰⁰ yet as an instrument that man can never be without: even in the preexistent state, man can be separated from matter only by an exercise in mental abstraction.¹⁰¹ In addition the pre-fallen *nous* is accompanied by the human "spirit," or *pneuma*, which is also extrinsic to the human constitution, yet similarly inseparable from it.¹⁰² Thus, man in his most essential nature is defined as contemplative mind, albeit always qualified by its permanent association with body and spirit.

Given this fact, and keeping in mind the nature of the "mind/soul" transformation discussed above, it should be clear that "soul"—in the technical sense of vital principle—is not the authentic expression of human personhood. The earthly condition of fallen man—his lowly subsistence as the self-absorbed, "fleshly" *psychē*, turned away from God and immersed in bodily concerns—is man in his most fragmented and disoriented state, "lost," to use Origen's expression.¹⁰³ Nor is this "soul" the most authentic expression of human freedom, which for Origen consists not in perpetual mutability, but in permanent adhesion to the Good.¹⁰⁴ The freedom of the fallen "soul" is viti-

97. This point has more or less achieved consensus among modern scholars of Origen. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 36; Crouzel, *L'anthropologie d'Origène*, 39; Edwards, "Origen No Gnostic," 26.

98. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 34.

99. See Edwards, "Origen No Gnostic," 32–33.

100. See *1 Cor. Frag.*; Cf. *Against Celsus* 8, 30.

101. See *On First Principles* 2, 2, 2.

102. *Commentary on John* 2, 15. The great exception, however, is the case of the damned, in whose case (Origen speculates) the *pneuma* may be permanently withdrawn. See *On First Principles* 2, 10, 7.

103. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 3.

104. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 48.

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ated by its absorption in bodily passions, by its estrangement from God, the source of freedom. Accordingly, it would seem wrong to attribute to Origen the view that the fallen *psychē* is the “seat of personality and freedom.”¹⁰⁵ Such a view presupposes that the authentic expression of human personhood is found in estrangement from God, whereas in fact, for Origen, only in contemplative union with God are authentic personality and freedom to be found. One might qualify this view by suggesting that personality, freedom, and human selfhood, *in whatever diminished state they still subsist*, are found in the fallen *psychē*, while their authentic expression is recovered only by the soul’s return to God.

The chief result of Origen’s theory of the “mind/soul”¹⁰⁶ transformation is to achieve a masterful model for understanding the “dual” experience at the heart of the Christian moral life, that is, for explaining the experience of moral conflict. What is masterful about this model is that it avoids the numerous problems involved in previous models, such as soul partition, “two souls in conflict,” and the “body-as-evil” models. Without a doubt, there is clearly some sort of mitigated soul-body dualism in Origen’s theory, but it is significantly moderated inasmuch as neither body nor soul becomes the scapegoat for moral evil. So long as the body is submitted to the mind/soul, and the mind/soul to God, there is no evil to be explained. Evil emerges only when this harmony is disrupted and subverted: soul is turned away from God and submerged in the passions of the body.

Origen’s general avoidance of the language of soul partition, which has been described in a previous chapter,¹⁰⁷ is now under-

105. See *ibid.*, 47; Crouzel, *Lanthropologie d’Origène*, 39; Antonia Tripolitis, *The Doctrine of the Soul in the Thought of Plotinus and Origen* (Roslyn Heights, N.Y.: Libra Publishers, 1978), 107–8. The problem here is not simply terminological: a deeper issue is at stake, i.e., Origen’s Christian understanding of human freedom and its relation to man’s fulfillment in God. To suppose that the fallen *psychē* is, in any meaningful way, authentically free and fully human, is to misunderstand entirely Origen’s notion of what it means to be free and human.

106. I use this shorthand term to designate the single human element that is potentially both “mind” and “soul.”

107. See “Origen and the Bipartition of the Soul,” in chapter 1.

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standable: moral evil need not be ascribed to a “part” of the soul, since it is a phenomenon of the entire mind/soul being unduly submitted to the desires of the body. Thus, it makes less sense for Origen to explain higher functioning (*nous*) and lower functioning (*psychē*, or *sarx*) in man as “parts” of the soul, since they would be more properly explained as different “grades” of “mind/soul” transformation:

Now, if this be the case, it seems to me that this very decay and falling away of the mind [*mentis*] is not the same in all, but that this conversion into a soul is carried to a greater or less degree in different instances, and that certain minds [*mentes*] retain something even of their former vigor, and others again either nothing or a very small amount. Whence some are found from the very commencement of their lives to be of more active intellect, others again of a slower habit of mind, and some are born wholly obtuse, and altogether capable of instruction.¹⁰⁸

Different levels of moral-intellectual functioning are explained by various stages of this “mind/soul” transformation. In the rare cases when Origen does describe the mind as the highest “part” of the soul, this is certainly what he means. The traditional Platonic language of soul partition, which presumes a static and quasi-permanent compartmentalization of the soul, simply does not measure up to the spiritual dynamism of Origen’s anthropological vision.¹⁰⁹ Contemplative thought is not the higher “part” of the soul, but the state of the mind/soul when exercised rightly; fleshly pursuits are not the lower “part” of the soul, but the state of the mind/soul when exercised wrongly. The two “options” that face man are not “parts” but defining forces or ways of living.¹¹⁰

It is in this context that we must understand Origen’s frequent mentioning of the soul’s “intermediate” nature. The mind/soul stands poised, as it were, between the spiritualizing power of God on the

108. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 4.

109. Cf. Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 36; Crouzel, *L'anthropologie d'Origène*, 36; Tripolitis, *Doctrine of the Soul*, 104–5.

110. See Jean Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” in Kyriakon: *Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1970), 1:330.

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one hand, and the “carnalizing” power of the flesh on the other. The rational creature’s freedom makes him fundamentally “mutable,”¹¹¹ this character being both located in (and exemplified by the nature of) the mind/soul, since neither the body nor the spirit is ontologically malleable in this way.¹¹² It is “something intermediate and capable of both virtue and evil,”¹¹³ and “capable” in this case refers to the possibility of assimilation into an entirely new way of being, as has already been noted: “The soul is a mean, as it were, between the flesh and the Spirit. And certainly, if it unites itself with the flesh to obey the desires of sin, it becomes one body with it; but if it unites itself with the Lord it becomes one spirit with him.”¹¹⁴

By “one flesh” and “one spirit” Origen means more than a mere spiritual disposition, as becomes clear by the fact that he uses the same “intermediate” nature of the human soul as an explanation for the possibility of the Incarnation:

This substance of a soul, then, being intermediate between God and the flesh—it being impossible for the nature of God to intermingle with a body without an intermediate instrument—the God-man is born, as we have said, that substance being the intermediary to whose nature it was not contrary to assume a body. But neither, on the other hand, was it opposed to the nature of that soul, as a rational existence, to receive God, into whom, as stated above, as into the Word, and the Wisdom, and the Truth, it had already wholly entered.¹¹⁵

It has been conventional for scholars of Origen to attribute this “malleability” strictly to the *psychē*, as opposed to the *nous*, whereas in fact it is this exact malleability that provides for their differentia-

111. See Ugo Bianchi, “Some Reflections on the Ontological Implications of Man’s Terrestrial Corporeity according to Origen,” in *Origeniana Tertia*, ed. Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1985), 153–58.

112. “The spirit of man that is in him is incapable of receiving things that are inferior.” *Commentary on John* 23, 218. “Soul and spirit are naturally convertible, as either can acquire the properties of the other . . . but body, while it can undergo a parallel transformation, is divorced from both by its indefeasible corporeality.” Edwards, “Christ or Plato?” 17–18.

113. *Commentary on John* 32, 218.

114. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 1, 4–5.

115. *On First Principles* 2, 6, 3.

tion at all.¹¹⁶ The “mediate” nature of the mind/soul is a function of both man’s ontological structure and the dynamism of his spiritual life: the two cannot be separated in the comprehensive anthropological vision of Origen.

The Mind/Soul and Spiritual Combat

The innovation of Origen with regard to the mind/soul problem allowed him to sketch out an anthropological and cosmic framework into which to situate the Christian experience of moral ascesis and spiritual combat. The dynamics of the spiritual life of the individual Christian, in other words, could be rendered more intelligible by placing them within the larger context of a cosmic dynamic between the spiritual and material orders of reality, thus offering a new vocabulary for the expression of Christian asceticism. Origen’s affirmation of human freedom, posed forcefully against the determinism of his Gnostic opponents, becomes all the more radical inasmuch as it receives an ontological undergirding. That is, the free choice of man is given efficacy not only in the realm of his eternal destiny, but in the determination of the very *kind of being* that he is. To allow oneself to become enslaved by the desires of the flesh is to become a fleshly man; to submit oneself to the dynamism of the spirit is to become a spiritual man. The life of this spiritual man, the fundamental vocation of the human person, is lived out most fully in the person of Jesus, whom Origen posits as the model and end of the spiritual life.

Origen’s template for the spiritual life comes from St. Paul’s letters to the Galatians and Romans, which describe with great existential depth the experience of being caught between the desires of flesh and Spirit: “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Gal 5:17).

116. See Crouzel, *L’anthropologie d’Origène*, 39. Verbeke successfully captures the much more complex relationship by describing the *psychē* as intermediary between *nous* and *sarx*, and *nous* in turn as intermediary between God and the *psychē*. See Verbeke, *L’évolution*.

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The human mind/soul finds itself caught between these conflicting desires, interprets Origen, and its choice between them determines what kind of man one will become, since it will serve the one that it has elected to obey: “And if it yield itself up to the pleasures of the flesh, it renders men carnal; but when it unites itself with the Spirit, it produces men of the spirit, and who on that account are termed spiritual.”¹¹⁷ Paraphrasing St. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 6:16–17, Origen describes the outcome of such choices as becoming “one body” with sin or “one spirit” with God, respectively.¹¹⁸ But Origen is not speaking in abstract pieties—he seems to believe quite sincerely that one’s behavior influences one’s ontological makeup. In a passage from *Against Celsus*, Origen speaks of the bodies of men possessing more or less dignity depending upon their lifestyles, even to the point of professing a certain sympathy toward those who had deified the body of Socrates.¹¹⁹ Indeed, for Origen, while all rational beings possess a common nature, the “species” of each is determined by its right or wrong use of the faculty of freedom:

Just as all bodily matter, since it, no doubt, consists of a single nature, through its inherent qualities produces various species of bodies or trees or plants, in the same way, since there is one nature for all rational beings, the choice of each—the liberty of the impulse of each is distributed equally—when summoned by the power of choice, and by guiding the soul subjected to them either toward virtue or toward evil desire, creates the species of a good tree or an evil tree.¹²⁰

How, then, does the “fall” of the *nous* into a *psychē*, that is, the anthropological transformation of man brought about by his immer-

117. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 2.

118. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 1, 4. St. Paul’s reference to “one body” is spoken in reference to illicit union with a prostitute (“one body with her”). Origen generalizes this to any inordinate pursuit of bodily goods, and perhaps this makes sense of his reference to matter as a “whore” in his *Commentary on John* 20, 134.

119. *Against Celsus* 4, 85.

120. *Commentary on Romans* 8, 11, 4. The “tree” analogy is drawn from Luke 6:44, “a tree is known by its fruit.” Interestingly, Augustine’s commentary on the same verse draws the opposite conclusion, that the species of a good or evil tree is formed *not* by free choice, but by the gratuitous election of God. See *Gratia Christi* 1, 19–22.

sion in bodily things, establish a framework for a description of the spiritual life?¹²¹ Origen's description of this "fall" draws largely upon images from the early chapters of Genesis, focusing especially on the creation of man according to the divine image. From here Origen offers a triad of vivid images to describe the fall into bodily things. First, the animals in Paradise signify the passions of the "outer man," which are at first governed carefully (as signified by Adam's naming of them), but which, at the moment this governance becomes incapable of mastering them, become savage and untamable beasts.¹²² Secondly, the divine "image" of Genesis can also be interpreted as a mirror, which when turned rightly reflects the brilliant luminosity of the sun, but when turned askew reflects only the dark earth below.¹²³ Thirdly, we have the image already mentioned of the soul, once kindled by the divine fire of love, cooling and hardening into a lifeless mass.¹²⁴ In addition to this, we have Origen's descriptions of man's "animalization" by his immersion in bodily things, his coming to "share the nature of savage beasts"¹²⁵ by forsaking the food of the Word and feast instead on "grass, fodder or straw."¹²⁶ Connected to this "animalization" is the concept of "slavery to the letter," since it is by forsaking the spirit that man becomes irrational and blinded to the true meaning hidden within the letter of the divine Word.¹²⁷

This dehumanization of man occurs by his excessive pursuit of bodily goods, to the point of becoming their subject rather than making them subject to himself: "God did not make us in His image that we should be subject to the needs of the flesh, but that the soul, in the service of its creator, should itself make use of the help and service of the flesh."¹²⁸ When the body is excessively "weighed down" by bodily satisfaction, "the soul too is burdened,"¹²⁹ "rendered

121. A comprehensive account of the "fall" will be offered in chapter 7. Here we are concerned only with the *nous-psyche* transformation and its connection to the spiritual life.

122. Cf. *Homilies on Genesis* 1, 8–12. A helpful analysis of Origen's account of the Fall, focusing on the parallels with Philo, is offered by Jean Laporte, "La chute," 320–35.

123. Cf. *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 2, 2.

124. Cf. *On First Principles* 2, 6, 4–8.

125. *Commentary on John* 10, 13.

126. *Ibid.* 13, 213.

127. Cf., e.g., *ibid.* 10, 13.

128. *Commentary on Romans* 4, 14.

129. *Commentary on Luke* 25, 2.

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duller and more obtuse”¹³⁰ by its being hedged in by bloated and overindulged flesh, to the point that it is “wearied as it were by the heavy burdens of luxury and lust.”¹³¹ Once it has become wholly engrossed in bodily goods, the soul becomes, as it were, “assimilated” into the body, becoming a kind of “body” itself.¹³² This is what Origen has in mind when he describes the mind’s transformation into a soul—that is, the cognitive principle’s transformation into a vital principle—the logical result of the soul’s preoccupation with bodily things is that it becomes itself a bodily principle. To phrase it in colloquial terms, there is a point where attachment to bodily things is no longer a “hobby” for the soul, but becomes its “full-time job.” But the soul cannot undergo this kind of transformation without tragic moral consequences, since it thereby becomes separated from the love of God. “This surely is the death of the soul,” claims Origen, since separation from God constitutes the soul’s spiritual death just as separation from the body constitutes its natural death.¹³³

Against this devastating possibility Origen poses an alternative destiny, which is the true vocation of every fallen soul, that is, a “re-conversion” into its original state of “mind,” facilitated by a submission of the soul to the governance of the spirit. The first step in this “re-conversion” is the soul’s mastery over its bodily passions, which until now have imposed their own hegemony over the soul. In Origen’s reading of Genesis, in which Paradise is a macrocosm of the human soul, the raging beasts that threaten to disrupt the harmony of the created order must be subjugated. The soul must confront the beasts that dwell within its own interior world, a world that has become a “guest chamber” for “sportive monsters” that must be wrestled into submission.¹³⁴ When effectively subjugated, these animals

130. *On First Principles* 1, 1, 5.

131. *Ibid.* 3, 4, 3.

132. Thus, in his commentary on St. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 6, Origen does not merely claim that the soul becomes “one body” *with matter*—he bluntly claims that the soul becomes “one body.” *Against Celsus* 20, 134.

133. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 12, 4. Cf. also *Commentary on John* 13, 140.

134. Cf. *Homilies on Leviticus* 5, 2. Patricia Cox demonstrates the importance of biblical exegesis in the confrontation of the “bestial soul,” along with the unique role played

become productive rather than destructive; they are “fruitful and multiply”: “When there is concord and harmony among [*psychē* and *pneuma*], they grow in union with each other and they are multiplied and bring forth offspring: good perceptions and understandings or useful thoughts by which they fill the earth and are masters of it; that is, they put the sense of the flesh [*anima carnis*], which is subject to it, to better use and exercise mastery over it.¹³⁵ These beasts are “tamed” by feeding on a higher form of victuals: not the “fodder or straw” of irrational passions but rather the “spiritual bread” of rational thought.¹³⁶ Thus tamed, the “flesh” is no longer master over the soul, but instead the soul may “make use of the help and service of the flesh,”¹³⁷ by not allowing it to become “relaxed by indulgence, and to become unsteady through the influence of those pleasures for which it feels a natural delight.”¹³⁸

The soul’s mastery of the body’s passions, however, is not merely an exercise in Pelagian self-perfection, but is effected by the transference of spiritual life by the agency of God. Origen describes the role of divine agency in terms of the role of the Spirit, or rather, the human *pneuma* that is a kind of participation in the divine Spirit. Although, in a sense, the human soul and spirit are localized in the human body, it is within the free choice of the individual as to which of these faculties leads or governs the others: “In another way, soul and spirit and power are in the body, but looked at in another way, the body of the just person is ‘in’ those better parts as if leaning on them and clinging to them.... For the soul of the sinner is in the flesh, while that of the just is in the Spirit.”¹³⁹ Only if this psychic movement takes place can self-mastery occur: that is, the *psychē* can master the *sarx* (“flesh”) only when it has been submitted to the gov-

by zoological imagery in the Bible. Cf. “Origen and the Bestial Soul: A Poetics of Nature,” in *Vigiliae Christianae* 36 (1982): 115–40.

135. *Homilies on Genesis* 1, 14–15.

136. Cf. *Commentary on John* 13, 205–13. Jean Laporte shows the comparison to Origen’s *Homilies on Genesis* by noting that these holy thoughts are the “*herbs et des fruits de la terre*” of Genesis. See “La chute,” 328.

137. *Commentary on Romans* 4, 14.

138. *On First Principles* 3, 4, 4.

139. *Commentary on Matthew* 13, 2.

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ernance of the *pneuma*. This movement inserts the human soul into the source of divine life itself, thereby rendering it capable of overpowering the brutish potency of the flesh. This is not merely an immanent event but a transcendent one, since the human *pneuma* is itself a divine gift, the end result being that our bodies will “no longer be energized by our souls but by Christ Himself.”¹⁴⁰ Origen’s insight here is that the very survival of the human person depends upon his being drawn into a source entirely outside himself, by becoming “one spirit” with God: the soul, in effect, comes into its own by forsaking its “soul-ness” and becoming “altogether spiritual”: “[The sons of God are those] who, mortifying their members on earth, and, rising above not only their corporeal nature, but even the uncertain and fragile movements of the soul [*animae*] itself, have united themselves to the Lord, being made altogether spiritual, that they may be forever one spirit with Him, discerning along with Him each individual thing, until they arrive at a condition of perfect spirituality.”¹⁴¹

While the “soul” (*psychē*) must be transcended, it can never be entirely forsaken, since it is not evil in itself but only a defected *nous*. Thus the salvation of man does not require the destruction of the soul, but only its transformation into its original state of *nous*: “the mind [*mens*], falling away from its status and dignity, was made or named ‘soul’ [*anima*] . . . if repaired and corrected, it returns to the condition of the mind.”¹⁴² This “repair and correction” takes its beginning from the moral life, which brings a certain “subtlety” to the soul by freeing it from its earthly constraints and transposing its loyalties to the spiritual realm.¹⁴³ This “mutability” of the soul emerges from its innate relation to spirit, inasmuch as the two, in the words of Mark Edwards, are “naturally convertible, as each can acquire the moral properties of the other.”¹⁴⁴ The process begun in the moral life, however, must be completed in the eschatological purification, which will bring about a transformation not only of soul, but of the body as well:

140. 1 Corinthians Frag.

142. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 4.

144. Edwards, “Christ or Plato,” 17–18.

141. *On First Principles* 1, 8, 4.

143. Cf. Verbeke, *L'évolution*.

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[Origen's eschatology] requires the full, substantial coalescence of soul with spirit and the attenuation of body to the finest state possible for a vehicle of the soul. Only a moral chastisement, which is also an essential transformation, will equip us to behold the eternal mysteries: since body is the shadow of the soul, and the companion of its destiny, the spiritual construction of the Gospels strikes no bargains with the weakness of the flesh.¹⁴⁵

The soul, then, must become entirely transformed into *nous* under the governing agency of the *pneuma*, whereas the body, without requiring a complete transformation, need be at least attenuated to the least obstructive state possible, which may be called the state of a "spiritual body."

The transformation of the soul into mind, for Origen, is the culmination of the soul's weary struggle toward intellectual growth during its earthly life. For even in his earthly state man is not deprived of participation in the divine *Logos*, however minimal; but the normal mental development of the human person is taken to an entirely new level by the eschatological consummation: "The *Logos* in man, in which we have said that our whole race had part, is spoken of in two senses: first, in that of the filling up of ideas which takes place, prodigies excepted, in every one who passes beyond the age of boyhood, but secondly, in that of the consummation, which takes place only in the perfect."¹⁴⁶ The vast difference between the two levels of participation is found reflected in the human and divine natures of Christ, respectively.¹⁴⁷ When perfectly joined to the divine *Logos* the mind becomes "one spirit" with him,¹⁴⁸ where it feeds upon divine Wisdom itself with the angels, rather than the "fodder or straw" of bodily goods.¹⁴⁹ The vocation of the mind causes it to rest in no other end than Truth itself, in which it finds the understanding of itself and all things, an understanding only possible when bodily senses have been superseded:

145. *Ibid.*, 21.

146. *Commentary on John* 1, 42.

147. "Perhaps the former meaning is to be recognized in the words 'The *Logos* was made flesh,' but the second in 'The *Logos* was God.'" *Ibid.*

148. *Ibid.* 20, 134.

149. *Ibid.* 13, 212-13.

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And thus the rational nature, growing by each individual step, not as it grew in this life in flesh, and body, and soul [*anima*], but enlarged in mind and in power of perception, is raised as a mind [*mente*] already perfect to perfect knowledge, no longer at all impeded by those carnal senses, but increased in intellectual growth; and ever gazing purely, and, so to speak, face to face, on the causes of things, it attains perfection.¹⁵⁰

In Origen's view, then, the soul's transformation into mind is congruent with the effective transference of its affections from material things to the intellectual intuition of truth itself. Origen's particular view of the mind/soul relationship, in sum, allows him to present a unique anthropological and cosmic framework into which to situate the Christian experience of moral ascesis and spiritual combat.

The Role of the Mind/Soul of Christ

The genuinely Christian character of Origen's framework comes out most clearly in the role that Jesus Christ, the Incarnate *Logos*, plays in the system, a role that is not incidental but essential to its integral cohesiveness. The dynamic between the transcendent *nous* and human *psychē* of Jesus, both of which are necessary for his full humanity, becomes for Origen the very mode of human salvation. That is, the unique character of the mind of Christ allows the Incarnate *Logos* to serve both as moral exemplar and as the agent of human divinization. In this way, Origen's anthropology remains intrinsically dependent upon a prior Christology.

Although the full humanity of the Incarnate Word would not become a central subject of intra-church debate until the fierce Christological debates of the fifth century, Origen himself leaves no doubt about the genuine manhood of Christ. Merely to admit that the *Logos* took on "flesh" is inadequate, Origen claims, unless one also adds that he took on a genuine human soul.¹⁵¹ Commenting on

150. *On First Principles* 2, 11, 7.

151. *Ibid.* 2, 8, 2: "But the nature of the Incarnation will render unnecessary any inquiry into the soul of Christ. For as He truly possessed flesh, so also He truly possessed a soul (*animam*)."

the child Jesus' "growth in wisdom and in stature" (Lk 2:52), Origen lashes out at those who would deny the Lord's true humanity: "They should learn that a divine being came into a human body—and not only into a human body, but also into a human soul!"¹⁵² Anticipating the soteriological arguments of the fourth-century Cappadocians, Origen argues that since mankind is "composite"—that is, composed of three parts—Christ had to assume all three parts in order to save mankind in his entirety: "For the whole man would not have been saved if he had not assumed the whole man."¹⁵³ This subject forms one of the central questions explored in Origen's famous *Dialogue with Heraclides*, where Origen uses this formulation to explore Christ's final ejaculation, "Lord, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46).¹⁵⁴ Christ's possession of a genuine human soul takes on an additional soteriological significance inasmuch as Christ's experience of psychic sufferings, as reported in the Gospels, make no sense apart from the possession of a human *psychē*.¹⁵⁵

Origen is careful, however, to distinguish between this human "soul" and the preexistent "mind" of the *Logos*, the latter of which serves as the central agent of human redemption. The problem of redemption for Origen emerges from its requirement that the divine *Logos* be somehow united to the fleshly condition of man. *Logos* as such is immaterial and impassible, and hence metaphysically incompatible with flesh. The flesh, for its part, is inherently opposed to spirit—hence reconciliation between the two appears impossible. Enter *nous*, an organ that is, in the phrase of Rowan Williams, "open at both ends," fundamentally opposed to neither flesh nor spirit, while poised between the two by its own inherent dynamism of free will.¹⁵⁶ The *nous* can join itself to flesh and perform "psychic" functions while at the same time remain "spiritualized" by its union with

152. *Homilies on Luke* 19, 1.

153. *Dialogue with Heraclides* 7.

154. *Ibid.*

155. Cf. Williams, "Origen on the Soul of Jesus." Williams even blames the widespread abandonment of belief in Christ's soul by "mainstream" Christian writers of the third and fourth centuries on the Church's abandonment of an Origenist cosmology.

156. *Ibid.*, 132.

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Spirit. Hence *nous* emerges as the mediating organ of salvation, or, in the phrase of Alain Le Boulluec, it plays a “heuristic role” as an explanatory model for the union of God and flesh.¹⁵⁷ Hence, when Celsus mocks as ridiculous the Christian notion that, in the Incarnation, a body becomes divine, Origen counters that neither body nor soul become God *as such*: rather, they are utilized by God as an “instrument” (*organo*).¹⁵⁸ Christ’s body and soul are the *recipients* of divinizing grace, not the *means*, a task that falls to the divine *nous* alone.

More importantly, Origen’s distinction between *nous* and *psychē* in Christ allows for the possibility of the redemption of man. Origen offers two sets of arguments in this regard, one cosmological and the other moral. As to the first, Origen observes that the redemption of man requires a “condescension” from above, not only of the divine *Logos*, but of a perfected human mind already united to this *Logos*. The preexistent mind of Jesus, when all other minds had fallen away, clung indefatigably to the supramundane *Logos*: “Reason [*Logos*], we say, dwelt in the soul of Jesus, and was united to Him in a degree far above all other souls.”¹⁵⁹ This intimate union so far excels all other unions that “the person of Jesus . . . is not a different being from [the *Logos*].”¹⁶⁰ It is this divinized human mind, then, the highest element of the person, that stoops to assume the lower elements of the person, that is, body and soul, allowing them to share in its own divinization: this divinized mind, “in that he has taken up the whole man, stirred up the other human elements in him.”¹⁶¹ By this union the lower elements themselves are divinized: “With respect to his mortal body, and the human soul which it contained, we assert that not by their communion merely with Him, but by their unity and intermixture, they received the highest powers, and after participating in His divinity, were changed into God.”¹⁶² This union does not, of course, involve the *Logos* in wickedness or suffering, since the em-

157. Alain Le Boulluec, “Controverses au sujet de la doctrine d’Origène sur l’âme du Christ,” in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1985), 223–37.

158. *Against Celsus* 2, 9.

159. *Ibid.* 5, 39.

160. *Ibid.* 6, 48.

161. *Commentary on John* 32, 225.

162. *Against Celsus* 4, 85.

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bodiment is not for the purpose of chastisement or correction, but rather as a “condescension” to human weakness, that human flesh might be lifted to the contemplation of God.¹⁶³ Once these lower elements are divinized, they are “used” as instruments of salvation, for example, by undergoing salvific suffering and death.¹⁶⁴

Hence, the human *psychē as such* cannot play a salvific role; only a preexistent, unfallen *nous* united to the *Logos* is capable of mediating between God and man:

Origen very naturally takes it for granted that the *psychē* as such cannot be the organ of salvation. In its empirical condition it is not really *capax Dei*, and becomes such only when it ceases to be *psychē*. Thus a *nous* embedded in *psychē*, as ours are, functioning as part of *psychē*, is equally incapable of saving power: it is necessary (if like is to be redeemed by like) to suppose the existence of a *nous* which is not “naturally” part of a *psychē*—an unfallen spiritual individual, free of “psychic” constraint. And the existence of such an individual depends strictly upon the *nous*’ condition not being determined only in and by the history of *this* world. If any *nous* is free of psychic association, there must be supra-historical *noes*.¹⁶⁵

The preceding observation by Rowan Williams, as he demonstrates further in the referenced article, receives ample confirmation from the Trinitarian debates of the third and fourth centuries. Positing a transcendent, perfected *nous*—itself subject to divinization by the *Logos* while simultaneously serving as the means of divinizing the lower elements of human nature—allowed Origen to avoid the vexing problem of directly associating *Logos* and *psychē*, since the *nous* was readily available as a transcendent mediator. The only other solutions proved hopeless. Paul of Samosata (AD 200–275) allowed the *Logos* and *psychē* to remain distinct and was rightly accused of teaching “two sons.” Arius allowed the two to intermingle, thus implicitly denying the transcendent divinity of the *Logos* by suggesting that he is possible. Apollinarius escaped the dilemma only by collapsing the two and denying that Jesus had a genuine soul at all, thereby

163. Ibid.

164. Ibid. 2, 9.

165. Williams, “Origen on the Soul of Jesus,” 34.

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compromising his genuine humanity. It seems that Origen's synthesis, whatever problems it may raise of its own, was capable at least of avoiding these dilemmas, simply because he realized that the attempt to juxtapose directly the divine *Logos* with a human soul was doomed to failure.¹⁶⁶

Origen defends the necessity of a perfected *nous* in Christ with a second argument, this one moral in nature. The *nous* in Christ "condescends" to become a *psychē* without contracting the stain of sin that normally precedes or accompanies such a transformation. This makes the soul of Christ the lone exception to the general rule that "every human soul ... is stained with vices."¹⁶⁷ "This soul," Origen says of Christ in his *Homilies on Luke*, "had something more than the souls of other men.... The soul of Jesus was never defiled with the stain of sin."¹⁶⁸ The stain of all other souls was contracted in the preexistent state, whereas the soul of Jesus never lapsed from the fiery warmth of the divine love. Consequently this soul, and it alone, is able to impart something the others have lost, to "rekindle" in cooled souls the fire of charity which they once knew, and with which this soul has never ceased to be ablaze.¹⁶⁹ And the *Logos* can communicate this only by a divine condescension, by taking on the lowly elements of flesh and soul, since these cooled souls could never look directly on the glorious face of the *Logos* himself: "Condescending occasionally to the weakness of him who is unable to look upon the splendors and brilliance of the Deity, He becomes as it were flesh, speaking with a literal voice, until he who has received Him in such a form is able, through being elevated in some slight degree by the teaching of the Word, to gaze upon what is, so to speak, His real and pre-eminent appearance."¹⁷⁰ The "condescension" of the *nous* of Christ, in other words, is an element of the moral pedagogy that is a part of the larger divine economy of salvation, whereby the soul of Christ becomes a "model soul" that, by means of imitation, can become a way of salvation. What is

166. This and the preceding historical interpretations are drawn from *ibid.*, 134–37.

167. *Homilies on Luke* 19, 1.

168. *Ibid.*

169. Laporte, "La chute," 332.

170. *Against Celsus* 4, 85.

more, the free adhesion to the divine love on the part of the soul of Christ demonstrates the commensurability of free will on the one hand, and the permanent and immutable adhesion of love on the other, since the soul of Christ never ceases to be free despite the fact that it remains indefectibly united to the Godhead.¹⁷¹ In this way, the dynamic between the transcendent *nous* and human *psychē* of Jesus, both of which are necessary for his full humanity, becomes for Origen the very mode of human salvation.

Conclusion and Comparison

To understand Origen's contributions to the classical mind/soul discussion, it is necessary to appreciate the problems bequeathed to him. The relationship between the vital and the cognitive principles within mankind had troubled thinkers far earlier than Plato, and Plato's attempts to harmonize them had been only partially successful, leading to the crisis of their separation in Middle Platonism. The question of how to relate these two principles in a synthetic way, without collapsing the two into one or violating the integrity of the human person, had not been successfully answered by Origen's contemporaries. Origen, however, approaches the question not as an exclusively philosophical but also as a theological problem, in light of man's creation in God's image and his reincorporation into the divine *Logos*.

Origen's decisive move is to resolve these tensions by identifying these two functions—vital and cognitive—as the same principle operating at different levels of moral functioning. This selfsame principle when turned away from God functions primarily as a vital principle ("soul"), and when turned toward God functions primarily as a cognitive principle ("mind"). Hence the two are successfully related without being collapsed or entirely separated. Origen's system preserves the unique features of each principle, giving each its own proper scope of operation, while at the same time preserving

171. Le Boulluec, "Controverses au sujet," 235–37.

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the “psychophysical” integrity of the human person. The distinctive elements of the human person—body and spirit on the outer limits, and mind and soul on the inner limits—combine and interrelate to form the dynamic compound of the human person.

Even more, Origen’s anthropological vision is able to incorporate this mind/soul phenomenon into the larger context of the moral and spiritual life, since the degree to which any particular rational creature is “mind” or “soul” is directly proportionate to its level of moral and spiritual striving. Those who live according to the flesh are carnalized; those who live according to the Spirit are spiritualized. And the path to spiritualization is not one that the Christian finds for himself, for it has been blazed already by the quintessential mind/soul exemplar, Jesus Christ himself, who lived a fully human life while remaining fully united to God by means of his own perfected mind.

PART 3

HISTORY OF THE TWO SOULS

An Examination of Their Relationship



CHAPTER 6

Preexistence of Souls



After examination of Origen's view of the "higher soul" and "lower soul," in relation to his philosophical contemporaries and predecessors, it remains to outline a cosmic "history" of the soul, to trace its role in Origen's grand vision of salvation history. This history begins for Origen not in this life but in a previous, preexistent state. The Middle Platonic tradition had a long history of speculation about such a state, beginning in the writings of Plato himself, and Origen draws extensively from the vocabulary and concepts of this tradition. Yet Origen's view of the preexistent state is vastly different from that of the philosophical schools, inasmuch as his is framed primarily by the theological concepts of God and creation, divine providence and justice, and the Trinity. For Origen, the preexistent state was not Plato's supracosmic world of Ideas, nor the Middle Platonic realm of eternal, disembodied divinities. It was, rather, the prehistory of the Bride of Christ, the creation of a Trinitarian God through his own providential wisdom.

Preexistence in Plato

Plato's view of the preexistent state is almost entirely conveyed to us in mythical form, making its actual philosophical content difficult to discern. Yet by tracing references to the preexistent state through Plato's dialogues, we can discern certain features that stand

out readily. As we shall see below, Plato associates the soul's preexistence with the realm of the eternal Ideas, to which it is related due to its epistemological mode of functioning. From this relationship arise certain qualities that the preexistent souls share with the eternal Ideas, several of which will be assessed below.

The doctrine of the soul's preexistence happens into Plato's early dialogues almost by happenstance, always on the periphery of his anthropology but never central to it.¹ It "happens" simply because preexistence is the only way of explaining Plato's epistemological doctrine of innatism, or "recollection," which is central to his philosophical system.² (Preexistence does become more and more central to Plato's system as his dialogues progress, it seems, and in his later dialogues it is rarely left out of the picture.) Both the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* argue, based upon the observation that teaching is a form of "midwifery," that the soul must have had a previous existence in the World of Ideas in order to possess innate knowledge of them.³ He adds to this another argument from the "law of opposites": that the cosmos operates cyclically and life could come only from that which was formerly alive.⁴ In these dialogues very little is actually said by way of a description of such a primordial, preexistent state. Little more could be expected, of course, since the experience of this state would require abstracting all that is bodily from our present experience, certainly an impossible feat, so the most that we are given is through the genre of mythology.⁵

1. See G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1935), 123–24. "The myth [of the preexistent soul] is an addendum, not an argument. At least until in his later dialogues immortality followed from premises he had by then worked into his philosophy, Plato was inclined not to treat the belief in it as the main argument for, but only as an added inducement to, the good life."

2. For Plato's doctrine of recollection, see Dominic Scott's *Recollection and Experience: Plato's Theory of Learning and Its Successors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Nicholas P. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* (Hackett Publishing, 1976); Norman Gulley, "Plato's Theory of Recollection," *Classical Quarterly* (1954): 194–213; O. Balaban, "The Paradox of the *Meno* and Plato's Theory of Recollection," *Semiotica* 98 (1994): 265–75.

3. *Meno* 81–86; *Phaedo* 73–95, e.g.

4. *Phaedo* 69–72.

5. "We cannot hold it against Plato, any more than we held it against Hamlet, that

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It is enough, though, at this stage, to note that this hypothetical preexistent state connects the soul to the Ideas, with which it possesses a natural kinship. This kinship is demonstrated by the soul's present mode of knowledge: given that the objects of knowledge (Ideas) are immaterial, so must be the soul, based on the principle that "only like knows like."⁶ So run the typical arguments presented in the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*.⁷ The soul must therefore share many (if not all) of the qualities of the Ideas, qualities that will be discussed below. The body, for its part, is altogether unsuited for such contemplation.⁸ For the present, however, it suffices to conclude that the soul's preexistence is in Plato's mind inextricably tied to its affinity to the Ideas, the realm of which constitute the locus of the preexistent state. The term "locus," of course, is not intended in a physical way, since the Ideas are immaterial; Plato's association of this realm with the stars or heavens is strictly mythical and not metaphysical.⁹ The paradigmatic aspect of these Ideas—in relation to the sensible world, that is—is well known and hardly needs pointing out, though this aspect will be taken in some interesting directions in the future.

We turn our attention now to the *qualities* of the souls in the preexistent state, qualities that (as we shall see) are determined by their association with the realm of Ideas. We shall focus our attention on three questions in particular: Are the souls divine? Are the souls simple (and consequently, disembodied)? And do the souls possess what might be called "individual personality"? The first question, of the soul's divinity, is a convoluted one for Plato, since one is left

he cannot tell us what eternal life is like." Grube, *Plato's Thought*, 316. Of course, a preexistent state could also be the soul's presence in another body, but this too is not without its epistemological problems.

6. E.g., *Timaeus* 34–35.

7. *Phaedo* 80, a10–b5: "The soul is most like the divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and unchangeable." The other main argument is from the origin of motion in *Laws* 10.

8. *Ibid.*

9. A metaphysical interpretation of Plato's association of the divine souls with astral bodies cannot be ruled out, of course, but this should not lead us to locate the entire realm of Ideas spatially within the astral sphere. For this point, cf. *Timaeus*, 246b–d and *Republic* 508a.

to work with a very muddled (from a Christian standpoint, at least) picture of the Deity from his dialogues. There is some confusion as to whether or not the soul itself is created or uncreated, although certainly in the *Phaedrus* the soul is "fashioned" by the Demiurge,¹⁰ who may or may not be God.¹¹ In the *Timaeus* the souls are definitely created, though certainly not in the later, Christian sense of that word.¹² The *Timaeus* also tells of the "young gods," themselves also creations of the Demiurge, who remain absorbed in the contemplation of the Ideas as models for the souls to imitate.¹³ It seems, although it is by no means certain, that the human soul shares the same nature as these gods, the differences between them being reducible to varying degrees of moral rectitude.¹⁴ At the very least, the soul is "most like" the divine,¹⁵ possessing true being; hence it is appropriate to refer to it in some sense as "divine": "As regards the most important part of our soul we must think this: that a god has given it as a spirit to each of us, that which we say dwells in the top part of the body, to lift us from the earth to its kindred in heaven, for we are not of earthly but divine nature."¹⁶ It may make more sense to conclude that, for Plato, the souls are simply thoughts in the divine Mind, fashioned by God yet not substantially distinct from him.¹⁷

Next we arrive at the question of the soul's simplicity. The soul's

10. *Phaedrus* 246a. Harry A. Wolfson, surprisingly, claims that the souls in the *Phaedrus* are uncreated. See *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948), 1:367.

11. John Dillon argues effectively that the Demiurge *is* God, notwithstanding the attempts of later Middle Platonists such as Numenius to deny this. See "Pleroma and Noetic Cosmos: A Comparative Study," in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, ed. Richard Wallis and Jay Bregman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 100–101.

12. *Timaeus* 41d.

13. *Ibid.* 253c.

14. "Whether the class of divine souls is to be identified with the class of souls animating immortal organisms, I cannot make out. The natural inference is, perhaps, that it is. Since the souls which animate mortal organisms are those with damaged wings, we are presumably to infer that those which animate the immortal organisms represent the condition from which human souls have fallen away." I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (London: Routledge, 1962), 327.

15. *Phaedo*, 80, a10–b5.

16. *Republic* 90a.

17. See Dillon, "Pleroma and Noetic Cosmos," 100–101.

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simplicity arises from its kinship with the Ideas: "The soul is most like the divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and unchangeable."¹⁸ This is due to the soul's being fashioned out of a blending of Existence, Sameness, and Difference.¹⁹ In fact, the soul's immortality (which is at stake in the argument, at least in the *Phaedo*) is a logical corollary of its simplicity: not having parts, it cannot decompose or die.²⁰ The soul's "intelligibility" is obviously connected to its bodilessness, since these souls (along with the Ideas) are entirely spiritual.²¹ We should also note that, even if Plato believes the soul incapable of essential change, it is certainly capable, for obvious reasons—not the least the soul's imminent incarnation—of at least accidental change. Even the seemingly uncontroversial claim of the soul's simplicity, however, is compromised by the image of the heavenly charioteer in the *Phaedrus*, suggesting as it does that heavenly souls are tripartite.²² We may add to this the suggestion in the *Timaeus* that the immortal soul is fashioned by the Demiurge, and that the "young gods" fashion the two mortal parts of the soul.²³ These suggestions may be difficult to reconcile, unless we allow ourselves to dismiss the mythological elements of the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*,²⁴ or perhaps (and with more justification) to view these elements as complications arising from the incarnation of the souls and not properly belonging to their preexistent state. In sum, the simplicity of preexistent souls implies their immortality, incorporeality, and at least relative impassibility.

18. *Phaedo* 80, a10–b5.

19. *Timaeus* 41d–42d.

20. See *Timaeus* 41b.

21. I. M. Crombie does suggest that the souls of the gods possess astral bodies, though he admits that this is conjecture. Cf. Crombie, *Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, 327.

22. *Phaedrus* 246b–d. "There is, indeed, a difficulty as to whether it is to the whole tripartite soul or only to its rational part that [Plato] wishes to attribute these characteristics [i.e., immortality and preexistence]. The source of the difficulty is partly to be found in the fact that Plato's language on these matters is almost always tinged with a greater or smaller admixture of imaginative myth." A. E. Taylor, *The Mind of Plato* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 84.

23. *Timaeus* 69a–72d.

24. "For the Platonic *philosophy* the myths can hardly be said to have any direct significance." Taylor, *Mind of Plato*, 94, emphasis in original.

We come at last to the closely related question of whether Plato's preexistent souls possess what we would call "individual personality." On this question interpretations of Plato differ wildly, not only from interpretations of one dialogue to those of another but between divergent interpretations of the same dialogue. That there are individual differences among Plato's preexistent souls appears self-evident, although the reasons for it are never clear.²⁵ These differences, according to John Dillon, amount to a distinct "point of view ... almost its own personality" for each individual soul.²⁶ Yet this individuality would seem compromised by the relation of the individual soul to the World Soul, and by virtue of this, to all other souls. G. M. A. Grube is of the opinion that the aim of the Platonic soul is "to live on the universal plane, to *lose himself* more and more in the contemplation of truth, so that the perfect psyche would, it seems, lose itself completely in the universal mind, the world-psyche."²⁷ I. M. Crombie supposes a divergence between the "anti-personalist" soul of the *Phaedo*, whose individuality is shattered by the process of reincarnation, and the highly personalized soul of the *Timaeus*, which (at least in its immortal part) is given a tour of the universe and taught how its free actions will affect its fate.²⁸ While these divergent opinions must be allowed to stand for now, it seems hard to deny that souls possess *some kind* of individuality in the preexistent state, although this individuality is always contextualized (though not abolished) by the "corporate" character of this state.

In summary, while Plato's view of the preexistent state is difficult to sort into a systematic framework, in part due to its mythical character and in part due to the (related) inconsistencies between his dialogues, certain features do stand out. Souls preexist solely due to their natural kinship with the eternal Ideas, which it is their task to

25. Harry Wolfson claims that the *Phaedo* posits eternally subsistent differences, the *Timaeus* posits differences arising from the free agency of the divine will. See Wolfson, *Philo*, 367.

26. Dillon, "Pleroma and the Noetic Cosmos," 100–101.

27. See Grube, *Plato's Thought*, 148, emphasis in original.

28. See Crombie, *Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, 324, 334.

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contemplate both in that state and (to a lesser extent) in the present. Due to this same kinship the preexistent souls share certain qualities with these Ideas, such as simplicity, bodilessness, and at least a participatory divinity, while at the same time retaining certain features of individuality.

Preexistence in the Middle Platonists

While the essential framework of Plato on this issue is assumed as the backdrop of Middle Platonic speculation on the preexistent state, many other aspects change, as certain features (like Plato's theory of reminiscence) are quietly dropped and other features are not only accentuated, but systematized to a sharp degree. Middle Platonic authors tend to associate the preexistent soul more with the *Logos* than with a transcendent realm of self-subsistent Ideas, and to view the mind of the *Logos* not only as an archetype of the sensible world, but as the unfallen predecessor to a fallen state. Secondly, a new interest in demonology helps to fashion a new consensus on the relationship between human souls, demons, and the gods. These developments, which emerge not in an organized fashion but rather as general patterns and inconsistent trends, will all converge in the figure of Origen, who will work closely within these same patterns and trends.

We may begin our survey of Middle Platonism with Antiochus of Ascalon in the first century, by many accounts the founder of this "movement." Already a minimizing of Plato's theory of recollection is evident, and Antiochus seems to downplay (if not deny) the objective, transcendent existence of the eternal Ideas, which for Antiochus exist only "in the mind of the beholder."²⁹ Yet in Antiochus we also find a definitive move, taken under Stoic influence, of identifying Plato's Ideas with the *logoi spermatikoi* in the mind of the *Logos*, after which the physical world is patterned.³⁰ This move would be taken

29. *Acad. Post.* 30. See the treatment of John Dillon in *The Middle Platonists*, 91–96; Dillon sees Antiochus as denying the realm of Ideas due to Stoic influence.

30. Cf. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 95.

by nearly every Middle Platonist after Antiochus. His Stoic influence notwithstanding, there seems to be some evidence that Antiochus retained Plato's belief in the soul's immortality and divinity.³¹ From Antiochus's pupil Varro we can deduce that he posited souls at each level of the universe, immortal souls (gods or *daemones*?) in the ether and mortal souls on earth.³² (Antiochus's claim that the soul's proper environment is the astral sphere is meant, it seems, more literally than Plato's.) We might infer, then, that mortal souls share a common nature with the immortal souls but have "fallen" in a fashion reminiscent of the *Phaedrus*, and thence been joined to mortal bodies. In sum, Antiochus retains Plato's belief in a divine, preexistent state of the soul while denying that this state has any connection with the eternal Ideas, a connection so essential for Plato.

Eudorus of Alexandria seems to follow Antiochus in identifying the Ideas with *logoi spermatikoi* in the mind of the *Logos*, by means of which the physical universe is generated.³³ Under Pythagorean influence, he makes the additional step of identifying the Ideas with eternal numbers, the generation of which results in the creation of the soul.³⁴ The soul is not, however, "created" in the strict sense, since it is eternal and has no temporal beginning; it emerges from God extratemporally.³⁵ We have no reports about Eudorus's teaching on the incarnation of the soul or on any of the other questions raised by Antiochus.

Skipping ahead for the moment to Alcinous, we find a resurgent interest in Plato's theory of recollection. After identifying the Ideas with thoughts in the Mind of God, he repeats Plato's theory of recollection as a means of demonstrating the preexistence of the soul: "There is no other way in which learning could come about than as a result of the recollection of things that one had known in a previous

31. These affirmations are found in two Ciceronian texts that John Dillon sees as reflecting Antiochus's influence; *ibid.*, 97–99. It seems more likely, however, that they reflect the influence of Posidonius more than that of Antiochus.

32. *Ibid.*, 90–91.

33. *Ibid.*, 128–29.

34. This position of Eudorus is reported by Plutarch's *Proc. An.* 103b.

35. *Ibid.*, 1019e–1020e.

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existence. . . . We form concepts, then, by means of recollection, stimulated by small sparks, on the basis of individual sense-data recollecting things we knew in a previous existence, of which we acquired forgetfulness when we entered the body.”³⁶ Having demonstrated a previous existence for the soul, Alcinous claims that the human soul shares a common nature with the divine souls, even to the point of sharing a tripartite structure.³⁷ All rational souls (Alcinous hedges on whether or not this applies to irrational souls) are thus intrinsically “godlike” and divine, though this is compromised somewhat by their embodiment.³⁸ The soul thus has no temporal beginning: at the point when it is incarnated, it is not “created” by God but rather “wakened” by him. To the soul’s divinity and immortality Alcinous adds that it is ungenerated, indestructible, imperishable, incorporeal, unchanging, invisible, uniform, indissoluble and indispensible.³⁹ Alcinous’s tendency to exaggerate the primal dignity of the soul is a means of underlining the tragedy of its “fall” into the temporal realm, for which Alcinous has nothing but disdain.

The culmination of these same tendencies can be found in Plutarch. In the realm of first principles Plutarch distinguishes between a transcendent *Logos* (the mind of God) and an immanent *Logos* (the realm of Ideas), the latter of which serve as the paradigm of the world.⁴⁰ Creation comes about when the “Maleficent Soul” assaults the realm of Ideas, which become disordered and result in the sensible realm, a type of “anti-cosmos.” The soul has a temporal beginning, fashioned from the fallen World Soul, whereas the mind (*nous*) is a transcendent and preexistent entity. This “mind” or higher soul shares a common nature with gods and *daemones*, whom Plutarch views on a dynamic, fluctuating scale, whereby a being may move up and down by way of promotions and demotions. Human souls were once gods and may become so again, passing through the daemonic

36. *Didaskalos* 25.

37. *Ibid.* 24. How a soul can be tripartite while remaining incorporeal is never satisfactorily explained by Alcinous and remains a glaring problem.

38. *Ibid.* 23.

39. *Ibid.* 25.

40. *De Is.* 373ab.

stage in the process.⁴¹ Here we see a clear Persian or even Gnostic influence penetrating Plutarch's thought, moving as it does far beyond the pale of Platonic speculation.

We will now return to Philo, whose importance as a "bridge" between Middle Platonism and the Alexandrian Christianity of Origen must not be underestimated. Philo interprets Plato's intelligible and sensible worlds through the lens of the "double creations" of the Genesis account. Like the others he puts the Ideas (which he also identifies as numbers) in the mind of the *Logos*, which become the *logoi spermatikoi* of the created world. God is the Archetype of the *Logos*, who is in turn the archetype of all sensible things.⁴² In this intelligible world (located in the air) preexist the rational souls or minds (*noēta zōa*), which result from the free, creative action of God.⁴³ Hence while immortal, the soul is not ungenerated, since it has a temporal beginning.⁴⁴ While many scholars prefer to see Philo's preexistent realm as pure, unadulterated Platonism,⁴⁵ Gerald Bostock rightly identifies strong Jewish traditions that undergirded Philo's speculations: Jewish apocryphal texts held that the Messiah, the patriarchs, and even Israel itself were preexistent.⁴⁶ This doctrine also has a corporate dimension, arising from the Jewish notion of the preexistent body of the "elect" or "righteous."

Philo the Jew could hardly believe the preexistent souls to be di-

41. *On the Obsolescence of Oracles* 416c.

42. Harry Wolfson distinguishes three "stages" of the *Logos's* existence: (1) the *Logos* as the mind of God, with the ideas being identical with God; (2) the *Logos* as an intelligible creation of God with the ideas in *its* mind as archetypal patterns of creation; and (3) the *Logos* as imminent in the sensible world, whose ideas are the *logoi spermatikoi* of this world. See Wolfson, *Philo*, 374–75.

43. *Ibid.*, 367–68.

44. *Conf.* 35, 179.

45. See Dillon, "Pleroma and Noetic Cosmos," 99: "It is safe to say, I think, that such a concept [of a nonmaterial, spiritual, or intelligible world parallel to our physical one] forms no part of traditional Jewish thought."

46. Gerald Bostock, "The Sources of Origen's Doctrine of Pre-Existence," in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Leis (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 259–60: "The doctrine of pre-existence . . . is not simply derived from a Platonism. . . . It is derived rather from Philo, who has absorbed both Platonic and Jewish elements into his thinking. . . . For the doctrine of pre-existence existed in Judaism."

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vine,⁴⁷ although he does propose a common nature between men, demons and angels.⁴⁸ Plato's "young gods" are identified with the *daemones* of Middle Platonic speculation, which in turn are identified with angels and demons of Jewish belief: "living creatures endowed with mind, or rather each of them a mind in itself, excellent through and through and unsusceptible of any evil."⁴⁹ This identification of the angels with "pure minds," biblical "eisegesis" notwithstanding, is thoroughly Platonic. From this preexistent state of equality the souls of men sank into mortal bodies; others (angels) never fell: "Now some of the souls have descended into bodies, but others have never deigned to be brought into union with any of the parts of earth."⁵⁰ These are not two classes of being, however, but simply the same class of being in different states.⁵¹ While in the preexistent state all souls were bodiless, intelligible, and imperishable, as the angels still remain ("bodiless and happy"⁵²). This is all in sharp contrast, of course, to the sensible world and its corresponding soul; Philo shares Plutarch's quasi-Gnostic tendency to exalt the intelligible world at the expense of the sensible.

It seems that, for all of the diversity and apparent untidiness of these Middle Platonic speculations, it is possible to discern a clear and increasingly systematic pattern of thought emerging from them all. Plato's interest in the preexistent realm had been largely epistemological in nature⁵³: the soul's primal kinship with the Ideas made sense of its intellectual activity in its present life. Middle Platonic interest in Plato's epistemological theory of reminiscence is very inconsistent—it does appear in Alcinous and perhaps Philo, but is ignored by many others—yet the desire to associate the soul with a pure, intelligible, and archetypal world remains a nonnegotiable part

47. He does, in *Opif.* 50, 144, describe the astral souls as "divine," but by this he clearly means this in the technical Platonic sense of "imperishable," as is clear from the context.

48. *On the Giants* 3; *Somn.* 1, 22, 140.

49. *Opif.* 46, 72. See *On the Giants* 6–9.

50. *On the Giants* 12.

51. *Ibid.* 16.

52. *Sacr.* 5.

53. Though not exclusively: *Timaeus* evinces a cosmological interest.

of Middle Platonic orthodoxy. Under Stoic influence, however, the Middle Platonists prefer to associate preexistent souls not with an objective realm of self-subsistent Ideas,⁵⁴ but rather with the *Logos*, in whom the archetypal Ideas become the *logoi spermatikoi* of the created order. The preexistent, intelligible life of the rational soul thus becomes not only a means of explaining human knowledge, but an enduring archetype of the ideal man.⁵⁵ Yet alongside the Platonic assumption that the preexistent realm must be archetypal or paradigmatic vis-à-vis the sensible world, we have a development, not altogether new but certainly much more pronounced here than it was in Plato—of seeing the sensible world as an “anti-cosmos” or “fall” from the preexistent state. While this development may owe something to Persian and/or Gnostic systems, it is always described in Platonic terms and is not altogether irreconcilable with Platonic thought, even if such was never envisioned by Plato.

The other major development, with regard to which we have a startling degree of consistency among Middle Platonic philosophers, is the assumption that the human soul (or “mind”) possesses a common nature with unfallen souls that continue to exist in the preexistent realm, souls that are alternatively identified as Plato’s “young gods” or planetary gods, Greek *daemones* or heroes, or the biblical angels. This conclusion can certainly be drawn from Plato’s dialogues, but it is by no means systematized there. Plutarch’s view, that gods, *daemones*, and human souls exist on a dynamic, “sliding scale,” expresses a commonly understood truth among his contemporaries, that there was no substantial difference between such souls, at least before the point when some of them “fell” into mortal bodies. Up to this point, all Middle Platonists agree that they are incorporeal, and most view them as “divine,” at least in some sense, though there is some debate as to whether they are truly eternal or

54. Although the tendency to place this realm in the aerial or astral sphere persists.

55. This element, while it can be explained as fully consistent with Platonic thought, also has important Gnostic parallels. Many Gnostic systems, such as the Valentinian, described Adam as the “perfect man” or archetype of whom all men are the image. See Dillon, “*Pleroma* and the Noetic Cosmos,” 106.

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whether they have a temporal beginning. Toward the end of the period in question, we find in Plutarch and Philo the assumption that such souls should properly be called "minds," the term "soul" indicating a distinct, lower entity. All of these developments can be seen as profoundly affecting the thought of Origen.

Status of the Doctrine of Preexistence in Origen's Thought

Before addressing the content of Origen's doctrine of the preexistent state, it is of course necessary to establish that he believed in such a state at all, the assumption of which is today more and more frequently called into question. Due to the variegated nature of Origen's writing and the unreliability of some of the texts most in question, it is possible that a definitive solution to this question, one that will satisfy all parties, may never be found. Most scholars of Origen, however, remain convinced that, at least in some sense—and this qualification will become very important—Origen did maintain a consistent belief in a preexistent state through his career. To establish this, it will be appropriate to survey the various alternative theories advanced *against* this conclusion and then briefly to theorize as to why these theories have not (yet) won the day.

No one doubts that Origen, at various and manifold places in his writings, proposes the following two theoretical propositions: that (1) before beings existed in the world, they had some previous existence, and that (2) the present state of the human soul is the result of a "fall" from a previous state, although the relation between these two theories is often disputed. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the dual claims is that human souls previously possessed a stable existence in a world anterior to this one, and then "fell" into their present world. Many scholars, however, have granted propositions (1) and (2) above, and proposed interpretations that diverge from this one. I will proceed to catalogue five such interpretative attempts, none of which (in this author's position) is entirely persuasive.

First, in relation to the second proposition stated above, a common suggestion is to propose that, when Origen describes a “fall” from a spiritual existence to the present (fleshly) one, he is speaking on a moral and not a cosmic level. That is, Origen may be referring to a spiritual lapse occurring *within a particular human individual*, that is, a decline in virtue, not a metacosmic lapse from one “world” into another “world.”⁵⁶ Hence, the “fall” into the present state and the “return” to the primal state describe not a transfer from one “world” to another, but rather the workaday cycles of sin and grace, virtue and vice. Second, in relation to the first proposition stated above, it has been proposed that the “previous existence” of existent beings might refer simply to divine foreknowledge of creation, that is, to the existence of the Ideas of created beings in the mind of God before their creation.⁵⁷ Thirdly, the “previous existence” in the first proposition might be something as innocuous as a reference to fetal life *in utero*.⁵⁸ Fourthly, it is proposed that, even if Origen does teach a preexistent state, this state is exclusively for nonhuman beings such as the Greek “heroes,” and does not apply to humans.⁵⁹ Finally, if the young and immature Origen did toy with notions of preexistence, he is often said to have abandoned them quickly upon attaining maturity.⁶⁰

Despite the appeal and heuristic viability of such explanations,

56. See Marguerite Harl, “La préexistence des âmes dans l’oeuvre d’Origène,” in *Origeniana Quarta: Internationalen Origenskongresses*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 248. See Mark J. Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 92–93: “There is no doubt that the cause of the soul’s defection here is boredom or satiety... But is there any evidence that this aberration occurred in a higher sphere? Everything that is said ... appears to concern the trials of the soul on earth as it tries to persevere in the life of faith.... It is probable then that Origen was alluding only to the decay of virtue in the embodied life.” John Dillon, for his part, has given some credence to this explanation as well. Cf. Dillon, “Origen and Plotinus,” 23.

57. See Harl, “La préexistence,” 253.

58. *Ibid.*, 253. See Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 105–6: “We must not misunderstand Origen when he goes on to surmise that God loved Jacob and hated Esau on account of the merits that each of them acquired in “the foregoing life” ... it is therefore clear that [when he says, “before the body”] he means by body only the infant frame as it emerges in parturition.”

59. See Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 92.

60. See Harl, “La preexistence,” 252–56.

most scholars of Origen remain convinced that the Alexandrian did, at least in some sense, maintain a consistent belief in a preexistent state through his career. This conclusion is lent even greater plausibility when viewed against the background of Middle Platonic theorizing. In the formative years of his life in Alexandria, Origen was heavily schooled in a tradition of Middle Platonism that, with near unanimity, assumed the existence of a pure, intelligible, and archetypal world from which human souls had fallen. That we find similar proposals in Origen, using almost identical language, from the beginning of his career to the very end, makes almost moot any suggestion of an entirely distinct frame of thought on this question.⁶¹ If Origen did explicitly reject this Middle Platonic view, it is surprising that he never made this known, since he certainly had no qualms about rejecting the Middle Platonic doctrine of metempsychosis, which he dismisses with much revulsion and rhetorical flourish.⁶² There is no doubt that when treating of a belief of dubious orthodoxy, Origen is masterfully subtle when he wishes to tolerate such a doctrine, but is there also any doubt that he is painfully and deliberately clear when he wishes to distance himself from it? In fact, Origen's frequent nuances, hesitations, and caveats when he discusses the doctrine of preexistence are the greatest proof that he *did* in fact accept it: one might say that Origen "protests too much!"⁶³

61. A thorough survey reveals that references to a preexistent state are found not only in his early *On First Principles*, but also in his later, Caesarean exegetical works, at nearly every point in his career. One might also propose, in response to suggestions that Origen took Genesis 1–3 historically, that Origen never saw historical and allegorical readings of Scripture as mutually exclusive. There is little doubt that Origen believed in a real, historical fault of a real, historical figure, but this does not exclude the possibility (probability?) that Origen also saw this narrative as an allegory for a precosmic fall. See C. P. Bammel, "Adam in Origen," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 62–93.

62. See Ugo Bianchi, "Origen's Treatment of the Soul and the Debate over Metempsychosis," in *Origeniana Quarta: Internationalen Origenskongresses*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 270–81.

63. In *Against Celsus* 5, 29 Origen warns his readers that the doctrine of the preexistence should not be discussed with the simple-minded, which would be a case of "casting pearls before swine." He insists that this question is left ambiguous in the Church's teaching in *On First Principles* Pref. 5, and treats it as a profound mystery, upon which he

It must be admitted, of course, based upon this same evidence, that Origen did not believe his opinions on this subject were to be treated as dogmatic (we might say *de fide*) propositions arising from the rule of faith, but rather as open questions—precisely because the rule of faith does not treat them—upon which he feels competent to propose speculative suggestions.⁶⁴ But that this doctrine in Origen's mind is a hypothesis does not require us to think that he had any doubt about the matter—in fact, the consistency with which he proposes the theory leads us to believe he assumed it was true. One might also point out that, even if this doctrine of Origen's is a hypothesis, he never suggests an alternate one. This doctrine, in other words, was a "working hypothesis," which is closely related to the other elements in Origen's doctrinal synthesis.

Origen's Motivations for Proposing the Doctrine

Yet before assessing Origen's doctrine of the preexistent state, it is necessary to pause once again in order to examine a methodological question, the consideration of which is essential for understanding the weight this doctrine held in Origen's mind. If Origen did, in fact, advance a doctrine of a preexistent state, what were his motivations for doing so? Here we speak, of course, only of heuristic motivations and not psychological, since the latter are far beyond the scope of our investigation.

What first leaps out at the reader, however, is Origen's apparent lack of interest in the Platonic doctrine of reminiscence. It will be remembered, of course, that this doctrine had fallen out of favor with many Middle Platonists, and this trajectory remains true in the case of the Alexandrian theologian as well. Origen spent little enough time reflecting on the soul's faculty of memory at all, and when he does so

does not wish to pronounce, in *Against Celsus* 4, 30. In *On First Principles* 2, 1, 3, he admits that discussing it is "somewhat bold" and "difficult to establish" in Scripture. In his most characteristic caveat, he says in *On First Principles* 2, 8 4, that his opinions are "not to be regarded as advanced by us in a dogmatic manner, but simply as opinions, treated in the style of investigation and discussion."

64. *Ibid.*

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it is never to demonstrate the probability of a preexistent state. Henri Crouzel has suggested only two passages in Origen's entire corpus that hint at the doctrine of reminiscence, and he personally doubts whether these bear the Platonic interpretation.⁶⁵ It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Plato's motivations for supposing a preexistent state are simply not Origen's reasons, and that he retained the doctrine for entirely different motivations. Crouzel elsewhere proposes that Origen's mind may have come to rest upon preexistence as an alternative to two alternate explanations for the origin of souls that prevailed in his day—traducianism and creationism—each of which he found equally heinous.⁶⁶ This is certainly true, though it is inadequate to explain the force and consistency with which Origen promotes the doctrine. It seems best to conclude that Origen found in preexistence a doctrine that was of more apologetic than theoretical value, in that it provided a means of warding off Gnostic claims of moral determinism and cosmic dualism. In reference to the former, the Valentinian Gnostics had proposed a rigid naturalistic determinism, in which each man belonged to the substance of either spirit, soul, or flesh, his fate being determined by his nature without reference to free choice.⁶⁷ For Origen this would spell the ruin of human liberty, for man's fate would be fixed at birth and all subsequent action rendered moot, thus eviscerating the moral life of its meaning.⁶⁸ Man's present condition, for good or for ill, can only be the result of moral choices, and inequalities of birth may then be justified only by free choices committed in a preexistent state. The preexistence thus becomes a means of defending divine justice as well.⁶⁹ This motive is stated so consistently and so clearly in Origen's writings that only a few examples need suffice:

65. See "Anthropologie et cosmologie d'Origène et de Plotin," *Studia Patristica* 26 (1993): 236. Cf. Crouzel, "Idées platoniciennes et raisons stoïciennes dans la théologie d'Origène," in *Studia Patristica* 18 (1989): 365–83. Also, cf. Tripolitis, *Doctrine of the Soul*, 105, 117n515.

66. Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, translated by A.S. Worrall (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 207–8.

67. See Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 174–205.

68. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 28.

69. See Blanc, "L'attitude d'Origène," 848. Cf. Jean Laporte, "Models from Philo in

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What shall we say, then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. If, then, when they were not yet born, and had not done any-thing either good or evil ... how if we do not go back to the works done before this life, can it be said that there is no unrighteousness with God[?]⁷⁰

Or is it not more in conformity with reason, that every soul, for certain mysterious reasons ... is introduced into a body, and introduced according to its deserts and former actions?⁷¹

Some, perhaps, may think that God fills individuals with His Holy Spirit, and bestows upon them sanctification, not on grounds of justice and according to their deserts; but undeservedly. And how shall we escape that declaration: "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!" or this: "Is there respect of persons with God?" For such is the defense of those who maintain that souls come into existence [simultaneously] with bodies.⁷²

To all which instances, those who maintain that everything in the world is under the administration of Divine Providence (as is also our own belief), can, as it appears to me, give no other answer, so as to show that no shadow of injustice rests upon the divine government, than by holding that there were certain causes of prior existence, in consequence of which the souls, before their birth in the body, contracted a certain amount of guilt in their sensitive nature, or in their movements, on account of which they have been judged worthy by Divine Providence of being placed in this condition. For a soul is always in possession of free-will, as well when it is in the body as when it is without it; and freedom of will is always directed either to good or evil. Nor can any rational and sentient being, i.e., a mind or soul, exist without some movement either good or bad. And it is probable that these movements furnish grounds for merit even before they do anything in this world; so that on account of these merits or grounds they are, immediately on their birth, and even before it, so to speak, assorted by Divine Providence for the endurance either of good or evil.⁷³

For it is established by many declarations that all rational creatures are of one nature: on which ground alone could the justice of God in all His dealings with them be defended, seeing every one has the reason in himself, why he has been placed in this or that rank in life.⁷⁴

Origen's Teaching on Original Sin," in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995): 105.

70. *Commentary on John 2*, 180–82.

71. *Against Celsus* 1, 32.

72. *On First Principles* 1, 7, 4.

73. *Ibid.* 3, 3, 5.

74. *Ibid.* 3, 5, 4.

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If protecting divine injustice against Gnostic dualism and determinism was Origen's main motivation for finding solace in the doctrine of predestination, other motives may be surmised as well. For one thing, it made it easier to answer detractors' suggestions that, before the creation of the world, God had been "inactive and immoveable," or that divine omnipotence would have little meaning, had there been a time when God had no beings over whom to exercise his power.⁷⁵ Gerald Bostock also suggests a Christological motive: defending the preexistence of Christ (and for Origen, this included the human soul of Christ) was necessary to safeguard Christ's own divinity, yet it seemed to Origen that a failure to extend this status to all men would compromise the identity of nature between them. In other words, if Christ's humanity preexisted this world, and if His humanity was the same nature as our own, the preexistence of all men seemed to be a logical corollary.⁷⁶ We should not reduce Origen's motivations, however, to the mere observation that preexistence fit neatly into his larger system, for Origen also believed that the doctrine was thoroughly biblical.⁷⁷ And every time he suggests the doctrine, Origen roundly supports it with biblical citations.⁷⁸ Thus, in addition to its alleged biblical support, the doctrine of preexistence also cohered neatly with his larger theological vision and lent support to a number of other doctrines that he found essential.

The Place of the Doctrine in Origen's Thought

If Origen was willing to propose to his fellow believers a notion of preexistence, however, the exact *manner* of this cohesion must be explored. How did this notion fit into his larger, cosmological and theological vision? Origen succeeds in effecting such a cohesion by identifying the Middle Platonic *Logos* with the divine Son, under his appellation as "Wisdom." As will become clear, in relation to the Son,

75. *Ibid.* 3, 5, 3.

76. Gerald B. Bostock, "The Sources of Origen's Doctrine," 259–60.

77. See Blanc, "L'attitude d'Origène," 848.

78. See, e.g., *On First Principles* 1, 7, 4 and 3, 5, 3.

Origen distinguishes between three "orders" of creation: (1) the pre-existent archetypes in the mind of the Son, (2) the preexistent, created intelligible world (of minds, or *logikoi*), and (3) the created sensible world. These "orders" are always situated against the background of the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and of creation, which differentiate them most clearly from Origen's Middle Platonic progenitors.

In relation to the Middle Platonists the tendency was noted of preferring to see the preexistent state not as an objective, self-subsistent realm of Ideas, but rather as the collection of *logoi spermaticoi* in the mind of the archetypal *Logos*. This tendency is found to the same degree in Origen, who has little use for a Platonic world of Ideas, but whose interest lies instead in the relation of these ideas to the *Logos*, or Son. That Origen rejected the Platonic world of ideas is affirmed by the majority of Origen scholars, but a simple passage from Origen himself is all that we need:

Now, of this world we have said beforehand, that the explanation was difficult; and for this reason, that there might not be afforded to any an occasion of entertaining the supposition that we maintain the existence of certain images which the Greeks call "Ideas," for it is certainly alien to our [biblical writers] to speak of an incorporeal world existing in the imagination alone, or in the fleeting world of thoughts; and how they can assert either that the Saviour comes from thence, or that the saints will go thither, I do not see.⁷⁹

The notion of such an intelligible world, conceived apart from the divine *Logos*, is unimaginable for Origen, for this would posit a realm of intelligence upon which the *Logos* himself would be dependent.

Yet Origen does not abandon the concept altogether: rather, like his Middle Platonist forebears, Origen merges the language of Platonic Ideas with the concepts of Stoic reason-principles, thereby placing in the mind of the divine *Logos* (who for Origen is the second person of the Trinity) the spermatic principles of creation. These are both divine mysteries contained in the Word, and at the same time

79. *On First Principles* 2, 3, 6. Cf. Jean Daniélou, *Origen*, trans. Walter Mitchell (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 75–76; Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 104; Crouzel, "Idées platoniciennes."

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principles that inform matter and are the origin of sensible beings.⁸⁰ Hence Origen adopts the Stoic notion of the *koinē ennoia*, positioned within the intelligible world within the *Logos*, which the human intelligence is able to comprehend with the help of the divine Spirit.⁸¹ Origen connects the idea of the *Logos* as repository of reason-principles of creation with the notion of “Wisdom,” one of the biblical *epinoia* given to Christ:

But Christ is Demiurge as a beginning [*archē*], inasmuch as He is Wisdom. It is in virtue of His being wisdom that He is called *archē*. For Wisdom says in Solomon: “God created me the beginning of His ways, for His works” [Prv 8:22], so that the Word might be in an *archē*, namely, in Wisdom. Considered in relation to the structure of contemplation and thoughts about the whole of things, it is regarded as Wisdom; but in relation to that side of the objects of thought, in which reasonable beings apprehend them, it is considered as the Word.... Consider, however, if we are at liberty to take this meaning of *archē* for our text: “In the beginning was the Word” [Jn 1:1], so as to obtain the meaning that all things came into being according to Wisdom and according to the models of the system which are present in his thoughts. For I consider that as a house or a ship is built and fashioned in accordance with the sketches of the builder or designer, the house or the ship having their beginning [*archē*] in the sketches and reckonings in his mind, so all things came into being in accordance with the designs of what was to be, clearly laid down by God in wisdom. And we should add that having created, so to speak, ensouled Wisdom, He left her to hand over, from the types which were in her, to things existing and to matter, the actual emergence of them, their molding and their forms.⁸²

With this development, Origen is able to consolidate the Middle Platonic tendency to Stoicize the Platonic Ideas while at the same time fusing this philosophical idea with biblical revelation regarding the divine Word.⁸³

In moving toward Origen’s view of the *Logos*, we must first address a common misconception, that Origen’s Christology is simply

80. Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 243.

81. *Ibid.*, 237.

82. *Commentary on John 1*, 162.

83. It is absolutely imperative, however, that we not confuse the eternal *archetype* of creation in the mind of the *Logos* with the preexistent (or rather, pre-fallen) *creation*

a “baptism” of Middle Platonic notions of the World Soul and/or the Demiurge.⁸⁴ In fact, any similarities between Origen’s *Logos* and the Platonic notions of a World Soul or Demiurge are outweighed by the stunning differences between them. While it is obviously true that Origen’s *Logos* acts as God’s agent of creation (and hence can even be called a “Demiurge”⁸⁵) and that, as constituting the seminal reasons of all created things, he sustains them all in existence (and hence can even be called the world’s “soul”⁸⁶), Origen does these things in a drastically different fashion than occurs in Platonism. The differences will be made clear shortly, but they can be reduced to what Robert Berchman calls Origen’s unprecedented *apophaticism* with regard to creation. That is, Origen’s radical distinction between uncreated and created being and his insistence that the *Logos* belongs to the former rather than the latter, a model that, Berchman insists, “within Platonism, is novel,” and that renders all other similarities between the respective models secondary and derivative.⁸⁷

As for Origen’s positive teaching on the *Logos*, Origen holds him to be an eternally generated intellect (*noēsis*), begotten by God for the purpose of creation.⁸⁸ He is an intermediary between God and creation, sharing both in multiplicity and in unity.⁸⁹ The virtues pos-

itself. The preexistent souls are not identical, in Origen’s mind, with the archetypal Idea of the soul in the mind of the *Logos*. See David L. Balas, “The Idea of Participation in the Structure of Origen’s Thought: Christian Transposition of a Theme of the Platonic Tradition,” in *Origeniana*, ed. Henri Crouzel et al. (Bari: Instituto di Letteratura Cristiana Antica, 1975), 257.

84. Cf. Daniélou, *Origen*, 261, and Dillon, “Origen and Plotinus,” 21; Tripolitis, *The Doctrine of the Soul*, 102.

85. *Commentary on John* 1, 162.

86. *On First Principles* 2, 1, 3. See also *Against Celsus* 1, 23, and *On First Principles* 2, 8, 5.

87. Robert M. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Transition*, Brown Judaic Studies 69 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), 135. On a related note, but equally important, it should be pointed out that Origen’s *Logos* is *personal*, whereas Plato’s Demiurge and World Soul were mere impersonal cosmic principles. See Tripolitis, *The Doctrine of the Soul*, 102.

88. Origen’s teaching in this area is clearly indebted to Philo. Note, e.g., Origen’s reference to the work of God’s *Logos* in creation in *Homilies on Genesis* 14, 3, where he virtually quotes Philo’s *On Creation*, 24. For a thorough reference on such parallels, see Anniewies van den Noek, “Philo and Origen: A Descriptive Catalogue of Their Relationship,” *Studia Philonica Annual* 12 (2000): 44–121.

89. See Daniélou, *Origen*, 254. “The two relationships, then—the Father’s to the Son

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essed by the Son-Logos are derivative from the Father. Hence only the Father is God in an “absolute sense” (*autodeos*), whereas the Son is God (*theos*) by participation. Likewise, the Father is *monas*, *henas*, *hyperousion*, *hen*, and *ousia*, whereas the Son is *monas*, *henas*, and *ousion hen*.⁹⁰ Yet we should not dismiss this as rank subordinationism, for Origen’s notion of participation is much richer than that of Middle Platonism: one participates in God via communication in spiritual life, and this communication is not all on the same level, since the Son participates *essentially* in what other creatures communicate only *accidentally*, namely, the Trinitarian dynamism of God’s very life.⁹¹ What is more, Origen’s Trinitarian theology must be viewed against his broader view of metaphysics, or “first principles.” That Origen dubs God *ousia* is, according to Robert Berchman, without precedent in Middle Platonism: God belongs to the realm of “absolute being” (*kath’ hauto*), as opposed to the “relative being” (*pros ti*) of created beings. If this is true of the Father, however, it is no less true of the Son, who is also a substance per se (*kath’ hauto*), even if he is an eternally generated substance as opposed to an eternally ingenerate one.⁹² In other words, given Origen’s radical, apophatic distinction between created and uncreated being, a distinction that sets him apart from his Middle Platonic contemporaries, the Son is placed decisively on the side of uncreated being.⁹³

Eternally generated for the purpose of creation, the mind of the

and the Son’s to the *logikoi*—are to some extent analogical.” Daniélou, mistakenly I think, reduces participation to a quantitative, materialistic notion, in which case the participation of the Son in the Father must be comparable or analogous, in some way, to the participation of creatures, and hence the difference between them must be in some sense “measurable.” This is, I think, to reduce Origen’s notion of spiritual participation to a crude physicalism. See also Jean Dillon, “Origen and Plotinus,” 17–18.

90. See Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 129.

91. See Balas, “Idea of Participation,” 257–75.

92. For Origen God “creates” (*ktidzein*) the Son in a radically different way than He “makes” (*poiein*) the spiritual creation or “fashions” (*plassein*) the material creation. Origen is cautious with his distinction of terms here, and we can presume he means them in a very different sense. It is clear, in another phrase of Origen’s, that “there was not when He was not” (*On First Principles* 1, 2, 9). See Crouzel, “Idées platoniciennes,” 367–68.

93. See Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 128f. Granted, of course, all of this can equally be said of the Spirit.

Logos also possesses within itself the intelligible world of eternal reason-principles (or Ideas) of creation. Since these do not merely reside *in* the *Logos*, but in a way *are* the *Logos*, they are as eternal as he is. These eternal reason-principles are *not*, however, to be confused with the preexistent minds themselves, which will be discussed below.⁹⁴ They are the divine mysteries contained in eternal Wisdom himself, not the concrete creatures that would later be fashioned from and through these mysteries. This preexistent world of ideas is as eternal as the Son himself, since “there was never a moment where the prefiguration of that which is was not found in Wisdom.”⁹⁵ Although the Word remains supremely one, the reason-principles within him admit of multiplicity.⁹⁶ Given these ambiguities, some have suggested that these reason-principles can be called “creatures” in a loose sense, despite being eternal.⁹⁷ But to admit this is to suppose that Origen was willing to blur the distinction between created and uncreated being, a supposition that seems impossible to grant, this being one of the most characteristic marks of his system.⁹⁸ The reason-principles within the Son are not in any way distinct from him; one might even say that the Son *constitutes* the intelligible world of Ideas.

This intelligible world within the divine *Logos*, however, exists not as an end in itself but as a prefiguration of the sensible world; every eternal Idea within him is also, therefore, a formal archetype of the sensible creation. In this way the reason-principles (*logoi*) are also “forms” (*ideai* or *schēmata*) that are particularized by matter to

94. See Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 235.

95. Crouzel, “Idées platoniciennes,” 368.

96. “The Word is one, being composed of many speculations [*theōrēmata*], each of which is a part of the Word in its entirety.” *Commentary on John* 5, 4.

97. “[T]he *logikoi*, the eternal paradigms . . . although eternal, are also creaturely, for they subsist by no necessity in themselves, but as the ideas of the Son.” Edwards, “Christ or Plato?” 6.

98. “At the core of Origen’s theoretic lies a distinction between uncreated and created being.” Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 134. The present author wonders if some rapprochement could be made between Origen’s notion of the eternal reason-principles of the Son and Gregory Palamas’s famous distinction between *ousia* and *energeia* in God. See John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodoxy Spirituality* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997).

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generate this or that sensible being.⁹⁹ Indeed, these eternal reason-principles become subsistent, created beings only when they inform matter. All of the creation, then, sensible and intelligible, preexists in “germ” or “seed” form in the intelligible world, which is a paradigm and archetype:

And since all the creative power of the coming creation was included in this very existence of Wisdom ... having been formed beforehand and arranged by the power of foreknowledge; on account of these very creatures which had been described, as it were, and prefigured in Wisdom herself, does Wisdom say, in the words of Solomon, that she was created the beginning of the ways of God, inasmuch as she contained within herself either the beginnings, or forms, or species of all creation.¹⁰⁰

But not only does the sensible world preexist within Wisdom, but the converse is also true: Wisdom subsists seminally in all sensible things as well, according to their “species and numbers”:¹⁰¹ “the Word, by whom all things were made ... exists in substance throughout the underlying nature of things, being the same as wisdom. For He permeated, from the beginning, all creation, so that what is made at any time should be made through Him.”¹⁰² Because all visible things are fashioned according to the divine archetypes, in relation to which they retain a similarity, they serve also as visible “signs” or “seeds” of the divine realities.¹⁰³

But we have not yet reached the sensible creation, for preceding this is the spiritual creation of intelligences that preexist with the Word. These beings are created and hence have a beginning in time; they are not eternal, except in the vaguest sense, since they are generated according to eternal archetypal ideas. The distinction between the archetypal ideas of the intelligences and the created intelligences themselves has been insufficiently noticed by some scholars, but is crucial to Origen’s cosmology.¹⁰⁴ Once created, the intelligible

99. See Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 243.

101. *Ibid.* 1, 7, 1.

103. See *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 3.

104. Hence, Tripolitis, *The Doctrine of the Soul*, 94: “Although Origen speaks of the logika as being created, they were not created in time. Creation with respect to them

100. *On First Principles* 1, 2, 2.

102. *Commentary on John* 6, 22.

beings exist outside of the divine mind, no longer possessing absolute being (*kath' hauto*) but relative being (*pros ti*), a share of existence that is accidental in nature.¹⁰⁵ Their existence in this fashion, as will be clearer below, depends upon their conjunction with matter, which is the principle of individuation from God; this prevents them from being understood as an efflux of the divinity, as in Neoplatonism.¹⁰⁶ These creatures share many of the gifts possessed by the Word—pneumatic life, intelligibility, and, in a sense, divinity—but in an utterly different, subordinate manner, that is, through the mode of participation.¹⁰⁷ What is more, adopting biblical language, Origen asserts that these intelligible beings constitute a kind of preexistent Church, with the divine Word playing the role of Bridegroom.¹⁰⁸ Even further, as the Word is the “Image” of the Father, then rational souls are created “in the image of the Image,” as reflections of the archetypal Wisdom.¹⁰⁹ Note that, while the divine *Logos* constitutes within himself the intelligible world, the created soul of Christ (i.e., the unique intelligible creature who would later be incarnated as the saving Messiah) is a citizen of this world—a unique citizen, to say

means that they had a beginning, but not a temporal one. They were created from all eternity, but their beginning is difficult to conceptualize.” Balas is helpful here: “The created intelligible world, for Origen, is primarily that of the created intelligible beings—and these, though preexistent, should not be confused (as it often happened) with the intelligible world understood as the eternal archetype of creation preexistent in God’s Wisdom.” See “The Idea of Participation,” 260.

105. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 133.

106. See Edwards, “Christ or Plato,” 17: “[T]his is neither an effluence of the deity nor a coeternal substrate, but a creation out of nothing by His will.”

107. Daniélou admits this but wishes for a clearer distinction between the *Logos* and the *logikoi*, complaining that Origen posits a difference only in degree, thereby minimizing the gratuity of grace. See *Origen*, 254. Balas, once again, is helpful: “Of these, the ‘Firstborn of all creation,’ who, as ‘the first to be with God’ (*pros ton theon*) is the highest in dignity, being and remaining God, because remaining always ‘in the uninterrupted contemplation of the depth of the Father.’ He (i.e., God the Word) is, in turn, the One through Whom the other ‘gods’—i.e., the rational creatures most advanced in sanctity—receive ‘to be made gods’ (*theopoiēthēnai*). The *Logos*, however, is not reduced (as some would fear) to be simply one among those many ‘gods’ who become ‘gods’ by ‘participation in God’ (*tēi metochēi tou theou*).” See “The Idea of Participation,” 270.

108. *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 8, 4–6.

109. Origen’s preferred phrasing is that men are created “according to the image” rather than “in the image.” See *Commentary on John* 1, 20.

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the least, but nonetheless a citizen. His relationship to the Word is one of grace and affection, not identity.¹¹⁰

Having established the intelligible creation, very little need be said here about the sensible creation, already alluded to briefly above, since this does not concern our main topic. What is important, however, is Origen's belief in a paradigmatic relationship between the archetypal world within the divine mind, on the one hand, and both of these creations, on the other. In this respect Origen is a bona fide Middle Platonist. The "heavenly" or "spiritual" realities—that is, realities as they preexist in the archetypal mind of the *Logos*—are the "true things," whereas created realities, in particular sensible things, are only "shadows," "copies" or "images."¹¹¹ The mere assertion of this paradigmatic relationship, however, makes one a Platonist but says very little more than that, since this assertion can be given a very positive or a very negative connotation. Plotinus, for example, gives it a profoundly negative connotation, stressing that which the image lacks in comparison with the model. Origen, for his part, gives it a much more positive connotation, stressing the value of the image to the extent that it resembles the model.¹¹² The fact that sensible things are images of divine archetypes has epistemological value: the reason-principles or "forms" hidden within sensible things can grant epistemic access to the divine Mind, serving as "bridges" to spiritual mysteries.¹¹³

In sum, it has become clear that Origen carefully situates the theory of preexistence into the larger Christian vision of the doctrines of God, the Trinity, and creation. By identifying the Middle

110. See, among other sources, *Against Celsus* 1, 33, and 6, 47, along with *On First Principles* 2, 6, 3.

111. *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 2. See also *On First Principles* 16, 2 and 17, 1.

112. For this observation, see Crouzel, "Anthropologie," 244. The fact that Origen chooses the biblical phrase *katabolé*, which he translates as "cast down," to describe the origin of the sensible world does not undermine this positive view. A defective image remains an image, and hence is capable of evoking its archetype. See Crouzel, "Idées," 374. The next chapter will be devoted to this subject.

113. This epistemological fact has nothing to do with reminiscence, since the rational soul, for Origen, is created out of nothing and is not identical to its archetype; hence the notion of "remembering" its past is a non sequitur.

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Platonic *Logos* with the divine Son, known under his appellation as "Wisdom," Origen appropriates Middle Platonic vocabulary without accepting its cosmological framework, which for him was unacceptable. In Origen's distinctions among three "orders" of creation—(1) the preexistent archetypes in the mind of the Son, (2) the preexistent, created intelligible minds, and (3) the created sensible world—he is always concerned to retain the fundamental distinction between uncreated and created being, and to show the relation of each being to the Trinitarian life in which it participates.

The Qualities of the Preexistent State in Origen

With Origen's belief in a preexistent state, his motivations for this belief, and the role this belief plays in his Christian worldview established, it remains to explore the actual *content* of this state, in terms of the qualities possessed by preexistent beings. While Origen will often ask the same questions, using the same terminology, of the preexistent state, he will often come up with very different answers from the Middle Platonists, inasmuch as his worldview is dictated not by the philosophical schools but by Christian revelation. It will be established that Origen (like the Middle Platonists) accepts a belief in the equality and common nature possessed by preexistent beings, but that (unlike the Middle Platonists) he believes such beings are corporeal, are created, and have a temporal beginning. These conclusions, are necessitated by his larger Christian vision of the doctrines of God, the Trinity, and creation.

The first observation that must be made about preexistent minds is that each mind, while remaining a distinct, substantiated being, shares a common nature with all other minds, thereby manifesting a primordial equality.¹¹⁴ This claim is Origen's way of refuting the Gnostic attacks upon divine justice, since Origen holds that God created all beings in equality. For Origen, the equality of all rational beings (i.e., their being "one substance and one nature with each

114. Crouzel willingly concedes this point. See "Anthropologie," 234–35.

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other”) is a logical corollary of the fact that all beings participate equally in the “intellectual light” of God.¹¹⁵ It arises from their common derivation from God, as “a lump of clay is described as being under the treatment of a potter.”¹¹⁶ This also remains an essential metaphysical principle for Origen, whose anthropology must be situated against the background of a general concept of a rational creature (*logikon*), apart from any secondary “accretion” that might distinguish it as this or that *type* of creature.¹¹⁷ Hence to say that “man” is a “rational being” is to posit a tautology, since the two are substantially identical.¹¹⁸ “There is one nature for all rational beings,”¹¹⁹ Origen claims, and any claim otherwise is “an absurdity,”¹²⁰ a “silly and impious fable.”¹²¹ It goes without saying, however, that a common nature does not obscure the “individual differences” between rational creatures.¹²² Origen deliberately avoids any suggestion of a “fusion” between souls by affirming that the preexistent minds constitute a distinct “number” and “measure,” categories that require individuality.¹²³ (It should be noted that since matter is the principle of individuation for Origen, the “individuation” of the preexistent souls implies their materiality.)

115. *On First Principles* 4, 4, 9. Once again, for the notion of participation in God, and its implications for primordial equality and hierarchy, cf. Balas, “The Idea of Participation,” 261–62.

116. *On First Principles* 3, 1, 21. The trouble here, of course, is how to make sense of sensible things, which emerge from the same source. Origen might reply that these derive from the source in a different fashion, indirectly, as it were, and hence their mode of participation is different.

117. Ugo Bianchi, “Some Reflections on the Ontological Implications of Man’s Terrestrial Corporeity according to Origen,” in *Origeniana Tertia*, ed. Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1985), 154.

118. *Commentary on John* 2, 145–46.

119. *Commentary on Romans* 8, 11, 4. See also *Against Celsus* 3, 69.

120. *Commentary on John* 20, 203.

121. *On First Principles* 1, 8, 2.

122. This seems to be the chief concern of Jean Laporte, which leads him to resist this entire notion of primordial equality in Origen. See “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 334–35.

123. Origen’s application of “number” and “measure” to the preexistent state is derived from his interpretation of Song of Songs 11:20; see *On First Principles* 2, 9, 1. Cf. also Harl, “La préexistence,” 239.

Origen's cosmology operates on this basic principle: it is the introduction of merit, and nothing else, that brings from this primordial equality a plethora of diverse—that is to say, unequal—creatures. Diversity comes, in other words, from different uses of freedom, or what Origen calls the “anterior causes” (*aitiai presbyterai*).¹²⁴ This principle does not appear limited, however, to the primordial “fall”; Origen imagines the possibility of demons taking the place of men, and men that of angels.¹²⁵ This is not so much a change of nature, but a change of “rank” or “place” in the cosmos, so that the words “man” and “angel” should be considered mere titles of rank.¹²⁶ Rational beings do not seem to admit of infinite degrees of rank, however; Origen mentions only three categories: (1) supracelestial beings (stars, planets, e.g.), (2) angelic powers (including demons), and (3) men.¹²⁷ Note that irrational beings, whether animals or vegetables, are strictly excluded from this discussion, since Origen does not allow for a transmigration of souls to or from such beings.¹²⁸ But a lengthier discussion of this “economy

124. See *On First Principles* 1, 7, 4, and 2, 8, 3.

125. “The cause of the diversity and variety among these beings is due to their conduct.” *On First Principles* 1, 8, 2. See also 1, 8, 5: “the souls of men [will be] assumed in consequence of their moral progress into the order of angels.” In this context also should be noted Origen's *sui generis* theology of John the Baptist, whom he believes to have been an incarnated angel, though for soteriological and not penal purposes. See *Commentary on John* 2, 188–92, among other texts. Marguerite Harl excludes, for some reason, the supracelestial bodies from this discussion (“La préexistence,” 241), but they are clearly important for Origen; cf. *On First Principles* 1, 7, 1–4. In one text Origen even mentions the Greek “heroes,” though it is difficult to read this as anything other than an allusion; *Against Celsus* 3, 22. Note that not all scholars have been willing to concede this point, viz., regarding merit as the principle of diversity, though even voices of dissent—such as that of Jean Laporte—have admitted that the evidence is murky and capable of more than one interpretation. See “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 333–35.

126. “[T]he names applied to the higher powers are not those of species of living beings, but those of the orders assigned by God to this and to that reasonable being. ‘Throne’ is not a species of living being, nor ‘dominion,’ nor ‘principality,’ nor ‘power’; these are the names of businesses to which those clothed with the names have been appointed; the subjects themselves are nothing but men, but the subject has come to be a throne, or a dominion, or a principality, or a power.” *Commentary on John* 2, 145–46.

127. “The Fall thus gave rise to the various kinds of spiritual natures—the hierarchies of angels, the heavenly bodies, the various races and conditions among men.” Daniélou, *Origen*, 214.

128. See *Against Celsus* 4, 83: Origen condemns Celsus's suggestion that “all souls are of the same species, and that there is no difference between that of a man and those

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of diversity” would take us too far afield, since our focus here is strictly the primordial equality that precedes and excludes such diversity.¹²⁹ It is enough, for now, to note that all such diversity of “rank” is posterior to the “fall” and cannot be traced back to the anterior condition, which is of manifest equality and commonality of nature.

If such a common nature for all preexistent creatures is established, the next question to be explored must be that of their incorporeality. The most frequent charge brought against Origen, and the one raised most forcefully at the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553, is that he taught an incorporeal preexistence.¹³⁰ This charge, it must be concluded, can find no purchase in the actual writings of Origen, who in fact went to great lengths to exclude such a hypothesis. On the contrary, Origen teaches that all rational creatures, even in the preexistence, remain embodied, although the constitution of this body is of a different nature than the present body. The enduring confusion surrounding this question is surprising, given Origen’s remarkable consistency and clarity on the issue.¹³¹

It is no surprise that Origen associates incorporeality with inherent invisibility, and therefore with the divine and intelligible realm. While such a view can be derived from the Old and New Testaments only with extensive hermeneutical leverage, it was central to Platonic philosophy and hence a part of Origen’s worldview.¹³² But Origen refused to extend strict incorporeality to any being but God himself: “an incorporeal life will rightly be considered a prerogative of the Trinity alone.”¹³³ Indeed, Origen’s affirmation of the soul’s corporeality was his central argument in protecting divine transcen-

of ants and bees, which is the act of one who would bring down the soul from the vault of heaven, and cause it to enter not only a human body, but that of an animal. Christians, however, will not yield their assent to such opinions.” As for inanimate objects, these have no souls, and so the discussion in their case is moot. See also *ibid.* 7, 30.

129. Once again, the next chapter will be devoted to the results of the “fall.”

130. See Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 318–19; cf. Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (London: Herder, 1957), nos. 212–28.

131. See Edwards, “Origen No Gnostic,” 23–24.

132. See Cécile Blanc, “Dieu est *pneuma*: Le sens de cette expression d’après Origène,” *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985), 227–29.

133. On *First Principles* 2, 2, 2.

dence; the cosmos exists in an ascending hierarchy of immateriality, with God alone presiding at the immaterial summit.¹³⁴ (The immateriality of God could not be taken for granted in Origen's day, as more than a few Christian theologians were content with an embodied deity.) For Origen, incorporeality was a characteristic of the divine essence alone; to be creaturely was to be embodied.

This did not mean that the preexistent *logika* were in fact bodies; it only required that they *have* bodies adjoined to them. The *nous* "in its proper nature" is just as incorporeal as God, but unlike God, it requires a body for its subsistence.¹³⁵ Without such a body the created mind could never exist; Origen consistently rejects the idea that the body (even a celestial one) followed subsequently upon the creation of an immaterial *nous*:

If, however, it is impossible for this point to be at all maintained, viz., that any other nature than the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can live without a body, the necessity of logical reasoning compels us to understand that rational natures were indeed created at the beginning, but that material substance ... appears to have been formed for them, or after them, and that they never have lived nor do live without it.¹³⁶

The reason for this indefatigable relation between body and soul is that the former, for Origen, particularizes and substantiates the latter, guaranteeing its individual identity in a world of change and flux.¹³⁷ A bodiless soul, whether in the preexistent state or in the afterlife, could not subsist at all as an individual being, and hence

134. See *Ibid.*, 2, 3, 2; cf. Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma*, 454.

135. "According to our dogmatic belief, i.e. in agreement with the creed of the Church ... all souls and all rational natures, whether holy or wicked, were formed or created, and all these, according to their own proper nature, are incorporeal; but although incorporeal, they were nevertheless created." *On First Principles* 1, 7, 3. This point deserves further emphasis. Antonia Tripolitis, who accurately describes Origen's belief that creatureliness requires embodiment, only two pages earlier makes the unfortunate statement that "the *logika* were incorporeal, immortal and perfect." See *Doctrine of the Soul*, 94–96. Cf. Bostock's claim that Origen accepts the "the Philonic belief that the soul was bodiless in its pre-existent state." See "Sources," 260.

136. *On First Principles* 2, 2, 2. Cf. Crouzel, "L'anthropologie," 43.

137. See Tripolitis, *Doctrine of the Soul*, 105–6, but especially Edwards, "Origen No Gnostic," 32–34.

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could never exist in reality, but only as an abstraction in the imagination.¹³⁸ Association with matter is simply a condition of creaturely existence: form cannot exist without matter, except in God alone.¹³⁹ Here, it seems, Origen's anthropological holism seems to make its departure from Plato.

But once again, if the preexistent *logikoi* were embodied, the bodies to which they were affixed were far different from the ones to which we are accustomed. The term "incorporeal" (*asōmaton*), Origen likes to remind us, has more than one meaning, although the ignorant are accustomed to use the term univocally.¹⁴⁰ The body must be seen in light of Origen's trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit, which together constitute the human person. Embodiment is capable of varying degrees of "refinement," and this refinement depends largely upon the extent to which a given body is subjected to the human "spirit" or *pneuma*. In the case of the preexistent *logikoi*, bodies were entirely under the governance of the *pneuma*, rendering them entirely "spiritual" or "pneumatic."¹⁴¹ This body is of the same quality as that which clothes the angels and the stars, and hence can be called a "celestial" or "astral" body.¹⁴² So great is the spirit's governance of the body in this state that the entire creature, so constituted, can even be called a "spirit" or a "mind," because the body—while certainly existent and playing its appropriate role—exercises no power over the mind or spirit, and these suffer no adulteration by the body's presence.¹⁴³ The notion of a subtle, luminous body that serves as a sort of "corporeal envelope" for the soul seems to derive from Plato through Aristotle in the doctrine of the *ochēma*, or "vehicle of the soul," although Origen alters the doctrine in substantial ways.¹⁴⁴

138. "... only in thought or understanding." *On First Principles* 2, 2, 2.

139. Edwards, "Origen No Gnostic," 32–35. Edwards describes Origen here as an "orthodox Aristotelian," which may be a bit of an overstatement but, at least on this point, is not far from the truth.

140. *On First Principles* Pref., 8.

141. *On First Principles* 2, 3, 2. Cf. Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 29–33.

142. *Ibid.* 1, 7, 5.

143. See Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 96.

144. On this doctrine, see Henri Crouzel, "Le thème platonicien du véhicule de

In conclusion, Origen sees the creation of the preexistent mind and its pneumatic body as simultaneous, given that each by itself is inconceivable without the other. Indeed, there is some evidence that Origen saw the creation of each of these elements (the minds and the spiritual bodies) as mystically embedded in the twin creation accounts in Genesis (1:1–2:3, 3:4–24), with the understanding that the two accounts occurred simultaneously rather than subsequently.¹⁴⁵ Whether or not this is the case, the difference between the “pneumatic” body of the preexistent state and the “terrestrial” or “carnal” body of the earthly state is undeniable, and Origen often associates the latter with the “tunics of skin” that Adam received during his expulsion from Paradise (Gn 3:31).¹⁴⁶

It is in this context that we must briefly explore the question of the divinity of the preexistent beings. What, exactly, is the relationship of the preexistent *logikoi* to God and the divine *Logos*? It bears remembering, of course, that the distinction between created and uncreated being was nonnegotiable for Origen; it was a chasm that could not be bridged.¹⁴⁷ The preexistent minds are always, for Origen, first and foremost created beings distinct from God, though they can nonetheless be called “divine” in a loose or participatory sense.¹⁴⁸ The *logikoi* participate in divinity only by means of a gift, by association, and yet in a way utterly different from the *Logos* him-

l'âme chez Origène,” in *Didaskalia* 7 (1977), 225–37. G. Verbeke has also found this connection convincing, as evidenced in his work *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma*. Crouzel sees the *ochêma* appearing in such odd contexts as Origen's description of gravesite ghost sightings. See *Against Celsus* 2, 60. This doctrine also plays a crucial role in Origen's account of the resurrected body, and hence will be discussed further below, in “Origen on Death and Immortality” in chapter 8.

145. See Crouzel, “Le thème,” 232–33.

146. C. Bammel has made a strong case for a “three-stage” version of corporeality: (1) the preexistent, luminous body, (2) the “semi-terrestrial” body of Adam in Paradise, and (3) the coarse “body of skins” given to Adam in his expulsion from Paradise. The present author finds the argument convincing, but given the paucity of textual evidence and the lack of relevance to the present argument, it need not be pursued here. See “Adam in Origen,” 62–93.

147. See above, “The Place of the Doctrine in Origen's Thought,” in this chapter.

148. See Tripolitis, *Doctrine of the Soul*, 148–49, and Balas, “The Idea of Participation,” 257–75.

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self, not only in degree but in kind. Just as the Father is transcendent in relation to the *Logos* and Spirit, so the *Logos* and Spirit are transcendent in relation to the *logikoi*.¹⁴⁹ Nor can Origen construe them as emanations from God, or as possessing the divine nature in some innate fashion: their kinship-in-distinction from God is expressed by Origen in terms of their being in God's "image."¹⁵⁰ Alternately, this participatory divinity is conceived by Origen in terms of an infusion of the divine pneumatic life communicated by the Spirit; that is, the robust fullness of the "human *pneuma*" that uninterruptedly governs the rational creature.¹⁵¹ This pneumatic life is not unique to the Holy Spirit, but constitutes the whole interior life of the Trinity. Thus Origen can describe the Father as the "governing spirit" (*hēgemonikon pneuma*), the Son as "true spirit" (*euthes pneuma*), and the third person as the "Holy Spirit" (*hagion pneuma*).¹⁵² In the preexistent state the created *logikoi* are entirely inserted into this blessed, pneumatic life, which is the vivifying activity of God.

Our final question, which may also be treated briefly, is that of the preexistent soul's eternity: does the preexistent soul have a temporal beginning, or is it coeternal with God and his divine *Logos*? There has been much confusion among scholars on this question, in part due to the reasons already raised, that is, failing to differentiate between the preexistent *logikoi* and the eternal archetypes in the mind of God.¹⁵³

149. "Obedience, then, requires us too to say that if the Saviour and the Spirit transcend all creatures not in degree but in kind, they are in turn transcended by the Father as much as, or more than, they themselves transcend all other creatures, even the highest." See Daniélou, *Origen*, 254.

150. See Henri Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*.

151. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 29–33. See also Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma*, 453.

152. *Homilies on Jeremiah* 8, 10, 12–14; cf. Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma*, 454.

153. Hence, Jean Daniélou attributes to Origen a belief that the *logikoi* are as eternal as the *Logos* himself, since God (as *Pantocrator*) must always have had creatures to govern: "An essential feature of the theory is that the world of the *logikoi* is coeternal with the *Logos*." Daniélou, *Origen*, 255. Antonia Tripolitis similarly reads Origen as believing that the *logikoi* "existed from all eternity," while nonetheless being created (she admits this is difficult to conceptualize): "God's first creation was the intelligible world. This

But these views arise from the conflation of the preexistent *logikoi* with the eternal archetypes in the mind of God. The created intelligible world of the *logikoi* is unmistakably a part of the created order; the eternal archetypes are constitutive of God's eternal, uncreated Wisdom.¹⁵⁴ The distinction between these two "worlds" was always clearly observed by Origen: only the "ideas, forms and reasons" of the world are eternally generated by the Father in his Wisdom.¹⁵⁵ An overlap in Platonic terminology should not overshadow this difference: the preexistent creatures are created, temporal, and free.¹⁵⁶ Being preexistent does not for that reason make them eternal:

That all things were created by God, and that there is no creature which exists but has derived from Him its being, is established from many declarations of Scripture; those assertions being refuted and rejected which are falsely alleged by some respecting the existence of . . . unbegotten souls [*ingenitis animabus*], in which they would have it that God implanted not so much the power of existence, as equality and order.¹⁵⁷

Origen insists that the preexistent beings are, in fact, "formed and created" beings, and he is accustomed to see their creation (*poiein*) reflected in the first creation account of Genesis.¹⁵⁸ For Origen, that God alone possessed the status of an uncreated being was a nonnegotiable principle of Christian faith.

Conclusion and Comparison

By way of conclusion, what can we say regarding Origen's relationship to the Middle Platonic philosophical tradition in which he

world consisted of a community of a definite number of rational beings, pure intelligences or minds, which Origen calls *logika*. . . . Although Origen speaks of the *logika* as being created, they were not created in time. Creation with respect to them means that they had a beginning, but not a temporal one. They were created from all eternity." Tripolitis, *Doctrine of the Soul*, 94–95.

154. See Balas, "The Idea of Participation," 260.

155. See Crouzel, "L'anthropologie," 235.

156. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 30.

157. *On First Principles* 1, 1, 3. See also 3, 5, 1.

158. See *On First Principles* 1, 7, 1.

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stood? His intellectual debt to this tradition cannot be ignored, because it is the source for much of his arsenal of philosophical vocabulary and concepts. Yet the most fundamental tenets of Origen's view, as in the case of the preexistent state, are the *theological* concepts of God and creation, divine providence and justice, and the Trinity.

Origen's belief in the radical distinction between God and creation, between the ground of Being itself and the accidental being that is the outworking of his free will, is the linchpin of Origen's system (as is demonstrated, methodologically, in the outline of *On First Principles*). God alone is divine, uncreated, eternal, and incorporeal. This is why Origen can never accept the willingness of his philosophical contemporaries to blur this distinction, and to attribute these divine qualities (divinity, eternality, incorporeality, e.g.) to beings other than God. A refusal to do just this, for Origen, was what separated Christianity from pagan idolatry.

Origen's belief in the Trinity (albeit, in pre-Cappadocian terminology) provided the framework for sifting and reworking Middle Platonic claims about the preexistent state. Origen's belief in divine providence and justice, which he attributed to the benevolent Father, was most likely his motivation for assuming a belief in such a pre-existent state at all. In providing a safeguard against Gnostic determinism and dualism, these same ideas solidified in Origen's mind the conviction of the absolute equality (and common nature) possessed by all creatures in the preexistent state. On this point, at least, there is no denying Origen's debt to the Middle Platonists, who had long ago worked out such a system, where angels, men, demons, and astral bodies shared a common rational nature. But Origen's reasons for this conviction have more to do with Christian apologetics than with speculative theorizing, and it may be best to conclude that he found in the Middle Platonists a favorable ally against the Gnostic attacks on divine justice.

Middle Platonic speculation about the divine *Logos*, in whose mind such thinkers were prone to posit the existence of the eternal reason-principles of creation, proved a useful parallel to Christian

belief in the Son of God, or God's Word or Wisdom. The key differences between Origen's *Logos* and the Platonic Demiurge notwithstanding, there is no doubt that Origen borrowed heavily from the Middle Platonists in their descriptions of the role of the divine *Logos* in creation and in the cosmos. Like them, Origen prefers to speak of the *Logos* as the repository of the cosmic archetypes, rather than in some independent realm of Ideas. Like them (or at least, like Plutarch and Philo), Origen prefers to speak of the preexistent beings as "minds" (*logikoi*), due to their close association with the *Logos*.

Yet Origen's true ingenuity lies in the fundamental distinction that he makes between the eternal archetypes of creation found in the mind of the *Logos*, and the created, intelligible community of minds (*logikoi*) created in accordance with these archetypes. This distinction, which does not seem evident or even suggested by any thinker before Origen, allows him to preserve the aforementioned distinction between God and creation, by attributing all divine prerogatives to the eternal archetypes *within* God, and by denying such prerogatives to the community of minds *created by* God. This distinction is none other than the distinction between Christ and the Church, Bridegroom and Bride, and it is exactly in this way that Origen describes the preexistent community of minds, as the Bride and as the Church. At the heart of Origen's doctrine of the preexistence, in other words, is ecclesiology, and this is where the truly Christian basis of his system is most evident. Origen's preexistent state is neither a supracosmic world of Ideas nor a Mount Olympus of eternal, disembodied divinities. It is, rather, the first stage of the Bride of Christ, the creation of a Trinitarian God through his own providential Wisdom. This same Bride of Christ would not sustain the loving contemplation of her Bridegroom, but would undergo a tragic and disastrous Fall. This Fall of the preexistent souls will serve as the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

Descent of Souls



Having noted Origen's crucial distinction between the Triune God and his creation, and the importance of this distinction for his belief in preexistent souls, we now explore Origen's belief in the "descent" of these souls into their present state. Origen's belief on this topic, however, must be viewed against the background of Plato's dialogues and the Middle Platonic developments that followed upon them. As will become clear, Origen picks up important themes from the Middle Platonic tradition—such as the conviction that the soul "merits" its present embodiment by a freely committed fault in the preexistent state—yet in very important ways Origen departs from the philosophical tradition. This is because Origen views the descent of souls in the context of salvation history, which unfolds not according to rigid, quasi-mechanistic laws of dualistic ontology, but rather according to the providential plan of a loving God to secure the redemption of each of his individual creatures, a plan culminating in the descent of the preeminent soul of Christ.

Embodiment in Plato

The chief problem arising from Plato's system is how the present diversity of the world could have arisen out of the pure and unitary perfection of its primal origin. Unless one were to posit a dualistic principle of negativity (as some Middle Platonists did), one

must suppose a “descent” of some kind.¹ The question of the *cause* and *quality* of this descent, however, is shrouded in mythology and plagued by inconsistency in Plato’s dialogues. We can discern, nonetheless, two divergent views emerging in the mind of Plato, which, for all their differences, share important assumptions.

The *Phaedrus*, usually seen as a fairly early or middle dialogue, describes embodiment as resulting from a cosmic fall, arising in its turn from a moral fault on the part of the soul. Here the immortal, unbegotten soul is described as a charioteer driving a pair of horses, whose wings naturally tend upward, to nourish the soul on “beauty, wisdom, goodness and the like.”² Yet the imperfect soul chafes against the natural tendency of its own nature, and feeds upon “evil and foulness,” ignoring the examples of Zeus and the gods: “[W]hereas the imperfect soul, losing her wings and drooping in her flight at last settles on the solid ground—there, finding a home, she receives an earthly frame which appears to be self-moved, but is really moved by her power; and this composition of soul and body is called a living and mortal creature.”³ The soul’s manner of incarnation is correlative to its degree of virtue or vice: its first incarnation, if it has properly contemplated the ideas, is as a man, ranging in quality from a philosopher to a demagogue. Subsequent incarnations will reflect whether this first incarnation was lived rightly or wrongly, and in ten thousand years the soul may be able to attain the place whence it had fallen, through the means of philosophy.⁴ But until that point the soul is “enshrined in the living tomb” of the body (like an oyster in its shell), subject to “ebullition and effervescence,” sensation and emotion, until its wings sprout once again by recalling the truth that it once contemplated.⁵

In the *Timaeus*, usually seen as a later dialogue, we are told a very different story. Here Plato describes this “descent” as the will of God, necessary for the completion of the universe. The embodiment

1. See John Dillon, “The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theology,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 1, ed. B. Layton (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 357.

2. *Phaedrus* 246.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.* 247–49.

5. *Ibid.* 250–51.

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of souls is “appointed” by the Demiurge, and is said to be “of necessity.”⁶ All of this is not to deny human freedom, which is assumed in this dialogue from the beginning.⁷ In fact, the only strict necessity (or “laws of Destiny”) seems to be the principle that a soul’s movement corresponds to its disposition, which is to say, the only necessity is that consequences arise from free decisions and not whimsical fate.⁸ Yet there is no sense in the *Timaeus* that embodiment is a punishment for some fault on the part of the soul. Rather, embodiment (as a man) allows the soul an opportunity to prove its character: if it lives its embodied life well, then it may return to its heavenly homeland as its just desserts; if it does not, it may face subsequent reincarnations, as a woman or even a beast.⁹ While any *particular* embodiment, then, may be for good or for ill (i.e., as reward or punishment), embodiment in general seems to be more or less neutral, since it gives an opportunity for the exercise of freedom either for virtue or for vice. In fact, one may even read the *Timaeus* as suggesting that embodiment *as such* is beneficial for the soul, since it allows for the completion of the universe and the most beneficial ordering possible for the functioning of the human soul.¹⁰

Aside from the obvious discrepancy between these two dialogues—namely, whether embodiment is a horrible thing or a neutral or even potentially good thing—the dialogues share key insights into the soul’s embodiment: that it results from a free decision of the soul, that the quality of the embodiment depends on the moral quality of the soul, that multiple embodiments are possible for the same

6. *Timaeus* 42a.

7. See *ibid.* 43d.

8. *Ibid.* 41e; cf. *Laws* 904c.

9. “And he who should live well for his due span of time should journey back to the habitation of his consort star and there live a happy and congenial life; but failing of this, he should shift at his second birth into a woman; and if in this condition he still did not cease from wickedness, then according to the character of his depravation, he should constantly be changed into some beast of a nature resembling the formation of that character, and should have no rest from the travail of these changes.” *Ibid.* 42b–d.

10. See *Timaeus* 57–72. Cf. Johansen, *Plato’s Natural Philosophy*, 150: “The basic outline of the body, then, shows how the body is so constructed as to aid the intellect in maintaining control over itself and the mortal soul.” Note also that women and animals, for Plato, develop from men. *Timaeus* 76d8, 90e8.

soul, and that embodiment brings a new series of moral challenges to the soul.

First, both dialogues strive to explain embodiment (and all of the negative features that come with it) as a result of the soul's own free decision, rather than as a result of fate or necessity. Even if embodiment *as such* is said in the *Timaeus* to be the will of God, this or that *particular* embodiment is contingent upon the soul itself, and nothing else. Whether this is directed against popular notions of "fate" or Stoic determinism, Plato is convinced that "virtue depends not on fate, but on the character of the soul, and man shall have more or less of it according as he honours it or contemns it."¹¹ This principle is said to be the chief lesson of these dialogues, and the primary meaning intended by Plato in his mythology of the soul.¹² In fact, this "trans-epochal" view of freedom—that is, the assumption that the exercise of freedom in one epoch is efficacious in the next—is perhaps the principal lesson that Origen learned from Plato.¹³ The state or condition of the soul is a direct consequence of its moral choices, and cannot be blamed upon either God, chance, fate, or other external circumstances.

Second, and as a direct consequence of the previous point, both dialogues make the specific claim that the exact *nature* of the soul's embodiment—that is, as this or that type of being, or as this or that state in life—is also a direct consequence of the soul's decisions in the previous life. Those who live a good life are embodied as men, and the best as men in the most fortuitous states in life—philosophers, artists, or righteous kings—while those who live a bad life are punished with embodiment as a woman or a beast. Each type of embodiment, in other words, is a reward or punishment for the

11. Taylor, *Mind of Plato*, 92.

12. Francis Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 144; Harl, "La préexistence," 252.

13. "Freedom as the principle of self-determination of a creature's status is exercised in one epoch of the creature's life as effective primarily in the next epoch. Rational souls are distributed in each epoch of their life (for a man, for example, this would be his lifetime) according to their exercise of freedom in the previous epoch." Jackson, "Sources of Origen's Doctrine of Freedom," 14–15.

previous embodiment, and so on, as a universal principle. (Note: this principle may not apply to embodiment *as such*, which may have other reasons, but does at least apply to this or that particular *type* of embodiment.)

Third, and as a direct consequence of the previous point, Plato assumes the principle of what has been called the “transmigration of souls”—that is, that the same soul may occupy multiple bodies in succession. This principle looms large in both dialogues (and in many others, including the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*), although it is not clear whether it is meant literally or not. As to the scope of possible bodies, certainly humans and animals are included, and the *Ti-maeus*, at least, implies that some souls may be placed in the celestial bodies, including the moon, sun, and planets.¹⁴ The transmigration of souls, in some form or other, would become a basic principle of cosmology accepted by nearly all Platonists.¹⁵

Fourth, and last, Plato assumes that embodiment—whether positive or negative—poses great challenges to the soul. What seems to be a unitary or “simple” soul in its preexistent state becomes complex, “partitioned,” so as to accommodate itself to its new body.¹⁶ The accretion of the body requires the soul to become newly attentive to such needs as nutrition and sensation, which in turn expose the soul to “violent affections.”¹⁷ Some degree of ignorance necessarily sets in, as an embodied soul must gain knowledge by the laborious process of sensation and deduction, rather than pure illumination. There may, of course, be some beneficial results (or “payoff”) from this as well—the perfection of the universe, the proper functioning of the soul as a whole, for example—but this does not at all minimize the complications presented to the soul by bodily life. Perhaps the most beneficial

14. *Ti-maeus* 42d–e. It is possible that the souls placed in the celestial bodies are simply “waiting their turn” for embodiment, or perhaps are simply immortal gods who would not be embodied at all.

15. “So far as we know all Platonists believed in [transmigration] without metaphor or reserve.” Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 9.

16. See *Ti-maeus* 69d and following.

17. *Ibid.* 64a–65b.

result of all is the opportunity for the soul's virtue to be "tested," so as to enable it to achieve a better embodiment or—better still—a return to its heavenly origin. All this may, of course, be meant metaphorically and not literally, but at the very least Plato is attempting to grapple with the great difficulty of living rightly in the face of the challenges presented by the body and its desires, while at the same time affirming that the situation of embodiment came about as a result of the soul's own free decision.

Embodiment in the Middle Platonists

The Middle Platonists, in varying ways, take up these same problems, and many of their solutions—freedom, transmigration, embodiment as a consequence of moral decisions, and the like—echo those of Plato. As we will see, however, it is the negative elements of embodiment that tend to be emphasized the most among these writers, with a preexistent sin being seen as resulting in a "fall into the body." While the most "dualistic" elements are found in Numenius and Plutarch, a more nuanced approach is found in Alcinous. Philo's unique approach to the problem, however, is that to which Origen will be the most indebted.

Among the Middle Platonists we find little speculation about a "fall" in earlier writers. Antiochus of Ascalon might be mentioned, but he says very little except in passing, and this advances very little beyond Plato: the assumption that a soul's fate depends upon its moral character, the possibility of reincarnation, and the view of the body as a foreign accretion.¹⁸ Philo, his near contemporary, was so influential on Origen that it is best to delay his treatment until last.

Both Plutarch and Numenius take the tradition in the direction of a sharper dualism, most likely indebted to Persian and/or Gnostic influence. For Plutarch, the soul's present state arises not through the benevolent providence of God, but rather by the malicious attack upon the divine realm by the "Maleficent Soul," resulting in a disor-

18. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 91–102.

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dered antitype of the intelligible realm.¹⁹ Individual souls “descend” to this state, and are accordingly incarcerated in bodies as a result, due to a moral fault on their parts: under the influence of sensual passion, they refuse to perform their moral duties.²⁰ This descent includes not only men but also *daemones*, and in fact the daemonic is a “middle stage” of ascent and/or descent of souls. Souls are reincarnated constantly, although a few may end up “divinized” and placed in the locale of the sun. (The moon is a sort of “launching pad” for descending souls; the Milky Way serves as a “highway” of ascending and descending souls.)²¹

Numenius, similarly, sees embodiment as the work not of God, but of the chaotic, malevolent “Indefinite Dyad.” The soul, however, is not without blame, since it descends into the body by being deluded with earthly pleasures, through what Numenius calls a “hankering for wetness.”²² In the course of its descent (through the Milky Way) the soul must struggle with demons, thereby gathering accretions that form its “irrational soul” (*alogos psychē*), which perpetually wars against its rational soul, until it can return to its supracosmic home.²³ Numenius sees nothing positive coming from the soul’s embodiment, and hence can say “all incarnations are evil.”²⁴ A clear belief in reincarnation is present throughout Numenius’s writings as well.²⁵

A much more thorough and systematic speculative teaching emerges from the *Handbook* of Alcinous. This author preserves Plato’s strong emphasis on the soul’s freedom, and—also like Plato—allows “fate” to determine only the strict correlation between an act and its consequence, and not acts themselves.²⁶ Aside from this, it

19. *De Is.* 369e, 373c, e.g.

20. “[T]he portion of the soul that mingles with flesh and passions suffers alteration and becomes in the pleasures and pains it undergoes irrational.” *On the Daemon of Socrates* 591d. Cf. *De Fac.* 945b–c.

21. *On the Face in the Moon* 943–44.

22. Numenius, *Neoplatonic Writings*, 1.6.35a. Cf. *On the Good*, Fr. 30–43.

23. *Ibid.*, 2.4.62a, 2.4.49b.

24. *Ibid.* 2.4.50.

25. See, e.g., *On the Good* Fr. 49.

26. “[I]f a soul chooses such and such in life, it will then also perform such and such actions, and such and such results will follow for it. The soul is thus autonomous, and

must be said that Alcinous takes Plato's myth of the soul's fall a good deal more literally than Plato probably did.²⁷ Souls are literally inserted ("sown") into bodies under the watchful eye of God, precisely at the moment of the conception of the embryo.²⁸ As for the reasons for the soul's descent, Alcinous reports four possibilities: "It follows from the proposition that souls are immortal that they should enter into bodies ... either following their turn in a numbered sequence, or by the will of the gods, or through intemperance, or through love of the body."²⁹ It seems that Alcinous prefers the last option, since it caps his list,³⁰ and it should be noted that the third and fourth both attribute embodiment to some "fault" on the part of the soul (indeed, the difference between the two is not clear). The first two seem to involve some kind of necessity, which does not sit well with Alcinous's emphasis on freedom, unless there is some more logical explanation of God's will in the second option. In any case, if these are the possible reasons that the soul is embodied *at all*, it is clear that the soul will have successive embodiments, for Alcinous accepts the principle of the transmigration of souls, each successive embodiment being a result of the soul's merit in the previous one.³¹ Even if the soul's first incarnation is due to a fault, however, Alcinous is more nuanced as to the complications arising from embodiment. After all, the complexity (tripartition) goes back to the preexistent state, and body and soul already possess a kind of "natural affinity" for each other.³² But the picture is not all rosy, for Alcinous also describes the

it is in its power to act or not, and this is not forced upon it, but what follows upon its action will be brought about in accordance with Fate." *Handbook of Platonism*, 569–70.

27. See R. E. Witt, *Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 138.

28. Alcinous, *Handbook of Platonism*, 23.

29. *Ibid.*, 25, 6.

30. Such, in any case, is the opinion of John Dillon: "If one could attach any weight to the fact that this reason is presented last, one might conclude that this was A.'s [*sic*] preferred one. It is, after all, the only one furnished with a sentence of explanation." See Alcinous, *Handbook of Platonism*, 158.

31. "[Souls] should pass through many bodies both human and non-human." *Ibid.* 25, 6. N.b.: This transmigration also includes embodiment as a beast, as it did for Plato.

32. Alcinous, *Handbook of Platonism*, 25, 6.

soul becoming “dizzy and . . . thrown into confusion” when embodied.³³ In sum, Alcinous recapitulates much of Plato’s mythology of the descent of souls: the importance of freedom, openness to either a prehistoric sin or the will of God for cosmic perfection as the cause of the descent, and the transmigration of souls.

In the unique case of Philo of Alexandria, both the break from Platonism and the influence on Origen will be most clearly seen. On the one hand, Philo’s basic cosmology and philosophical terminology, as utilized in explaining the “descent” of souls, are indistinguishable from the Platonic tradition. He evinces Plato’s concerns to defend freedom and to explain the soul’s present state as the consequence of its own decisions rather than of fate or predestination.³⁴ Thus, the soul’s present state of embodiment comes about through a prehistoric moral fault, described as “satiety” or *koros*.³⁵ Like Plato and many of his disciples, Philo identifies this sin with a disordered affection toward sensible reality, and a neglect of the contemplation of the intelligibles.³⁶ He similarly associates this “descent” with a thoroughgoing demonology, positing that some rational beings remain unfallen, or at least “less fallen”—angels and the like.³⁷

Here, however, is where the similarity ends, for Philo preferred, when possible (and he realized it was not always), to resort to biblical revelation for the answers to philosophical questions.³⁸ Hence Philo views man’s present state through the perspective of God’s benevolent creation; embodiment *as such* is not a tragic fault but a work of an all-wise Creator. Undeniably, the body is a “lower” element of God’s creation, and Philo’s claim that the body is created

33. *Ibid.*, 25, 1.

34. “For it is the mind alone which the Father who begat it judged worthy of freedom, and loosening the fetters of necessity, allowed it to range free. . . . But man, possessed of a spontaneous and self-determined judgment, and whose activities rest for the most part on deliberate choice, is with reason blamed for what he does wrong with premeditation, praised when he acts rightly of his own will.” *Deus* 47.

35. *Heres* 240.

36. See Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 325.

37. See *Plant.* 4, 14; *Somm.* 1, 22, 140. Cf. Wolfson, *Philo*, 366–85.

38. See Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 322.

by God only *indirectly*, via the “powers,” must certainly be read as an attempt to remove God a few steps from the creation of corporeality. But Philo believes that human souls were never without bodies, even in the preexistent state. The “fall” described in Genesis, then, is not a “fall into embodiment,” but primarily a waning of the human spirit. Philo sees the preexistent state primarily as the soul’s full infusion with the divine spirit, wherein the soul enjoys the fullness of God’s pneumatic life. When the soul grows sated with the contemplation of God and stoops to earthly goods, the *pneuma* is eviscerated. This does, indirectly, of course, have an effect on the body, since the pneumatic, celestial body of the preexistent state is “terrestrialized” into a coarse, crude body. The degree of “terrestrialization” depends upon the degree of virtue or vice of the soul.³⁹ Thereafter, the body that had proved no hindrance to the spiritual life in the preexistent state now becomes a source of excess, inflamed passions and spiritual trial.⁴⁰ Philo sees these two states as allegorized in the twin creation accounts in Genesis.⁴¹ But note: the soul in both states is embodied, and the body *as such* is a blameless creation of God; Philo even speculates that some souls might take on terrestrial bodies for soteriological, and not penal, reasons.⁴² By viewing the “fall” primarily through the lenses of creation, sin, and redemption, then, Philo has made a dramatic break from the Platonic tradition.

By way of summary, what, if any, consensus can be drawn from the Middle Platonic schools? All of these thinkers follow Plato in their emphasis on *freedom*, insisting that the soul’s present condition

39. *Heres* 240. See Dillon, “Descent of the Soul,” 362–63.

40. See Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 323–25. It should be noted that Laporte believes that, for Philo, this “fall” occurs *within* this present life, and not in a preexistent state. Although Philo is not systematic enough to provide a definitive answer, it seems hard to deny that Philo at least speculated as to the possibility of a preexistent sin. See Wolfson, *Philo*, 366.

41. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 176–77.

42. “That is why all whom Moses calls wise are represented as ‘sojourners.’ Their souls never set out as colonists to leave heaven for a new home, but rather their way is to visit earthly nature as men who travel abroad to see and learn.” *Conf.* 77–78. Cf. Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 326.

Descent

is the result of its own free choice, not fate or predestination. For similar reasons, nearly all allow for the possibility of reincarnation, or the transmigration of souls, so that one's actions in one embodiment might be rewarded or punished in successive embodiments. Again, for similar reasons, all combine their theorizing about the fall with speculations about demonology and astrology, since the *daemones* and celestial bodies must also be souls in some state of ascent or descent. Nearly all, save Philo, see the descent as a "fall into embodiment" from a previously disembodied state, and view this embodiment more or less with negativity. Of those who speculate as to the reasons for this "descent," the Middle Platonists are divided between the majority, who see embodiment as the punishment for some preexistent moral fault, and a minority, who include the possibility that embodiment serves some kind of cosmological end, for example, the perfection of the universe.⁴³

It should be noted that all of the aforementioned developments become solidified in the Platonic tradition, and can be found, sometimes in more exaggerated form, in Plotinus himself.⁴⁴ The complications that these theories would pose for the Christian tradition are not hard to discern: it assumed that the body *as such* was an evil, contrary to the primal nature of the rational being. Any good it might bring about—and few Middle Platonists were willing to admit that it might at all—was for the cosmos as a whole, or some other external necessity, and not the good of the soul itself. Similarly, the universal assumption of the transmigration of souls seemed to undermine

43. John Dillon concludes that there is a "tension between two views of the soul's lot, a conviction that a conscious transgression of some sort has taken place, and an equally strong conviction that somehow God willed all this, and that thus it is all, if not for the best, at least an inevitable consequence of there being a universe at all." "Descent of the Soul," 364.

44. See Tripolitis, *Doctrine of the Soul*. Porphyry says in his biography of Plotinus that the latter seemed tried by the great shame of being imprisoned in a body. Porphyry himself states what can be seen as a Neoplatonic commonplace, "To be in the flesh, to be glued to this cadaver, is the worst of condemnations." Heinrich Dörrie, "La Doctrine de l'âme dans le Néoplatonisme de Plotin à Proclus," in *Révues Théologie et de Philosophie* 23 (1973), 126–27.

human individuality, which seemed to be assumed by the Christian doctrine of judgment.⁴⁵ These problems, or at least the former ones, had fortunately already been tackled by Philo of Alexandria, who had formulated an alternative vision of the descent of souls, wherein the “descent” was conceived as a waning of the pneumatic life in an already embodied creature. These problems, and Philo’s tentative solution to them, would be taken up readily by Origen.

Cause(s) of the Descent of Souls in Origen

The foundation of Origen’s system was the double affirmation of the equality of all rational creatures and their free determination.⁴⁶ For Origen this amounts to saying that man has no excuse for his sins, since all of the “occasions” of sin—external events, inadequate knowledge, and weak physical constitution—do not coerce sin, and cannot bring it about without the free consent of the will (*syngkathesis*).⁴⁷ Thus inequalities among men must be attributed to their own free choices, and yet it was readily apparent to Origen that human inequalities emerge even at birth. Origen was not alone in seeking a solution to this enigma. Gnostic determinists such as Heracleon blamed inequalities of birth upon distinctions of nature, which would then determine fates from birth; but this was never acceptable to Origen.⁴⁸ Plotinus and others similarly attributed human inequalities to destiny, as overseen by the stars; but for Origen destiny cannot suppress human liberty, and Origen routinely mocks the pretensions of horoscopes to calculate the future.⁴⁹ Neither, of course, could appeals to cosmic “necessity” assuage Origen’s convictions, for history arises only from the free acts of rational creatures.⁵⁰ Some

45. See Stead, “Individual Personality in Origen.” For the Platonists, the soul was immortal precisely because it was *not* an individual, but supra-individual, and survives as a universal Soul apart from any body that might individuate it.

46. See Harl, “La préexistence,” 242.

47. *On First Principles* 3, 1, 2–3. See H. S. Benjamins, “Origen’s Concept of Free Will in Relationship to the Fight against Opposing Powers,” in *Studia Patristica* 26 (1993): 217–20.

48. See Dupuis, *L’esprit de l’homme*, 51–52. Cf. Bianchi, “Some Reflections,” 156–57.

49. Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 244.

50. Crouzel, *Origen*, 216–17.

Christians suggested divine predestination as a solution, but for Origen God never overrides man's freedom of choice, lest God be held responsible for evil.⁵¹ The Christian must "maintain that none has been created evil by the Author of all things,"⁵² and that "there is no respect of persons with God."⁵³ Thus, Origen could find no cause for creaturely inequalities outside of the creature himself.

The creature, claims Origen, is free precisely because he is a creature, and therefore mutable and subject to change.⁵⁴ This is the condition of his free acceptance of God, which must occur of his own volition and not through necessity. Yet such liberty is not, for Origen, the "last word," since man was created not for liberty but for indefectible adhesion to God, a state that does not destroy liberty but perfects it, as in the Pauline concept of *eleutheria*.⁵⁵ But until this state of rest is attained, the rational creature remains in a state of "created instability," ever unstable and in need of grace, good only by participation and not by nature.⁵⁶ Because the creature, at least in his state of pilgrimage, possesses this manner of contingency and freedom, we need look no further for the cause of his own condition, either after birth or before.

The only plausible opinion left to the Christian, then, as a means of accounting for inequalities of birth, seemed to be that the soul is introduced to the body "from without" (*extrinsecus*),⁵⁷ in accordance with what Origen called "anterior causes" (*aitiai presbyterai*):

Once we accept that there are anterior causes for the "vessel of honor" and the "vessel of sin," it would hardly be absurd, in returning to the doctrine

51. *On First Principles* 3, 3, 5. See Crouzel, "Anthropologie," 238; cf. Harl, "La préexistence," 252–53.

52. *Against Celsus* 2, 69.

53. Romans 2:11, quoted by Origen in *On First Principles* 1, 7, 4.

54. "But mutability was natural for [the *logika*], being creatures, and, we may understand, diversification was inescapable in the long run." Bianchi, "Some Reflections," 156.

55. Origen cites the examples both of demons and of the soul of Christ, in which case habits are solidified so as to transmute into nature, so that further change is rendered impossible. See *On First Principles* 1, 6, 3; cf. Crouzel, "Anthropologie," 239. Cf. *Against Celsus* 2, 69 ("wickedness has been naturalized in some individuals").

56. *On First Principles* 2, 9, 2; cf. Tripolitis, *Doctrine of the Soul*, 142–43.

57. *On First Principles* 1, 7, 4.

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of the soul, to think that the anterior causes could explain why Jacob was loved and Esau hated, even before Jacob's entry into the body and before Esau was at Rebecca's breast. . . . In the same way, since God's disposition is alike for all souls and, in a sense, all rational creatures are fashioned from one lump of clay, it is due to anterior causes that this one is "for honor" and that one "for sin."⁵⁸

Thus, as Origen favorably cites the opinion of Plato, the soul "is introduced into a body, and introduced according to its deserts and former actions."⁵⁹

This is not to say, of course, that Origen denies the role of divine Providence over human affairs, which in fact is one of the keynotes of Origen's system. But, even if nothing occurs in the world apart from the Providence of God, some actions—namely, sins—are committed against the divine will. In these cases, Providence is involved not as the cause of the action, but as that which works to bring good out of the evil, by assigning consequences to the sinner that will bring about his reform.⁶⁰ Thus, if Origen is to posit an anterior fault in the preexistent state, this fault can have no other cause than the creatures who committed it; yet, at the same time, any consequences of that fault will be (in a sense) the work of Providence. And these consequences include, as we will see, the organization of the sensible world in which embodied creatures now live, which was brought about by the "just judgment" of God.⁶¹ Most importantly, these consequences are not arbitrary or whimsical, but are assigned justly according to the merit or blame of each creature:

There were certain causes of prior existence, in consequence of which the souls, before their birth in the body, contracted a certain amount of guilt in their sensitive nature, or in their movements, on account of which they have

58. *Ibid.* 3, 1, 21.

59. *Against Celsus* 1, 32.

60. See Crouzel, "Anthropologie," 242.

61. See *On First Principles* 1, 6, 2; 1, 8, 1; 2, 1, 1–2. Cf. Harl, "La préexistence," 242. This organization of the sensible world arises from an allegorical reading of Deuteronomy 32:8–9, in the drawing of lots for the Promised Land under Joshua. The distribution of land—viz., the assignment of souls to bodies—is carried out neither by providence nor by partiality, but by the "secret judgment of God." *Homilies on Joshua* 23, 3.

been judged worthy by Divine Providence of being placed in this condition.... And it is probable that these movements furnish grounds for merit even before they do anything in this world; so that on account of these merits or grounds they are, immediately on their birth, and even before it, so to speak, assorted by Divine Providence for the endurance either of good or evil.⁶²

What is, then, this anterior cause, this antecedent sin freely committed, which brought about man's present state? The first *Homily on Genesis* includes the conventional Platonic themes of the rational faculty's becoming overwhelmed with sensible delights, and sinking into bodily things.⁶³ But matter-spirit dualism plays only a subsidiary role in Origen's narrative of the fall; his is not the Platonic "fall into the cosmos."⁶⁴ Rather, for Origen the first sin is primarily an abandonment of divine love, a "cooling" of contemplative fervor. Its proximate cause is *satiety* or "mental slothfulness (*desidia animi*),"⁶⁵ and one might draw a connection with the early monastic vice of *acedia*, or spiritual boredom.⁶⁶ Although Origen uses Plato's imagery of the soul "losing its wings," for him this refers to the loss of the soul's sustenance by God.⁶⁷ Drawing upon a Stoic metaphor, Origen contrasts the "cooling" of the soul's fervor with the fire of divine affection:

As God, then, is a fire, and the angels a flame of fire, and all the saints are fervent in spirit, so, on the contrary, those who have fallen away from the love of God are undoubtedly said to have cooled in their affection for Him, and to have become cold.... [W]e have to inquire whether perhaps the name soul, which in Greek is termed *psychē*, be so termed from growing cold out of a better and more divine condition, and be thence derived, because it seems to have cooled from that natural and divine warmth, and therefore has been placed in its present position, and called by its present name.⁶⁸

62. *On First Principles* 3, 3, 5.

63. Laporte, "La chute chez Philon et Origène," 327–28.

64. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 34.

65. *On First Principles* 3, 2, 3.

66. See Crouzel, *Origen*, 210.

67. *Against Celsus* 4, 40; cf. Harl, "La préexistence," 243.

68. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 3.

We should never forget, however, that “fire” for Origen was a metaphor for the pneumatic life of the Triune God,⁶⁹ and man’s assimilation into (or “impregnation” by) the spiritual energies of God, such that the first sin can also be seen as a “sin against the spirit.”⁷⁰ While association with the bodily realm is certainly a consequence of the primeval fall, as we shall see, it is not the cause of this fall: here Origen takes his cue from Scripture, not the philosophers.

Effects of the Descent of Souls in Origen

Origen found in Scripture not the cosmological speculations of philosophers, but a grand narrative of love repudiated and love redeemed. Hence, Origen understands the descent of souls to the present world in the context of a drama, taking place under the loving providence of a benevolent God, who ensures that each and every individual soul receives the necessary means to secure its own redemption. Hence, when the embodied *logika* rejected the pneumatic life of God, he did not abandon them but ensured, through the transformation of their bodies and souls and the formation of the sensible world, and by the sending of agents of redemption, culminating in the sending of his own Son, that they would be drawn back to the same life that they once rejected.

If, as we have noted above, the primeval fall consists in a “cooling” of spiritual fervor, then the most obvious consequence of this fall will be a dissipation of divine energies in the soul. As the pre-existent *logika* fall from their saturation with divine love (*agapē*, which flows from the Father to the Son and Spirit) they slip into a deviant, pseudo-love of terrestrial things.⁷¹ The divine energies that previously influenced the *logika*, sanctifying and perfecting them, are now repudiated. The medium by which these divine energies penetrated the *logika* was the human *pneuma*, as distinct from the divine Spirit. So great was the dominance of this *pneuma* over the preexistent be-

69. Ibid.

70. See Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 333.

71. Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 240.

ing that the body, even if present, in no way hindered its sanctifying power; hence the term “mind” may be used to describe the entire creature, as though the body were not present at all.⁷² Yet the fall is a rejection of the *pneuma*’s influence, a tragic sundering of the inner harmony of the creature, a “divorce” between mind and spirit, *nous* and *pneuma*.⁷³ This cannot but have ontological consequences for the anthropological identity of the creature, which now suffers a kind of “shift” in its makeup, the exact nature of which will be discussed further below. Suffice it to say, for now, that human *pneuma* that previously governed the entire creature is now shunted, and the contemplative intellect (*nous*) that was previously inspired by this spirit suffers a paralyzing adulteration of its constitution.⁷⁴

What must be stated from the outset, however, is that Origen’s fall is not a fall “into a body.” There has been much confusion about this matter, and more than a few readers of Origen have assumed too readily a correspondence between Origen and Plato on this point.⁷⁵ A similarity in language and imagery has led some to see in Origen’s *On First Principles* a virtual parroting of Plato’s *Timaeus*. But, we are reminded, few Greek philosophers failed to afford the *Timaeus* at least some indulgence, and Origen stands out among them for his open contradictions of the *Timaeus*, say, on the question of metempsychosis.⁷⁶ A more critical spirit, then, is necessary. Unlike his fellow Platonists, Origen holds that God is the author of matter and that evil arises not from materiality but from a deprivation of the will. While Origen follows Philo in identifying the two creation accounts with the creation of the soul and body, respectively, he assumes that their distinction is conceptual, not chronological: both creations occurred simultaneously.⁷⁷ We have established above that,

72. See Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 96.

73. See Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 330.

74. See *On First Principles* 2, 4, 5; 3, 4, 1; cf. *Fragments on Luke* 187.

75. See Blanc, “L’attitude d’Origène,” 848; Daniélou, *Origen*, 98.

76. See Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 332.

77. See Harl, “La préexistence,” 245. Cf. Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,”

332. Henri Crouzel has discovered in the *Commentary on Genesis* of Procopius of Gaza

in the mind of Origen, the preexistent *logika* are already clothed with bodies, albeit spiritualized and luminous ones.⁷⁸ The body as such is not an accreted punishment for man, but rather the sanctuary of the image of God, which resides within it.⁷⁹ Origen, as has already been noted, treats embodied man as a unitary, psychophysical “whole,” and not as a divided, “two-fold” personality.⁸⁰ Hence, the fall occurs in a being already embodied, and this assumption puts Origen on an entirely different level of speculation than his Platonic forebears.

If the second creation account, which results in the body, is not to be identified with the “fall,” where are we to look for a description of this tragedy? Despite his allegorizations of the Genesis account, Origen did regard Adam as a historical figure, and there is no reason to doubt that he took seriously the historicity of the Adamic fall in Genesis 3. Scholars are now beginning to notice that Origen is perfectly capable of speaking of the fall of Adam in a manner that is highly consistent with the more “traditional” Christian accounts.⁸¹ Note that Adam begins this account fully embodied (Genesis 2), yet in his expulsion from Paradise (Genesis 3) he is given a “tunic of flesh” (3:31). This “tunic” seems to represent for Origen not embodiment as such, but a coarse, mortal, and terrestrial body that obscures rather than enhances the image within.⁸² The fall of Adam,

an explicit rejection of the notion that the second creation account is a posterior, punitive embodiment, and claims that this can be traced back to Origen. See “L’anthropologie d’Origène: de l’archè au telos,” 43.

78. See “The Qualities of the Preexistent State in Origen” in chapter 6.

79. See Crouzel, *Théologie de l’image de Dieu chez Origène*, 155.

80. “[Origen] perceives man as a single whole, a psychophysical organism of which body is as much a part as the soul, but the soul is superior to the body and independent of it.” Tripolitis, *Doctrine of the Soul*, 151.

81. See, e.g., *Commentary on Luke* 14, 4–6: “Every soul that has been clothed with a human body has its own stain.”

82. “If we wish to systematize Origen’s scattered hints and tentative suggestions, we must think in terms of the story of Adam (the first event in human history) as having taken place subsequent to and at a lower level than the fall of rational creatures from their original state of contemplation, also of individual souls having descended through more than one level before their entry into human life.” Bammel, “Adam in Origen,” 62–93. Cf. Harl, “La préexistence,” 245. Both Bammel and Harl come to the conclusion that there are actually not two but *three* successive states of embodiment: (i) the preexistent,

then, is not a “fall into a body,” but rather a “fall” of an already embodied creature, resulting in the transformation of his luminous, celestial body into a crude, terrestrial body. In fact, in one place Origen explicitly associates the “tunics of skin” with the soul’s descent to earth.⁸³

This terrestrial corporeity—complete with passions, sensation, physiology, and the like—is a mutation of his original, luminous body. This is in accordance with Origen’s conception of matter, a pliable substructure that adapts itself accordingly to the form that occupies it: “all bodies are adapted to the habits of the souls (*psychōn*).”⁸⁴ As such it constitutes a “vanity” to which man has been subjected, which interrupts his contemplation of God and imprisons his luminous spirit in the cramped confines of flesh and blood. Commenting on this condition, Origen cites St. Paul (Rom 8:20): “The creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but on account of Him who subjected it in hope.”⁸⁵ The body, which previously presented no obstacle to the governance of the *pneuma*, now presents a source of temptation to the soul, as it drags it downward toward sensual excess and unregulated passions: it is “subjected to servitude to the corruptible body and . . . overcome by its futility.”⁸⁶ In other images, Origen describes this transformation as the loss of the soul’s likeness to its

luminous body; (2) the “semi-terrestrial” body of Adam in Paradise; and (3) the “fully-terrestrialized” “tunics of skin” received after Adam’s sin. It is difficult, apart from such a conception, to make sense of Origen’s exegesis of Genesis, although it must also be admitted that Origen never says anything like this explicitly. Origen uses a number of other biblical images to describe the descent of souls: the descent of the Hebrews from Egypt, the union of the sons of God with the daughters of men, the plaintive jeremiads of the Psalter, etc. See Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 331–33.

83. “And the expulsion of the man and woman from paradise, and their being clothed with tunics of skin (which God, because of the transgression of men, made for those who had sinned), contained a secret and mystical doctrine (far transcending that of Plato) of the soul’s losing its wings, and being borne downwards to earth, until it can lay hold of some stable resting-place.” *Against Celsus* 3, 41.

84. *Ibid.* 1, 32–33.

85. Origen draws attention to the phrase, “not willingly,” to demonstrate that this soul’s present state of embodiment is contrary to the divine will. *Commentary on John* 1, 97–100.

86. *Commentary on Romans* 7, 4, 9–10.

Archetype, the *Logos*, an inverted mirror, a barely recognizable portrait.⁸⁷

The mutation of the body into a crude, terrestrial organism is naturally accompanied by the creation of the sensible world, the kind of world in which such an organism must necessarily dwell. Like the terrestrial body, the sensible world similarly constitutes a “test” or trial for the soul, which is now tempted to take it for the absolute, rather than a mere image of the divine mysteries: such, in fact, is the very nature of sin.⁸⁸ Origen is careful to balance his assertion that the sensible world originates from the hand of God, and is hence in every sense good, with the recognition that it is also a consequence of evil, and hence is not a part of the original creation (*ktisis*) but rather a “world cast down” (*katabolē kosmou*).⁸⁹ The cosmos (*kosmos*, or *kosmopoia*) is distinct from the “heavens and earth” of Genesis 1:1, and represents a kind of “descent” from that original state. In contrast, while the “heavens and the earth” are “created” (*ktisma*) by God, the sensible cosmos is merely “formed” or “organized” by him (*poiēma*, *plasma*).⁹⁰ While undoubtedly a descent to a lower condition, this cosmos remains the work of God:

This point, indeed, is not to be idly passed by, that the holy Scriptures have called the creation of the world by a new and peculiar name, terming it *katabolē*, which has been very improperly translated into Latin by *constitutio*; for in Greek *katabolē* signifies rather *deijcere*, i.e., to cast downwards,—a word which has been, as we have already remarked, improperly translated into Latin by the phrase *constitutio mundi* And if this is so, then there has been a descent [*descensum*] from a higher to a lower condition . . . [of] those souls which, on account of their excessive mental defects [*defectus mentis*], stood in need of bodies of a grosser and more solid nature; and for the sake of those for whom this arrangement was necessary, this visible world was also called into being.⁹¹

87. See Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 331–33 for references.

88. See Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 243.

89. See *On First Principles* 3, 5, 2–4; *Commentary on John* 19, 149. Cf. Harl, “La préexistence,” 244–47.

90. See *Commentary on John* 20, 182.

91. *On First Principles* 3, 5, 4.

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This point, however, requires further examination. We said above that, if the cause of *primeval sin itself* was the free act of the rational creature, the *consequences* of this act must be attributed, in some mysterious way, to divine Providence, which works to bring good out of evil. Thus, while it is right to say that man's terrestrial incorporation is "motivated" by sin,⁹² we must also insist that this embodiment is the positive will of God.⁹³ God fashioned the visible world so that, through it, we may have knowledge of the invisible, passing from the one to the other.⁹⁴ Hence the purpose of this sensible world is to bring about redemption from sin, a motive that is undeniably biblical.⁹⁵ It is true that oftentimes Origen describes the sensible world as the work of the devil,⁹⁶ but he means this only in an indirect sense, since the devil is (partially) responsible for the Fall, which in turn motivates God to fashion the sensible world. The mortal body is not, as it is for Plato, a vindictive and penal imprisonment, but a reparative medicine, since it becomes the soul's "instrument," by which it effects good works that please God.⁹⁷ The cosmos is not a penitentiary, but a gymnasium;⁹⁸ it is not an accident or disaster, but a benevolent act of God, even if it is in some sense a "symptom" of evil. We must thus resist any suggestion that there

92. "What is at stake here is only that the God of Origen, though fully commensurate to Biblical standards, converges with Platonic ontological and anthropological presuppositions, positing an objective, self-evident and, consequently, conceptually inescapable connexion between soul's fall and soul's terrestrial incorporation." Bianchi, "Some Reflections," 156–57.

93. Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 105.

94. "Even though nothing sensible is true, one cannot say that, because the sensible is not true, the sensible is therefore false; for the sensible can have an analogy to the actual." *Homilies on Jeremiah* 8, 1; cf. Blanc, "L'attitude d'Origène," 851–52.

95. See *Against Celsus* 3, 18, where Origen asks Celsus to reject the Platonic myth of transmigration and, instead, to accept the Christian doctrine of "one descent [of souls], distinguished by its great benevolence, undertaken to convert ... the lost sheep of the house of Israel, which had strayed down from the mountains." Of course, this does not make it any less of a punishment; for Origen, all punishment is remedial and restorative. See Crouzel, "Anthropologie," 235.

96. *Commentary on John* 20, 22. Cf. Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 40–41.

97. See *Fragments on 1 Corinthians*, 30. Cf. Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 55–56; *Commentary on John* 13, 245; Harl, "La préexistence," 245–46.

98. See Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 105.

is some sort of ontologically necessary connection between sin and matter, such that man becomes embodied “automatically” upon sinning. There is no link between the two, apart from the sovereign will and positive decision of God.⁹⁹

The transformation of the body that has just been described, from a luminous to a terrestrial frame, cannot but have its effect on the *nous*, or “mind,” to which it is affixed. Before its fall the rational creature was a pure intellect (*nous* or *logikos*), adjoined to a celestial body and governed by the human *pneuma*, affixed in rapt contemplation of God. Hence the preexistent ontology of man may be schematized as *pneuma-nous-sōma pneumatikon*.¹⁰⁰ With the fall, the human *pneuma* is paralyzed and incapacitated, the body is terrestrialized, and the *nous* itself undergoes a transformation into what Origen terms “soul”: “[T]he understanding [*mens*], falling away from its status and dignity, was made or named soul [*anima*]; and that, if repaired and corrected, it returns to the condition of the understanding.”¹⁰¹ We need not speak of a lower part of the soul suddenly “becoming active,”¹⁰² or of the *nous* remaining unchanged as only the higher part of a complex soul.¹⁰³ For Origen the *nous*, which, now as before, constitutes the essence of man, simply “loses its distinctive character,” and is mutated into a *psychē*.¹⁰⁴ The *psychē*, which—unlike the *nous*—carries out sensitive and nutritive functions, is more suited to animate a terrestrial body, even if less suited for spiritual contemplation;¹⁰⁵ again, this is another case of man’s constitution adapting to suit his environment. Hence, man’s present condition can be schematized as “[slumbering] *pneuma-psychē-sōma*

99. If the opposite were true, we would expect demons, who sinned the most grievously, to have the coarsest and crudest bodies of all, which is of course preposterous. See Crouzel, *Origen*, 212–13. Cf. De Faye, *Origen and His Work*, 87–89.

100. Dupuis, *L’esprit de l’homme*, 33.

101. *On First Principles* 2, 8, 3.

102. See Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 236.

103. See Dupuis, *L’esprit de l’homme*, 36.

104. *Commentary on John* 13, 205. Cf. 20, 182: “And if, forgetful, as it were, of the superior essence in us, we subordinate ourselves to that which is molded from dust, even the superior part will take on the image of the earthly.”

105. There is no need here to repeat what was said of the “lower soul” or *psychē* in chapter 5; what was said there is of the utmost relevance here.

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gēinon.¹⁰⁶ When the preexistent trichotomy is inverted, and the rational creature shuns the *pneuma* and submits to be governed by the body, the inner harmony of its own nature is compromised.¹⁰⁷ The disruption of this inner harmony of the rational creature, and the perverse effects upon both the *pneuma* and the body that accompany it, inaugurate a new kind of life for the soul, a life that can only be called “a calamity, or at least the first and greatest struggle of the soul.”¹⁰⁸ Although the terrestrial body is not in itself an evil, it does constitute the locus of a nefarious influence upon the soul, which Origen dubs “the flesh” or “the wisdom of the flesh.”¹⁰⁹ For the body and its passions, previously tamed and docile, become inflamed and rise up in rebellion, earning the name “flesh” accordingly. Hence, upon the preexistent trichotomy of the rational creature is emblazoned a deeper dichotomy, a war between flesh and spirit.¹¹⁰ The soul is now a battleground for spiritual combat, where the human *pneuma* must wage war to recapture the soul that it previously governed in perfect harmony and to chasten the body into perfect submission to its influence. The life now lived by the soul is only a shadow of its former life, a participatory and derivative existence, “far from the Lord” (2 Cor 5:6), where his presence to us is veiled by flesh.¹¹¹

Compounding this inner combat within the fallen soul is the terrifying exposure to demonic influence, for the very conditions

106. Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 39. “[T]he soul [*anima*] is something intermediate between the weak flesh [*carnem*] and the willing spirit [*spiritum*].” *On First Principles* 2, 8, 4. It is the present author’s conviction that Origen means this statement not only in a moral sense, but in an ontological sense, as the context of the statement makes clear.

107. “He who is one, when he sins, becomes many, cut off from God and divided in parts, and fallen away from the unity.” *Commentary on Hosea* fragment; cf. *Homilies on Genesis* 1, 14–15.

108. *Against Celsus* 1, 43.

109. See *Fragments on 1 Corinthians* 24; cf. Blanc, “L’attitude d’Origène,” 851–52; Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 42–61.

110. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 39. N.b.: This dichotomy, of course, is the foundation for the doctrine of the “spiritual senses,” the “law of homonymy,” and the exemplarity between the “two worlds.” See chapter 3, above.

111. *Commentary on Matthew* frag. 503–4; cf. Blanc, “L’attitude d’Origène,” 196.

that occasioned the original fall (satiety, laziness, negligence of contemplation) are utilized by the devil to tempt us to sin, to enslave us more and more to the fleshly condition.¹¹² Joining in the battle, the demons in league with Satan exercise their influence upon the soul, without, of course, vitiating its power of free choice.¹¹³ Satan gains a foothold only when the mind becomes weakened through its own malfeasance: “[I]t is through certain acts, or a kind of mental slothfulness, that room is made for the devil, so that, if once he enter our heart, he will either gain possession of us, or at least will pollute the soul.”¹¹⁴ Thus polluted, the soul is more likely to succumb to the influence of the sinful flesh, further extinguishing the light of the spirit.

In this case, according to Origen, man becomes what he loves; those who choose the flesh become altogether fleshly, slaves to concupiscence, while those who choose the spirit become altogether spiritualized. For the emerging *psychē* finds itself in a “median” position, wavering between flesh and spirit, ever unstable and unable to rest in itself. Origen refuses to accept the Gnostic position that man is born with one of three natures, his fate decided before his birth; for him, there is only one nature, “destined for spiritual filiation.”¹¹⁵ Under the influence of grace, man must learn to pass through the sensible world so as to attain to the intelligible, thereby living as though he were no longer on earth at all.¹¹⁶ Finding himself in a position of radical freedom, man is called to become so conformed to the Spirit that his love is “changed by the power of habit into nature,” thereby leaving him permanently ensconced in the divine life.¹¹⁷ To

112. *On First Principles* 3, 2–3; cf. Benjamins, “Origen’s Concept,” 218, and François Marty, “La discernement des esprits dans le Peri Archôn d’Origène,” in *Revue d’Ascétique et de Mystique* 34 (1958): 147–64, 253–74.

113. Origen, in his anti-Montanist polemics, insists that the prophets of the Old Covenant retained their freedom of will during their prophetic inspiration; the same principle, of course, would apply to those under the influence of demonic temptation. See Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 328.

114. *On First Principles* 3, 2, 3.

115. See *Commentary on Romans* 4, 9. Cf. Dupuis, *L’esprit de l’homme*, 51–52.

116. *Commentary on Ephesians* frag. 10; cf. Blanc, “L’attitude d’Origène,” 853.

117. *On First Principles* 1, 6, 3. See Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 239.

do so requires a “double victory” on the part of the *pneuma*, which must both vanquish the wickedness of the flesh (*sarx*) and tame the rebellion of the body, in order to accomplish the reversion of the *psychē* to a *nous*. Such is the task bequeathed to the soul upon its fall from grace: the task of spiritual combat in the context of radical freedom.

It is this very use of freedom, of course, as evinced in the fall itself, that brings from the primeval equality of rational creatures a diversity of condition—that is, those to which we now refer as men and demons, and to various states of life as such creatures.¹¹⁸ Each is assigned a place in proportion to its degree of fault, and hence each is born into the condition “appropriate to its state,”¹¹⁹ in accordance with its merits, or that which pleases God in each being. This distribution of states, which Origen sees as intended in an allegorical reading of the “drawing of lots” in Deuteronomy 32, is carried out by angels.¹²⁰ This should not be read as varying degrees of punishment, since—as we have seen above—terrestrial incorporation has a redemptive purpose, so much as the providential ordering of all creatures such that each is in the position best suited for its own redemption. The degree of materiality of each embodiment is somehow related to the degree of fault (or rather, its “quality,” as demonstrated in its degree of fault), although, once again, the connection between sin and materiality should not be seen as some ontologically necessary law (or else, we should expect demons to have the coarsest

118. “[A]greeably to the faculty of free will, variety and diversity characterized the individual souls, so that one was attached with a warmer love to the Author of its being, and another with a feebler and weaker regard.” *On First Principles* 2, 6, 3. “[I]t seems to me that this very decay and falling away [*decessus*] of the understanding [*mens*] is not the same in all, but that this conversion into a soul [*anima*] is carried to a greater or less degree in different instances, and that certain understandings [*mentes*] retain something even of their former vigour, and others again either nothing or a very small amount.” *Ibid.* 2, 8, 4. It is unclear whether we are to number angels among fallen creatures, as will be discussed further in this section.

119. *Philocalia* 22.

120. *Homilies on Joshua* 23, 3. That angels oversee this distribution should be a hint that some creatures (perhaps angels, or the highest rank of angels?) did not fall at all, and remain “unfallen,” though perhaps these are embodied for other purposes.

bodies of all), but rather has its origin in the divine will. This does not mean that angels may become men, or men demons—there is no reason to suspect that any creature may “fall” more than once—but rather that each rational creature takes its place as one or the other, realizing its own place in the ladder of divine participation.¹²¹ Origen’s point here, once again, is that the condition in which each man finds himself is not to be blamed upon divine partiality or upon happenstance, but rather the justice of God that gives to each his due.

But there are limits to Origen’s belief in terrestrial incorporation, for he remained deeply suspicious of Plato’s doctrine of the transmigration of souls. This doctrine, which nearly all Platonists held to some extent or another, allowed for rational souls to be transferred from one body to another, not excluding the bodies of animals (and in some cases, even plants), in a perpetual cycle of reincarnation.¹²² Origen, despite the protestations of Jerome and Justinian, consistently holds that animal souls are different in kind from rational souls: both have what can be called “souls” (*psychēis*), but only the latter were formerly “minds” (*noes*) and possess some residual intellects therefrom.¹²³ As for plants, they fall into the category of *apsychēs*, “soulless.”¹²⁴ Hence he rejects outright, as sheer “folly” suitable only for young children, the possibility that human souls might pass into

121. See Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 334. Also, the emerging distinctions between angels, men, and demons should not be seen as distinctions of *nature*, since we have seen that Origen holds all rational creatures to share the same nature; rather, they are questions of “rank” or “office.” See Laporte, “La chute chez Philon et Origène,” 334.

122. Plotinus’s “panpsychism” held that souls could be found in every existing being, including plants and the earth itself. See Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 242.

123. “Unless, indeed, by these assertions Celsus means obscurely to intimate . . . that all souls are of the same species, and that there is no difference between that of a man and those of ants and bees, which is the act of one who would bring down the soul from the vault of heaven, and cause it to enter not only a human body, but that of an animal. Christians, however, will not yield their assent to such opinions: for they have been instructed before now that the human soul was created in the image of God; and they see that it is impossible for a nature fashioned in the divine image to have its (original) features altogether obliterated, and to assume others, formed after I know not what likeness of irrational animals.” *Against Celsus* 4, 83; cf. 8, 30.

124. See Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 237.

flora or fauna.¹²⁵ Besides, if the purpose of terrestrial embodiment is redemptive, reincarnation as an irrational creature would be self-defeating, since such a creature would lack the reason and will to redeem itself.¹²⁶ Christians, then, according to Origen, “do not believe that souls . . . may descend so low as to enter the bodies of the brutes,”¹²⁷ for such assertions are “contrary to our belief.”¹²⁸

What of transmigration from one human body to another, an opinion that many scholars readily attribute to Origen?¹²⁹ While this was a matter of course for most Platonists, Origen rejects outright, explicitly and in diverse contexts, the assumption that a human soul could be “reembodied” at the end of its life. Some Christians, apparently, found attractive the doctrine that Origen calls “transcorporation,” and found support for it in Jesus’ statement that John the Baptist was Elijah (Mt 11:14), among other passages. But for Origen, “a churchman . . . repudiates the doctrine of transcorporation as a false one, and does not admit that the soul of John ever was Elijah,” but rather holds that he possessed the “spirit and power of Elijah” (Lk 1:17). When Origen speaks cautiously about “the doctrine of the entrance of souls into bodies” in *Against Celsus*, he qualifies quickly that he is speaking “not, however, of the transmigration from one body to another,”¹³⁰ since “we do not believe that souls pass from one body to another.”¹³¹ It is necessary to re-

125. *Against Celsus* 2, 75.

126. “Nay, if we should cure those who have fallen into the folly of believing in the transmigration of souls through the teaching of physicians, who will have it that the rational nature descends sometimes into all kinds of irrational animals, and sometimes into that state of being which is incapable of using the imagination, why should we not improve the souls of our subjects by means of a doctrine which does not teach that a state of insensibility or irrationalism is produced in the wicked instead of punishment, but which shows that the labours and chastisements inflicted upon the wicked by God are a kind of medicines leading to conversion?” *Ibid.*

127. *Against Celsus* 8, 30. Cf. *On First Principles* 1, 8, 4.

128. *On First Principles* 1, 8, 4. Origen does accept the doctrine on a moral or spiritual level, for he believes that men can “sink to the level of beasts” by their immoral living, through a thorough defacing of the image of God that lies within them. See Cox, “Origen and the Bestial Soul,” 115–40.

129. See, e.g., Bianchi, “Origen’s Treatment of the Soul,” 272–75.

130. *Against Celsus* 5, 29.

131. *Ibid.* 8, 30.

member that Origen was committed to defending the indefeasible individuality of every human soul against the monism of many of his Platonist contemporaries, such as Plotinus. To allow that a soul could occupy more than one body would compromise this individuality, while at the same time excluding matter from the definition of the human person, a step that Origen would never make. Hence, as he insists, "it is impossible for one soul to animate two bodies."¹³² Does Origen accept any form of transmigration of souls, which would allow a soul to change bodies? Yes, but only in a highly modified manner, which Origen terms *metensōmatōsis*—not a strict "exchange" of bodies, but a "shift" or "transformation" (*transformatio*) in the structure or form of the same body, such as we have already discussed in relation to terrestrial incorporation.¹³³ Obviously, in the Christian tradition, demons are identified as fallen angels, and angels as unfallen demons, and for Origen this seems to entail some change in bodily structure, without their becoming strictly terrestrial.¹³⁴ Man, who previously shared the condition of the unfallen angels, may rise to join them again. (We need not speak, however, of man's "becoming an angel," since once again there is no difference of substance but only of rank.)¹³⁵ It is also true, as will be discussed in the next paragraph, that such unfallen angels may become embodied, for salvific and not punitive purposes, as was the case with John the Baptist.¹³⁶ We are not speaking, then, of a single soul arbitrarily exchanging one body for another, but rather of particular embodied souls undergoing a transformation of the bodies they already possess, so as to become either more or less refined as the particular case requires. Clearly, so long as we do not generalize illicitly here or speculate uncritically beyond Origen's own statements, we are far from the Platonic theories of transmigration.¹³⁷

132. *Fragment on Luke* 9.

133. See Bianchi, "Origen's Treatment," 278–79; cf. *On First Principles* 2, 1, 4.

134. See Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 100.

135. See chapter 6, "Preexistence of Souls."

136. See *Against Celsus* 3, 18.

137. See Laporte, "La chute chez Philon et Origène," 332.

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This brings up the particular cases in which terrestrial incorporation may occur for redemptive purposes. For Origen, the primeval fall is not universal, and it becomes clear in his writings that some rational creatures “escaped,” or rather “survived,” the fall. Such creatures constitute the “pure heavens” of Genesis 1:1 or “paradise of God” of Ezekiel 28,¹³⁸ retaining the rank to which God has assigned them. Among these we must include at least the highest ranks of angelic beings,¹³⁹ if not all angels taken together.¹⁴⁰ These beings remained true to the essential nature of their origin, remaining in uninterrupted contemplation of God.¹⁴¹ These *logika* are dubbed “angels” because of the mission for which they are thereupon set aside: being sent into the sensible world for the salvation of man. These are embodied, or “become men,” not because of their own free decision (as did those who “fell”) but “against their wishes,” albeit in accord with the divine will; hence Origen compares them to those who “wept as they sowed” in Psalms 126:6.¹⁴² We should also include in this number the celestial bodies—sun, moon, and stars—which are placed in such bodies (or rather, their bodies took this particular form) not for their own redemption, but for that of mankind:

And if this is so, then there has been a descent from a higher to a lower condition, on the part not only of those souls who have deserved the change by the variety of their movements, but also on that of those who, in order to serve the whole world, were brought down from those higher and invisible spheres to these lower and visible ones, although against their will . . . so that both sun, and moon, and stars, and angels might discharge their duty to the world.¹⁴³

138. *Against Celsus* 7, 28–29; 6, 44.

139. So claims Henri Crouzel in “Le Cœur selon Origène,” 102.

140. So claims Marguarite Harl in “La préexistence,” 242. Certainly we should not conclude that *all* beings (save the soul of Christ) “fell,” including the highest ranks of angels, as does Daniélou, *Origen*, 214 (“All created spirits were affected, with the one exception, as we shall see, of the soul of Christ”). Being sent for redemptive purposes can hardly be called a “fall.”

141. *Commentary on John* 1, 172–79.

142. “For the soul of the sun is placed in a body, and the whole creation, of which the Apostle says, ‘The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.’” *Commentary on John* 1, 97–100; cf. 13, 293; *On First Principles* 1, 7, 4.

143. *On First Principles* 3, 5, 4.

Of special note, of course, is John the Baptist, whose role in Origen's theology has been well noted: "John was sent from another region when he entered into the body [*ensōmatoumenon*] ... [for] John's soul was older than his body and subsisted by itself before it was sent on the ministry of the witness of the light."¹⁴⁴ All of these redemptive incarnations serve to prepare the way for the supreme Incarnation, that of Christ himself.¹⁴⁵

A further examination of the Incarnation of Christ must conclude this discussion, as it remains the most central and determinative facet in Origen's speculations as to the descent of souls from the preexistent state. For the other preexistent *logika* are understood only in relation to this preeminent *logikos* (or *nous*). While others cooled in their fervor and lapsed from the divine love, this *nous* remained aflame with such fervor of love as to make its choice immutable, its adhesion to God indefectible:

But since the power of choosing good and evil is within the reach of all, this soul which belonged to Christ elected to love righteousness, so that in proportion to the immensity of its love it clung to it unchangeably and inseparably, so that firmness of purpose, and immensity of affection, and an inextinguishable warmth of love, destroyed all susceptibility [*sensum*] for alteration and change; and that which formerly depended upon the will was changed by the power of long custom into nature; and so we must believe that there existed in Christ a human and rational soul, without supposing that it had any feeling or possibility of sin.¹⁴⁶

This *nous* remains true to the proper perfection of its nature, in a manner far excelling all others, thus enabling it to play its unique role in the narrative of salvation. It may be, as Rowan Williams suggests, that Origen developed the doctrine of the preexistence for the primary purpose of envisioning how the person of Christ was able to save, as only an unfallen *nous* could save those that had fallen.¹⁴⁷

144. *Commentary on John* 2, 180–2.

145. "Jesus was not the only one who visited mankind as an angel, and who manifestly became the Saviour and benefactor of all those who depart from the flood of wickedness." *Against Celsus* 5, 41.

146. *On First Principles* 2, 6, 5. Cf. Le Boulluec, "Controverses au sujet," 223.

147. See Williams, "Origen on the Soul of Jesus," 134.

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This created *logikos* is to be carefully differentiated, of course, from the divine *Logos* himself, who is eternal and substantially united with the Father, and is himself the paradigm of all virtues.¹⁴⁸ Yet in its fervor of love this *logikos* is so great that his union with the eternal *Logos* was perfected:

That soul [*anima*] regarding which Jesus said, “No one shall take my life [*animam*] from me,” inhering, from the beginning of the creation, and afterwards, inseparably and indissolubly in Him, as being the Wisdom and Word of God, and the Truth and the true Light, and receiving Him wholly, and passing into His light and splendour, was made with Him in a pre-eminent degree one spirit [*unus spiritus*], according to the promise of the apostle to those who ought to imitate it, that “he who is joined in the Lord is one spirit.”¹⁴⁹

The *nous*, due to its “mediatory” nature (and unlike the “flesh”) is “open” to union with God, and hence, through its exemplary virtue a full cohesion between the divine *Logos* and this created, unfallen *logikos* is achieved.

In order for the redemption of fallen mankind to be achieved, however, it is not enough for the Word to adopt a human *nous*, “for the whole man would not have been saved if He had not assumed the whole man.”¹⁵⁰ The present condition of fallen man, as noted above, was the trichotomy of a *pneuma*, a fallen *psychē*, and a terrestrial body. Hence, it was necessary that this human *nous*, already joined indefectibly to a *pneuma*, descend to the level of a “soul” (*psychē*) and allow its body to be degraded to the terrestrial condition of fallen humanity.¹⁵¹ In this way, the divine *Logos* takes on a fully human na-

148. See *Commentary on John* 32, 11, 7; cf. Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 239.

149. On *First Principles* 2, 6, 3. Thus we find in Origen’s Christology a robust teaching on the union of the two natures in the person of Christ. The preexistent relationship between the *logikos* and the *Logos* is a union “without confusion, change, division or separation” (to borrow Chalcedonian terminology). A rejection of Origen’s doctrine of the preexistence, according to Rowan Williams, was partially responsible for the later problems of Arianism and Apollinarianism. See Williams, “Origen on the Soul of Jesus,” 134–35.

150. *Dialogue with Heraclides*, 7.

151. “[T]he soul of Jesus was in God and His fullness when it was in its own perfection, and, after it had proceeded from there by being sent by the Father, it took up a body

ture, like us in all ways.¹⁵² Yet, despite having taken on our human condition, he does so without appropriating the stain of sin, since his *nous* remains in uninterrupted contemplation of God, its transformation into a *psychē* notwithstanding.¹⁵³ Similarly, although he adopts a body like ours for the sake of salvation, he is not tainted with sin so as to require (or merit) such a body; hence, his body possesses a unique quality of impeccability, or sinlessness:

It is probable, therefore, that this soul [i.e., of Christ] also, which conferred more benefit by its residence in the flesh than that of many men ... stood in need of a body not only superior to others, but invested with all excellent qualities.... [W]hy should there not be also some soul which receives an altogether miraculous body, possessing some qualities common to those of other men, so that it may be able to pass through life with them, but possessing also some quality of superiority, so that the soul may be able to remain untainted by sin?¹⁵⁴

As a result, even in his state of terrestrial embodiment, Christ's *pneuma* maintains complete governance over his soul, and the soul over the body, retaining the perfect harmony of man's primeval condition.¹⁵⁵ Thus, like the angels and heavenly bodies, his "descent" is redemptive and not punitive, for our salvation and not his own, a distinction made possible precisely by the fact that he requires no salvation.

And since this privileged *nous*, united to the saving Word, descended to the sensible world without any stain on its part, it is able to effect the salvation of all other *noes*, those whose descent is due

from Mary. Other powers, however, did not proceed from God in this way, that is, they were neither dispatched nor sent forth by the will of God." *Commentary on John* 20, 162. For this *nous* to be joined to a body is also, of course, not unnatural, and hence this *nous* serves as the only means possible by which God can adopt a body at all.

152. *On First Principles* 4, 4, 4; cf. *Against Celsus* 3, 28. Cf. Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 83.

153. See *Commentary on Luke* 19, 1: With the exception of Christ, "every human soul, before it turns to virtue, is stained with vices."

154. *Against Celsus* 1, 32–33. This is Origen's way of describing Christ as "like us in all ways but sin."

155. "[T]he Word, still remaining essentially the Word, suffers none of those things which are suffered by the body or the soul [*psychē*]." *Against Celsus* 3, 15.

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to sin. Origen uses a diversity of images to describe the salvation wrought by this soul. It is an exemplar, a model whose moral life other souls can imitate.¹⁵⁶ The original Image renews and refashions the human images that have been soiled.¹⁵⁷ The undimmed flame of this soul's love rekindles the cooled embers of our own.¹⁵⁸ This soul becomes a "ladder" by which other souls advance back to the God, whom they have abandoned through sloth.¹⁵⁹ The Word, whose brilliance is too bright for fallen souls, condescends to the frail form of flesh, so that we might be elevated to gaze upon his "real and pre-eminent appearance."¹⁶⁰ The divine Word became man so that man might become God:

But both Jesus Himself and His disciples desired that His followers should believe not merely in His Godhead and miracles, as if He had not also been a partaker of human nature, and had assumed the human flesh which "lusteth against the spirit," but they saw also that the power which had descended into human nature, and into the midst of human miseries, and which had assumed a human soul and body [*psychên kai sōma*], contributed through faith, along with its divine elements, to the salvation of believers, when they see that from Him there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe, but so enter upon the life which Jesus taught, and which elevates to friendship with God and communion with Him every one who lives according to the precepts of Jesus.¹⁶¹

This elevation must take place in the entire "composite" (*syntheton*) of man. Hence, having taken on the human condition of body, soul and spirit, Christ undergoes the punishment of death, wherein the three elements are separated: the body is entombed, the soul descends into Hades, the *pneuma* is committed to the Father.¹⁶² In the

156. *On First Principles* 4, 4, 4. Cf. Le Boulluec, "Controverses au sujet," 223.

157. See Laporte, "La chute chez Philon et Origène," 328.

158. See *Against Celsus* 3, 69; *Homilies on Ezekiel* 13; cf. Laporte, "La chute chez Philon et Origène," 332.

159. *Commentary on Matthew* 13, 26; cf. Tripolitis, "Doctrine of the Soul," 112.

160. *Against Celsus* 3, 15.

161. *Ibid.* 2, 28.

162. *Dialogue with Heraclides*, 7.

resurrection, the three elements are reunited again: the soul is reunited to the body, the *pneuma*—having been confided to the Father as a “deposit”—is “taken up again,” so that Christ’s human nature in its integrity can vivify human nature in its integrity.¹⁶³ All of this, of course, is made possible by the preeminent love with which the soul of Christ cleaved unfailingly to the Father.

Such is the grand vision of salvation history that Origen narrates, which is a drama of love repudiated and love redeemed. The descent of souls to the present world, for Origen, is inserted into a drama, taking place under the loving providence of a benevolent God, who ensures that each and every individual soul receives the necessary means to secure its own redemption. Hence, when the embodied *logika* rejected the pneumatic life of God, he did not abandon them but ensured, through the transformation of their bodies and souls and the formation of the sensible world, and by the sending of agents of redemption, culminating in the sending of his own Son, that they would be drawn back to the same life that they once rejected.

Comparison and Conclusion

In the end, what comparisons might be made between Origen and the Middle Platonists on the question of the soul’s “descent”? One might sum this up by suggesting, between Origen and all Platonists back to Plato, a common existential reaction to man’s present situation of embodiment. All these authors, in considering man’s present, bodily life, react with something between melancholy and horror—due both to the challenges presented by the bodily life itself and to the gross inequalities in which these are found among men—and conclude that there must be some explanation for it. These authors, Platonists all, conclude that the explanation must be found in a fault freely committed in some preexistent life, and thus that man “deserves” his present state. Origen follows his Platonic predecessors in imagining some correspondence between the degree of a being’s ante-

163. *Ibid.*, 8. Cf. Dupuis, *L’esprit de l’homme*, 88. The divine Word, of course, undergoes none of this suffering and death, as he is impassible and immutable.

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rior fault and the present state of his life. In sum, this common reaction, and conclusion, is more or less where the commonalities end.

Among Middle Platonists, the foregoing insight is understood in the context of a closed cosmos that operates according to the rigid, quasi-mechanistic laws of dualistic ontology. While the notion of free will might be touted as the cause of the soul's fall, the correspondence of the soul's embodiment to its fault, to take one example, is strictly necessary according to the laws of nature. This holds true even for Plato: even when he supposes that the soul's descent is according to God's will, God's motivation is said to be the "completion of the universe," something that Plato dubs "necessary." Again, lacking is any notion that the cosmos as a whole, as a created order dependent upon the will of God, is radically contingent upon the same will. If the premises (in this case, the soul's primeval fault and the laws of ontic dualism) hold, the conclusion (the soul's embodiment) follows necessarily. One cannot view the soul's present embodiment, then, as one views a work of art, as the effect of a creative expression of a free agent; rather, one must view it as one views the result of a mathematical equation—desirable or not, there is not exactly much one can do about it.

Origen's cosmology, however, is predicated on the absolute being of God, and the radical contingency of all creatures, and in addition, the benevolent providence of God over his creation. Thus, for Origen, history is the product of the interplay between the free actions of God and his creatures. Rather, we should say that all history is *salvation history*, since the outworking of these free actions, under the oversight of God, is designed so as to achieve the redemption of all God's creatures. In this context, the "descent" of souls and their subsequent embodiment can be seen, not as the result of quasi-mechanistic, dualistic laws, but rather as a benevolent intervention of a loving God, who acts to bring good out of the evil acts of his creatures.

Similarly, because Origen—like Philo before him—viewed the material world as the creation of the same loving God, he was immune to the harsh dualism of Middle Platonists such as Numenius

and Plutarch. The body is not evil but is integral to the human person, whose existence is inconceivable without it. The fall of the soul is not a “fall into a body,” but rather a cooling of divine love, a Bride’s spurning of her Bridegroom, on the part of a creature who is already embodied. The terrestrial body and the sensible cosmos in which it dwells are not a punitive prison, but rather works of a loving God, engineered so as to secure most effectively the salvation of the souls that dwell therein.

Another point where Origen departs most substantively from the philosophers is his positive sense of individual personhood. For the Middle Platonists (though this is more pronounced in Neoplatonism) individuality is an afterthought, as individual souls are often seen as divine emanations, often indistinguishable from the World Soul itself. Their individuality often appears even as a defect, to be remedied by the final return of all souls into the World Soul. It was not that Middle Platonists rejected the survival of individual souls; rather, the question rarely even occurred to them. The individual person is swallowed up in the endless cycles of reincarnation—as plants, animals, humans, demons, and even gods—after which point the question of the individual becomes a moot one. If the embodiment of souls was good at all, it was good for the cosmos as a whole, not the souls themselves. Origen stands this assumption on its head: in his view, the entire purpose of God’s creation, both spiritual and sensible, is the good of rational creatures whom God wishes to draw to himself. The soul’s terrestrial embodiment is a benefit not only to the cosmos but to the soul itself—its particular embodiment being, as it were, “tailor made” to its own situation—so as to draw it more effectively to its end. And the *telos* of the person is not disembodiment and subsequent fusion with the World Soul, but rather its joining in the ranks of the celestial “city,” gathered in praise of its Creator.¹⁶⁴

164. Another key difference, of course, is that for the Platonists the soul reaches its end through its own recollection of truth via philosophy, where for Origen the soul reaches its end only by being empowered through divine grace. A discussion of this theme will be delayed until the following chapter.

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In sum, Origen's vision of cosmic history is a drama of love repudiated and love ransomed, under the guidance of loving Providence, not an unfolding of dualistic laws of nature in a quasi-mechanical process. Much of this vision, of course, was achieved already by Philo the Jew, and we should not underestimate Origen's debt to Philo on this matter. Philo had already achieved a transposition of Plato's achievement into the mold of biblical revelation, which had already necessitated a radical attenuation of Platonic claims. Origen advances beyond Philo not by challenging the latter's conclusions, but rather by taking them to their outer limits. The role of the soul of Christ, in particular, is no tangential aside but the heart of Origen's whole system, and a true achievement of his genius. The soul (or rather, the "mind") of Christ shows the potential of an unfallen person, of what the rational creature was always meant to be. As a soul that remained true to its original nature, enraptured in the embrace of divine love, the soul of Christ reveals mankind to itself, and thereby brings it to its own destiny. At the risk of anachronism, it is safe to say that Origen would have viewed the following claim of Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes* with approval:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. . . . Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. . . . Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too.¹⁶⁵

165. *Gaudium et spes*, par. 22.

CHAPTER 8

Destiny of Souls



A treatment of Origen's theology of the soul must culminate in Origen's view of the soul's grand destiny, that to which his entire anthropology is ordered. Origen's eschatological views were not without relation to his Middle Platonic predecessors—for example, on the soul's immortality and goal of "likeness to God"; but Origen's eschatology, informed most decisively by his Christology and his more positive view of material creation, ends up with a surprisingly different vision of the soul's *telos*. In particular, while the Middle Platonists tend to discuss the soul's immortality in terms that are impersonal, mechanistic, and individualistic,¹ Origen's views are enriched by the Christian doctrines of freedom, divine love, and grace. Whereas the Middle Platonists tend to view the body, along with the whole sensible world, as obstacles to the soul's salvation, Origen sees the sensible world as the very theater of salvation, and the body as an object of salvation, rather than a hindrance to it. Throughout, Origen's entire eschatological system hinges upon the linchpin of the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ on earth.

1. "Individualistic" here does not mean to imply that Middle Platonists denied a kind of final union between all souls in the World Soul, which they certainly did. Rather, the term refers not to the *end* but to the *means*—the Middle Platonists tended to assume that the soul would pursue this end on its own and by its own means, and lacked the strong sense—found in Christianity—that the soul's journey to its end required the

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After a brief survey of the views of Plato, a treatment of Middle Platonic views of the immortality and *telos* of the soul will follow. Finally, a subsequent presentation of Origen's views will include sections on (1) the *telos* of the soul, (2) the means toward this *telos*, (3) death and immortality, (4) the fate of the individual soul, (5) the fate of the body, and (6) the destiny of the created order as a whole.

Destiny of Souls in Plato

For Plato, the question of the immortality of the soul is contingent upon the metaphysical assumption of psycho-physical dualism; that is, the soul must have "its own proper existence" apart from the body.² This assumption (and with it, it seems, the immortality of the soul) would be seriously challenged by the triumph of Aristotle's hylomorphic anthropology, but Plato assumed that the soul could function perfectly well, and perhaps even better, without a body.³ This is because the soul's chief function was to think, and thinking is only impeded, not assisted (as it was for Aristotle), by the input of bodily senses. Thus, the soul's attachment to the body is accidental and unfortunate (even if some good could come of it), the two representing more or less an "unnatural" combination. Death, which Plato (citing Socrates) defines as the separation of soul and body,⁴ even if it necessitates the corruption of the body, need not for that reason necessitate the corruption of the soul. (The body is naturally dependent upon the soul to animate it, but not vice versa.) Dualism, then, makes the soul's immortality a real possibility.

Plato, however, wishes to make the soul's immortality more than a possibility, as he seems to think real arguments can be made for its probability, if not necessity. These are taken up with zest in the

corporate community of the Church, and all that was found therein, i.e., that which was traditionally termed the "communion *in sacris*."

2. *Phaedo* 64.

3. *Phaedo* 72–76.

4. "And is [death] anything but the separation of soul and body? And being dead is the attainment of this separation; when the soul exists in herself, and is parted from the body and the body is parted from the soul—that is death." *Phaedo* 63.

Phaedo. Plato's very odd argument from the "law of opposites," that death must pass into life since life passes into death, need not detain us, since it is the weakest of his arguments and he makes no attempt to prove his major premise.⁵ Most of Plato's arguments focus on the relationship between the individual soul and the Ideas, or gods. We have already spoken of the doctrine of reminiscence, which proves for Plato the soul's natural "kinship" with the Ideas, and of the various qualities that the soul shares with them, including simplicity, or not being made up of parts: "The soul is most like the divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and unchangeable."⁶ It is precisely because the soul is not made up of parts that it cannot be dispersed or dissolved into its components; hence, its perpetual survival is a matter of course.⁷ The *Phaedrus* also adds an argument from the soul's power of self-motion. Substances whose motion is self-originated, and not dependent upon another, can never cease to move, and hence must be eternal.⁸ All of these arguments, whatever their validity, rest on the assumption that immortality is "natural" to the soul: because it is what it is (or rather, because "what it is" is akin to the Ideas), annihilation is a metaphysical impossibility.⁹

This immortality should not immediately be equated with the blissful beatitude of Christianity, since for Plato the sins of the soul will require purgation by a series of reincarnations, often including successive lives as beasts, perhaps for thousands of years. Some, he speculates, may never escape these cycles of reincarnation at all. In this case, their immortality is not a happy one, but an unending series of tormented existences. Some, those purged by philosophy, may finally achieve the pure, disembodied state of the gods, which can be called their truly "natural" state:

5. *Phaedo* 69–72. See Robert Leet Patterson, *Plato on Immortality* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965), 48–49.

6. *Phaedo*, 80, a10–b5; cf. 245, d–e.

7. *Phaedo* 78b. See Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 213.

8. See Patterson, *Plato on Immortality*, 114–118.

9. "He wants to argue that the soul as such . . . has a natural claim to immortality in that, being simple and self-consistent, it is the sort of thing whose destruction is not rationally credible." Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, 1:315.

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But the soul, the invisible, which departs into another place which is, like itself, noble and pure and invisible, to the realm of the gods of the other world in truth ... if it departs pure, dragging with it nothing of the body, because it never willingly associated with the body in life, but avoided it and gathered itself into itself alone, since this has always been its constant study—but this means nothing else than that it pursued philosophy rightly ... if it is in such a condition, it goes away into that which is like itself, into the invisible, divine, immortal, and wise, and when it arrives there it is happy, freed from error and folly and fear and fierce loves and all the other human ills, and as the initiated say, lives in truth through all after time with the gods.¹⁰

Although the question remains the subject of some debate among scholars of Plato, it is difficult to affirm that Plato's immortality involves the survival of an *individual person*, given the cycles of re-incarnation it has passed through, and the "fusion" with the World Soul that is its destiny.¹¹ Due to the affinity of the soul to the Forms, in the words of John Rist, "it is not clear what relationship the soul which survives has to *us*."¹² But it is, in either case, an immortality, not an annihilation.

Destiny of Souls in the Middle Platonists

The question of mankind's destiny in the afterlife was especially urgent to the Middle Platonists: indeed, few intellectual movements seemed to feel it as urgently as they did.¹³ But this question depends upon an anterior question: how does one define mankind, or the human person? For those in the Platonic tradition the human person was never the body-soul complex, but rather the soul itself, or even the higher soul in contradistinction to the lower.¹⁴ The body

10. *Phaedo* 80c–81a; cf. 112–115.

11. "[The soul is] to live on the universal plane, to *lose himself* more and more in the contemplation of truth, so that the perfect psychē would, it seems, lose itself completely in the universal mind, the world-psychē." Grube, *Plato's Thought*, 148, emphasis in original. Robert Patterson affirms the individual survival of the soul; cf. *Plato on Immortality*, 115.

12. Rist, "Platonic Soul, Aristotelian Form, Christian Person," 359, emphasis added.

13. "The chief objective of the movement [i.e., Middle Platonism] was to solve the problem of man's destiny and salvation through a philosophical system of the universe." Tripolitis, *Doctrine of the Soul*, 24.

14. See previous chapters, especially 4 and 5.

never formed an integral element of the human person, but was always viewed as a foreign accretion, superadded to its essence and to be sloughed off at death: "Now, when we are living, the soul is dead, and has been entombed in the body as in a sepulcher; whereas should we die, the soul lives forthwith its own proper life, and is released from the body, the baneful corpse to which it was tied."¹⁵ Those Middle Platonists who affirmed the existence of a lower soul, whether conceived as a nefarious principle of evil or simply a vital, nutritive element, did not identify this soul with the person, but saw it as an unnatural outgrowth designed to facilitate the superaddition of the body to the soul. The soul, then, or perhaps only the highest, cognitive element of the soul, was the person, and a discussion of the afterlife must revolve around this element alone.

What is the fate of the person at the moment of death? If death brings the separation of soul from body, and if no Greek philosopher could envision the survival of the body, then the obvious question is whether or not the soul survives death. Middle Platonists were not unanimous in their answer to this question, largely because they differed in their consideration of the soul itself. Some figures who emerge in the dawn of the Middle Platonic era, heavily influenced by Stoic materialism, deny the immateriality of the soul, and hence could not affirm the soul's immortality.¹⁶ Some, perhaps, affirmed some kind of quasi-survival of the soul, in that the soul is permitted to rejoin the cosmic fire that spawned it, only to perish in the final conflagration, but this hardly merits the name "immortality."¹⁷ The bulk of Middle Platonic authors, however, follow Plato in affirming the immortality of the soul, often echoing the same arguments of Plato himself.¹⁸ These arguments usually center on the natural

15. Philo, *Allegories of Laws*, 1.

16. It seems that such was the case with Antiochus of Ascalon. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 96–97.

17. This seems to be the case with Posidonius; see *Adv. Phys.* 1, 72. "Also they survive on their own... For having quitted the sphere of the sun they inhabit the region below the moon, and there, because of the purity of the air, they continue for a considerable time." Cf. Gourinat, *Les Stoïciens et l'âme*, 34–35.

18. It should be noted that, according to the testimony of Nemesius of Emesa, argu-

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qualities of the soul, such as divinity or incorporeality, which make its destruction logically impossible, its survival a *fait accompli*.¹⁹ The “natural subordinate divinity of the soul,” as A. Hilary Armstrong writes, was a Platonist commonplace, as opposed to the soul’s “divinization by the grace which God freely gives to those He freely chooses.”²⁰ Those Middle Platonists who distinguish between a higher and lower soul tend to attribute immortality only to the former, and assume that the latter dies with the body.²¹

To affirm the immortality of the soul, however, is not to speak of its destiny; rather, it is to define negatively that which begs for a positive definition. What is the end, the *telos*, of the soul? The Stoics had defined man’s *telos* in terms of conformity with nature, with the cosmic order (and hence saw no need for an individual immortality, as this could occur without eternal survival). And many Middle Platonists labored under the same assumption, especially the earlier figures, such as Plato’s successor at the Academy, Speusippus (407–339 BC), Plato’s third successor, Polemon (313–270 BC), and above all Antiochus of Ascalon (130–68 BC).²² Yet one of the predominant features of Middle Platonism, and in some sense the feature that defined the movement as a whole, was the affirmation of a transcendent end for the soul, namely, “likeness to God.”²³ The majority of

ments for the immortality of the soul played a strong role in the teaching of Ammonius Saccas, onetime teacher of Origen. See *De Natura Hominis* 2.

19. See Numenius, *Neoplatonic Writings* 2, 7, 66. See Alkinous, *Handbook of Platonism*, 25. This principle can also be found in Cicero, for whom the indivisibility of the soul guaranteed its immortality; see *Tusculan Disputations* 1, 71.

20. “Man in the Cosmos: A Study of Some Differences between Pagan Neoplatonism and Christianity,” in *Romanitas et Christianitas. Studia I. H. Waszink a.d. VI kal. Nov. a 1973, 13 lustra complenti oblata*, ed. W. den Boer, P. G. van der Nat, C. M. J. Sicking and J. C. M. van Winden (Amsterdam: North Holland Publ., 1973), 5. An exception here is Philo, for whom the soul is naturally mortal and is granted immortality only by the providential disposition of God. See Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:410.

21. See Numenius, *Neoplatonic Writings* 1, 1, 16; 2, 4, 56; Philo, *Quod Deterius* 82–83; Alkinous, *Handbook of Platonism* 22, 32.

22. “It any conjecture were to be made ... it would be that Antiochus followed the Old Stoic doctrine that the ... there was no personal immortality.” Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 96.

23. “When we turn to later Alexandrian Platonism ... we find that the Stoic-

Middle Platonic thinkers, and certainly those who made the most defining marks on the tradition, were of this mind. Many saw no reason to choose between the two, since “likeness to God” could also be achieved by conformity with the universe that he had fashioned.

This was an especially easy move for a thinker like Philo, who used the *Logos* as a transitional notion here: conformity to the *Logos* achieved both ends at once, immersing one in the reason-principles of God’s creation while simultaneously uniting one to the Creator himself.²⁴ At the very least, the most influential Middle Platonists affirmed that the soul could be satisfied by nothing short of union with God himself, as the One and the Good. It went without saying that not all souls could achieve this end, but no other end could bring true happiness.

We must ask again, however, the vexing question raised earlier, as to whether this happiness is one enjoyed by the individual person, or whether this *telos* involves the dissolution of anything that might be considered individuality. Putting aside the question of whether a bodiless soul can even be considered a “person,” except in a very attenuated sense,²⁵ we may instead ask whether the individual soul’s union with the World Soul abolishes its individuality entirely.²⁶ Middle Platonists, though perhaps not nearly in so systematized a fashion as Neoplatonists,²⁷ were prone to see diversity as a defect

Antiochian definition has been abandoned in favour of a more spiritual, and perhaps more truly Platonic, ideal of ‘Likeness to God’ (*homoïōsis theōi*) ... this formula remained the distinctive Platonic definition of the *telos* ever afterward.” Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 44. See Alkinous, *Handbook of Platonism*, 179f; Plutarch, *On the Divine Vengeance* 550d.

24. “[The patriarchs] gladly accepted conformity with nature, holding that nature itself was, as indeed it is, the most venerable of statutes, and thus their whole life was one of happy obedience to the Law.” *Abr.* 6.

25. “If I am more than my soul, namely my soul when somehow attached to a body (which I need to be as an active moral agent), but what is more than my soul perishes at death, then I must perish at death whatever happens to what I now call ‘my’ soul.” Rist, “Platonic Soul,” 361.

26. The single exception to this may be Philo; because he rejects the notion of a universal soul, he is able to conceive of the survival of an individual soul as a distinct entity. See Wolfson, *Philo*, 396.

27. See Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 242. Plotinus also associates self-consciousness

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from an original unity, and hence tended to envision the soul's perfection as a dissolution of distinguishing characteristics and a fusion into primal unity. Diversity was often associated with the body—Aristotle's view of matter as the "principle of individuation" was not too far removed from the Platonic view—and so the soul's escape from the body would seem to eradicate its individuality.²⁸ Thus, if the soul survives death, it does not survive as an individual entity, but is swallowed up in the World Soul by which it was generated in the first place.²⁹ (The fact that the soul may undergo numerous reincarnations in various bodies raises even further doubts about whether what survives can be considered an individual person in any meaningful sense.)

If this final union is the *telos* of the soul, the last question to be asked is how the soul is to achieve or attain this *telos*. Even if immortality (the inability to be dispersed or dissolved) is an innate property of the soul, one can hardly say that "likeness to God" is something to be presumed upon, or something that will happen by default. Many Middle Platonists, like Philo, are convinced that very few will in fact attain this end.³⁰ Certainly the Christian notion of "grace" was far from the minds of these thinkers, and in fact the notion that special, privileged revelation was necessary at all generally met with stiff re-

with attention to external things (since man is self-conscious only as a means of self-differentiating from things other than himself): hence, when man reaches the intelligible world, he "has no recollection of himself." See *Enneads* 6, 5, 7; cf. Bréhier, *Philosophy of Plotinus*.

28. Philo, perhaps surprisingly, is no exception here, since "no direct or indirect reference to resurrection as distinguished from immortality is ever made by him." Wolfson, *Philo*, 404.

29. See Dörrie, "La Doctrine de l'âme dans," 121. Cf. the discussion of "monopsychism" in Philip Merlan, *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metacosciousness: Problems of the Soul in the Neo-Aristotelian and NeoPlatonic Tradition* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963); cf. also Stead, "Individual Personality in Origen."

30. "The death of worthy men is the beginning of another life. For life is twofold; one is with corruptible body; the other is without body and incorruptible. So that the evil man 'dies by death' (Gen. 2:17) even while he breathes, before he is buried, as though he preserved for himself no spark of the true life, which is excellence of character. The decent and worthy man, however, does not 'die by death,' but, after living long, passes away into eternity, that is, he is borne to eternal life." *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesisim* 1, 16.

sistance.³¹ Even if some admitted that religious practice, for example sacrifice via the pagan cult, could be beneficial, this was not because of a privileged access to the gods, but rather because the pagan cults enshrined universal principles of nature.³² For the Middle Platonists the physical universe is a theophany, “the only, and as far as possible, the complete, manifestation of God on the level of space and time.”³³ Since man’s *telos* is a bodiless one, reason dictates that the means to achieve it involves a renunciation of the body. This means that the first step is virtue, conceived as a renunciation (or at least taming) of bodily pleasures,³⁴ and the final step is philosophy, conceived as cultivation of the mind.³⁵ This process served to “acclimate” the soul to the afterlife, even to begin such a life while on earth. We have not yet arrived at the profound mysticism of Plotinus, predicated on the assumption that man’s *telos* could be achieved while on earth (at least in part),³⁶ but it is not too much to say that such a life could be an-

31. See Dörrie, “La Doctrine de l’âme dans,” 128. The natural exception, of course, is Philo, who believed in the necessity of divine help to reach man’s last end. See *Allegorical Interpretation* 17, 78–80; *On the Change of Names* 3, 19.

32. See Dörrie, “La Doctrine de l’âme dans,” 128.

33. Armstrong, “Man in the Cosmos,” 6–7. Armstrong adds, “It is a contrast between a monotheism which sees the One God, the unique, unchallengeably and unchangingly transcendent, source of all reality and goodness, communicating divinity to all beings whom his spontaneous creativity brings into existence according to their capacity to receive it, and the monotheism of the ‘jealous god’ [of Nicea], separated by an unbridgeable gulf from his creation, guarding his divinity as an unique prerogative which it is blasphemy and idolatry to attribute to any other being.”

34. See John Dillon, “Plotinus, Philo and Origen on the Grades of Virtue,” in *Platonismus und Christentum: Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie*, ed. Horst-Dieter Blume and Friedhelm Mann (Münster: Aschendorff, 1983), 97–98. Some Middle Platonists, such as Speusippus, Numenius, and Alcinous, believe that bodily pleasures must be spurned altogether; others, such as Polemon, Xenocrates, Antiochus, Philo, and Plutarch, hold that they must merely be moderated to such a degree that they do not hinder the progress of the soul. See Speusippus, *Fragment* 58; Numenius, *Testimonia* 40; Alkinous, *Handbook of Platonism*, 180, 13–14; Polemon, *On the Life according to Nature*; Xenocrates, *Fragment* 4; Antiochus, cf. *De Finibus* 5, 16; Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 7, 19f; Plutarch, *On Moral Virtue* 451b.

35. Usually the liberal arts are seen as an intermediate step. Cf. Philo, *On the Preliminary Studies* 3–4, e.g.

36. See Dörrie, “La Doctrine de l’âme dans,” 123. This is also because, for Plotinus, the superior elements in man have never fallen into the sensible realm to begin with; hence, all that is required is for man to recognize the godlikeness already present within

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anticipated, at least.³⁷ While few philosophers imagined that the renunciation of bodily pleasures could be easy, none imagined that the obstacles were insurmountable, so long as the requisite human effort was expended.³⁸ And if this end was to be achieved at all, the soul could look to no other source of sustenance besides its own efforts.³⁹

In sum, the Middle Platonists, sharing Plato's assumption of psycho-physical dualism with regard to human nature, discuss the afterlife in terms of the soul's survival of the body. When this survival is affirmed, it is predicated upon the natural, innate qualities of the soul—divinity, immateriality, simplicity—which make its dissolution metaphysically impossible. The soul that has lived rightly in the body—that is, spurned fleshly pleasures and practiced philosophy—may hope to reach its *telos*, conceived as “likeness to God,” even if this requires the absorption of the individual into the World Soul. The bulk of this does not move much beyond Plato, save for a more pronounced dualism and a “hardening” of the twin convictions that man's destiny necessitates a complete liberation from the prison of the body and an overcoming of diversification so as to achieve a primal unity with the One.

Origen and the Destiny of Souls

Origen found a fortuitous rapport between the Middle Platonic goal of “likeness to God” and the conviction of Christian revela-

himself. If this happens rarely it is not because it is difficult, but because so few have the knowledge and will to carry it out. See *Enneads* 4, 3, 6; 5, 1, 1.

37. Philo, for his part, believed that mystical union with God could theoretically be attained in this bodily life, but only rarely and partially. *On the Unchangeableness of God* 1, 2. Indeed, Philo even claimed to have attained as much: *On the Migration of Abraham* 7, 34–35.

38. Cicero is confident that those who have kept themselves free of bodily contagion will find an “easy return” to the realm of the gods. See *Tusculan Disputations* 1, 72–73; cf. Stephen Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 125–29.

39. The closest the Platonists come to affirming man's need for supernatural assistance is the tendency among Neoplatonic authors to permit the use of magic or divination as a means of securing the assistance of *daemones* or gods. But this is hardly “grace” in the Christian sense, since the *daemones* are being manipulated by theurgy, rather than acting freely and personally. See Dörrie, “La Doctrine de l'âme dans,” 130–31.

tion that man was created “in the image and likeness” of God (Gn 1:26–27). While the passage in Genesis spoke of man’s beginning, Origen interpreted it eschatologically: “image” describes man’s created kinship with God (found in his immortal soul), while “likeness” describes man’s progressive and lifelong task of approximating the divine holiness:

[W]hile the first human being did indeed receive the dignity of God’s image in the first creation, the dignity of his likeness is reserved for the consummation. This is so that human beings would work to acquire it by their own industrious efforts to imitate God; for in the beginning only the possibility of perfection is given them by the dignity of the “image,” while in the end they are to acquire for themselves the perfect “likeness” by the carrying out of works.⁴⁰

The “image” that man finds impressed upon himself thus sparks an awakening, which spurs man on to attain the divine likeness.⁴¹ The latter task occurs through the mediation of Christ, who is the perfect Image and Likeness of the Father: “Since he is the invisible image of the invisible God [Col 1:15], he himself grants participation in himself to all rational creatures in such a way that the participation each of them receives from him is commensurate with the passionate love with which they cling to him.”⁴² Hence, Origen reminds himself, “I need to consider that the Lord and Savior is ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Col 1:15) and realize that my soul is made in the Creator’s image, so that it is an image of the Image . . . [and] not directly an image of God.”⁴³ This “godlikeness” (*homoïōsis theōi*), though it presupposes a willful struggle in the present life (“each one of us shapes his soul into the image of Christ”⁴⁴), will be obtained fully only in beatitude.⁴⁵ Because the soul’s end corresponds to its beginning, this “godlikeness” is no extrinsic achievement but rather the culmination of the soul’s own natural orientation.⁴⁶ While “likeness

40. *On First Principles* 3, 6, 1.

41. See *Commentary on John* 20, 183.

42. *On First Principles* 2, 6, 3.

43. *Homilies on Luke* 8, 1.

44. *Homilies on Luke* 8, 2.

45. See Crouzel, “Le cœur selon Origène,” 105.

46. See Marty, “Le discernement,” 263.

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to God” also doubles as a philosophical term, Origen can also use the more biblical concept of divinization or *theosis*, which similarly highlights the unique mediation of Jesus Christ, who fully possesses the divine nature:

“Gods” he calls those who by grace and participation in God are given the name of gods.... And yet although these are capable of being God and seem to be given this name by grace, none of them is found to be like God in power or nature.... For example if we say that a portrait is like the one whose image is seen expressed in the portrait, the similarity is due to the quality of the expression—grace —, while in substance the two remain quite different ... Therefore no one is “like the Lord among the gods” ... except the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷

Similarly, Origen can underline the intellectual dimensions of the soul’s final end, joining the Middle Platonic ideal of noetic contemplation with the biblical notion of “knowledge.” St. Paul had already spoken of the coming perfection in terms of “fully knowing” (1 Cor 13:12). Origen referred this statement to the Father, while at the same time insisting that, since only the Son knows the Father, we shall know God only by being incorporated into the Son, as “only sons in the only Son.”⁴⁸ He is called the *Logos*, after all, precisely “because He takes away from us all that is irrational, and makes us truly reasonable.”⁴⁹ For in the eschaton, we will “ascend by reason,” so as to feed no longer upon the straw of irrational beasts, but upon the pure rational food that nourishes the angels, that of the *Logos* himself.⁵⁰ And the rational creature is capable of this destiny not because of his body or even his soul, but because of the mind or *nous* that constitutes his very essence: “that which sees God is not the eye of the body; it is the mind [*nous*] which is made in the image of the Creator, and which god has in His providence rendered capable of that knowledge.”⁵¹ The soul (*psychē*) that the rational creature presently possesses, after all, is

47. *Homilies on Exodus* 6, 5.

48. See *Commentary on John* 1, 10. See Crouzel, “Le cœur selon Origène,” 105.

49. *Commentary on John* 1, 267; cf. 2, 42.

50. See *ibid.* 13, 214.

51. *Against Celsus* 7, 33. See also *On First Principles* 1, 1, 7: “[T]he mind [*mens*] bears a

merely a deformation of that original mind, and its refashioning into such a pure mind will be the effect of its salvation.⁵²

More often, however, Origen prefers to speak of the soul's destiny as its coalescence with the spirit, whether with the human *pneuma* or with the Holy Spirit of God: "those who, mortifying their members on the earth ... have united themselves to the Lord, being made altogether spiritual [*integro spiritus*], that they may be forever one spirit [*unus spiritus semper*] with Him, discerning along with Him each individual thing, until they arrive at a condition of perfect spirituality [*perfecti effecti spiritales*]."⁵³ Even within the human constitution itself the *pneuma* stands as the ordering principle, that is, that to which all elements are ordered. The *pneuma* is the *telos* of the body, and the whole movement of the human person—body, soul and mind— is organized so as to progress toward the spirit, to be "pneumatized."⁵⁴ Not only the body, but the soul too, must be entirely given over to the spirit, which requires the transformation of the soul to mind, along with the appropriate attenuation of the body. And here Origen has entirely departed from the materialist conception of the *pneuma* held by Stoics and Platonists alike, for it is only Origen who truly "spiritualizes the spirit,"⁵⁵ by conceiving of it not as a material element but as the vivifying activity of God himself, and a human means of participation in the same.⁵⁶

At the point that the rational creature finds itself entirely conformed to the divine Spirit, his adhesion in love is such as to become permanent and indefectible. God's gift of free will has as its purpose to grant mankind the capacity to adhere to the divine will; this freedom is enhanced by the acceptance of God's will and diminished by its refusal. When a creature's loving obedience is "changed by the

certain relationship to God, of whom the mind itself is an intellectual image, and that by means of this it may come to some knowledge of the nature of divinity."

52. See *On First Principles* 2, 8, 3.

53. *Ibid.* 1, 8, 4.

54. See Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 54.

55. See Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma*, 454.

56. See Cécile Blanc, "Dieu est Pneuma. Le sens de cette expression d'après Origène," in *Studia Patristica* 16: 224–41.

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power of habit into nature,"⁵⁷ this represents not a destruction but an exaltation of liberty, for thus the creature is able fully to return the perfect love flowing from the Father through the Son and Spirit. In his unfailing choice of the good, man is solidified in the realization of his own divine likeness, and truly becomes himself. Origen's system of thought runs from being to vocation: the good that we do not possess by nature becomes ours through free choice. Our free choice, conceived as the arbitrary freedom to choose good or evil,⁵⁸ in fact, must be surmounted by cleaving permanently to the Good.⁵⁹ In the end, the destiny of the rational creature is not merely a cosmic return to a state of integration with God, but more importantly, a union in spirit and love with the benevolent God in whose image man was fashioned.

Origen and the Means to the Soul's Destiny

As we have seen, most of the Middle Platonists imagined that the practice of philosophy was the most essential means of securing the soul's happy destiny, supplemented by a lifelong purgation (or moderation) of fleshly desires. The latter element is certainly found in Origen. Because man's likeness to God cannot be achieved without the entire submission of body to soul/mind, and soul/mind to spirit, the soul must work throughout its earthly life to subdue the passions of the flesh.⁶⁰ These passions are not merely physical, for they wreak their havoc on the mind as well, in the form of temptations, ignorance, delusions, and even demonic visions.⁶¹ Hence the

57. On *First Principles* 1, 6, 3. See Crouzel, "Anthropologie," 239.

58. This sense of freedom has been called by Servais Pinckaers the "freedom of indifference." See Servais Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 242–43.

59. See Marty, "Le discernement," 271.

60. "And indeed He came not to bring peace on the earth, that is, to corporeal and sensible things, but a sword, and to cut through, if I may say so, the disastrous friendship of soul and body, so that the soul, committing herself to the spirit which was against the flesh, may enter into friendship with God." *Commentary on John* 1, 229.

61. "[W]e will also be according to the likeness of God, having abandoned every passionate desire for matter and bodies, and even for some of those beings who are according to the likeness." *Commentary on John* 20, 183.

lifelong task that Origen calls “this training of ours in the body.”⁶² The goal of this training for Origen, however, is not the complete eradication of fleshly desires,⁶³ but merely their “taming” and moderation, so that the body is an obedient “instrument of the soul,”⁶⁴ or an instrument of God.⁶⁵ (This is what preserves Origen from a rigid dualism; like Plato, he holds that the bodily passions can be neutral or even positive, so long as they are kept under the governance of reason.) Only when the desires of the mind are “purified and separated from bodily matter” may it hope to see God.⁶⁶

Origen describes the saint as one who no longer lives the earthly life at all but lives in heaven, where lies his true citizenship, even if he appears to live on earth.⁶⁷ But we should interpret these phrases in terms of analogical anticipation, for Origen certainly does not mean that the route to heaven may be obtained with any great facility, or even that it may be obtained at all on earth, regardless of any measure of human striving.⁶⁸ One of the greatest gulfs between Origen and his Platonic contemporaries was Origen’s robust theology of grace. Origen could never imagine that the soul could secure its redemption by means of its own efforts, apart from the benevolent mercy of God: “Even the most just person, when faced with the rigor of God’s judgment, has need of God’s mercy, because the very fact of seeming to have become just is due to the mercy of God. For what has anyone done that could be worthy of eternal blessedness?”⁶⁹ One of Origen’s greatest fears in his discussions of eschatology is that ra-

62. *On First Principles* 2, 3, 2.

63. “We are not commanded to tear out and destroy the natural impulses of the soul, but to purify them, that is, to purge and drive out the dirty and impure things which have come to them by our negligence so that the natural vitality of its own innate power might shine forth.” *Homilies on Joshua* 22, 4.

64. *Fragment on 1 Corinthians*.

65. See *Commentary on Romans* 4, 14; cf. Blanc, “L’attitude d’Origène.”

66. *On First Principles* 1, 1, 7.

67. See *Homilies on Luke* 17, 21; *Homilies on Romans* 9, 1, 10.

68. See Henri Crouzel, “La ‘première’ et la ‘seconde’ résurrection des hommes d’après Origène,” in *Didaskalia* 3 (1973), 19.

69. *Commentary on the Psalms* 118, 156.

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tional creatures “should be ignorant that it is by the grace of God and not by their own merit that they [will] have been placed in that final state of happiness.”⁷⁰

For Origen the one and only source of grace for mankind is the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, apart from whom any heavenly progress is inconceivable. The preexistent soul (or rather, *nous*) of Christ, because it never fell from the love of the Father, provides an ongoing means by which man can participate in God.⁷¹ Upon this unfallen soul’s descent to earth, fallen souls are invited to follow his saving path: the Transfiguration, his sacrificial death, the descent of his soul into *Hades*. When the expiring Christ commits his spirit (*pneuma*) into the hands of the Father, this has nothing to do with physical death, but is for Origen a symbol of Christ’s commendation of all saints as acceptable to the Father.⁷² During this earthly life we may not possess the virtues of God directly, but only “under the shadow” of his Son’s human nature. Thus, we may obtain through him the divine realities that he possesses connaturally, the realities that are named in his many *epinoia*, chief among which is Wisdom itself.⁷³ If we are to be divinized, it will be only by participation in him who is God by right and by nature: we “are called gods because of our participation in him.”⁷⁴ He is the true Image after which we were fashioned; he is the true Light by which we are illuminated, and he is the true Life by which we live.⁷⁵ In sum, while Origen is not sanguine

70. *On First Principles* 2, 3, 3.

71. See Le Boulluc, “Controverses au sujet,” 223. Also, cf. the remarks on Christ’s role in chapter 7, “The Effects of the Descent of Souls in Origen.”

72. See *Fragment on Matthew* 560. Cf. Dupuis, *L’esprit de l’homme*, 86.

73. See Henri Crouzel, “Le cœur selon Origène,” 105.

74. *Commentary on John* 2, 3.

75. “[I]n the image of God he created him’ [Gen. 1:27]. We must see what this image of God is. . . . What else could this image of God be . . . except our Savior who is ‘the first-born of all creation?’ [Col 1:15].” *Homilies on Genesis* 1, 15. “It is clear that the source of that life which is pure and unmixed with anything else resides in him who is ‘the first-born of all creation’ [Col 1:15]. Drawing from this source, those who have a share in Christ truly live that life.” *Commentary on John* 1, 28. “He was the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world’ [Jn 1:9]. Whatever is of rational nature has a share in the true light.” *Homilies on Jeremiah* 14, 10.

about the degree of moral ascesis necessary for the soul's redemption, his ethical vision is firmly set against the background of his Christology, apart from which all such ascesis would be fruitless.⁷⁶

In the same vein, it is surprising to note that the practical task of philosophy, as conceived by Origen's contemporaries, plays a relatively insignificant role in Origen's ethical worldview.⁷⁷ Though he viewed philosophy as a helpful preparation for wisdom, it was neither indispensable nor sufficient for it; only Scripture could provide such wisdom. Origen was not as indisposed as most Middle Platonists were to make redemption hinge upon special, unique revelation, for only in Scripture did one find the revelation of Christ. And along with Scripture, one must acknowledge the importance of the Christian sacraments in the soteriology of Origen. Baptism sanctifies not only the soul but the body, by conforming it to the glorified body of the Lord.⁷⁸

This is not to say that the revelation of the New Testament—the human mission of Christ, the hierarchical Church and its rites—is the supreme destiny of the soul. For just as the Old Testament is a mere shadow of the New, so the New is a mere shadow of what Origen calls the "Eternal Gospel" (a term derived from Rv 14:6). The present Gospel participates in the eternal Gospel, and is in fact one and the same *hypostasis* with it, being different only in *epinoia*, or point of view. Thus all the elements of the present Gospel—including the humanity of Christ and the structure of the Church—have a double structure, reflecting the divine mysteries *ex parte* ("in a mirror," cf. 1 Cor 13:12) while at the same time making these mysteries fully present. Here we see Origen's clear vision of Christian sacramentalism,⁷⁹ which has in a way "baptized" the Platonic dualism of the world on two planes. Thus, there are two baptisms (water bap-

76. It would be remiss to ignore the role of Origen's pneumatology; the entire Trinity plays a role in Origen's eschatology: as the Father gives us being, the Son gives us reason, and the Spirit holiness. See *On First Principles* 1, 3, 8. Cf. Marty, "Le discernement," 266–70.

77. See Crouzel, *Origène et la philosophie*.

78. See *Commentary on Matthew* 13, 21.

79. See Crouzel, "La 'première,'" 4.

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tism and the eschatological purgation) and two resurrections (ritual baptism and the eschatological resurrection), and the like.⁸⁰

In summary, Origen accepts the essential framework of the Platonic ethic of moral asceticism, but views this as altogether supplemental to—or rather, contingent upon—the Gospel revelation. Thus, the grace of Christ, transmitted through the Church, remains the indispensable means by which the soul obtains its destiny.

Origen on Death and Immortality

Given the radically contingent status of creatures in Origen's cosmology, the only true Life worthy of the name can be said to belong exclusively to God himself. Man may have life, but "it is not possible for someone who participates in life, and for this reason is called living, ever to become Life itself."⁸¹ God alone possesses life substantially and by right. Mankind, on the other hand, possesses it only accidentally, and this by participation in the life of the Word, under his *epinoia* as True Life, for "it is clear that the source of that life which is pure and unmixed with anything else resides in him who is 'the first-born of all creation' [Col 1:15]."⁸² Even this participatory life that we now possess, however, is only a shadow of the true life of eternity, as Origen so eloquently replies to bishop Demetrius in his *Dialogue with Heraclides*:

How is it that the Apostle says of God: "Who alone has immortality" [1 Tim 6:16]? I investigate and find that Jesus Christ "died for all except God" [2 Cor 5:15]. There you have the sense in which God "alone has immortality." Now then, let us take unto ourselves eternal life; let us take it unto ourselves the best we can. God does not give it to us, but sets it before us: "See, I have set before you life" [Dt 30:15]. It is for us to stretch forth our hands by performing good deeds and lay hold of life and deposit it in our soul. This life is Christ, who said: "I am the life" [Jn 11:25], this life which is

80. *Fragments on Romans* 29; cf. *Commentary on Romans* 5, 9. See Crouzel, "La 'première.'"

81. *Commentary on John* 2, 4.

82. "Drawing from this source, those who have a share in Christ truly live that life." *Commentary on John* 1, 28.

presented to us now in shadow, “but then face to face” [1 Cor 13:12]: For the Spirit is before our face, Christ the Lord of whom we say, “in his shadow we shall live among the nations” [Lam 4:20].... [I]f the shadow brings so many good things, what will not our life be when we no longer live under the shadow of life but will be in life itself!⁸³

Any discussion of immortality, then, must be conditioned by this premise. As long as a creature remains in the world, subject to sin and hence a sinner, it cannot be said to be immortal in any absolute sense. Interminable possession of life can belong to the creature only inasmuch as it cleaves unfailingly to God in love.⁸⁴ And since this union can occur only through the mediation of the Word, Origen can speak of a soul “possessing in itself incorruptibility” only “because it has been clothed with Christ, who is the Wisdom and Word of God.”⁸⁵

When we speak of immortality, we must be attuned to Origen’s careful exegesis of this word, since “immortality” can refer to either natural or supernatural life—we shall speak first only of natural.⁸⁶ Natural immortality belongs to the soul by its very nature, as one of its natural properties correlative to its characteristic features. This does not, however, mitigate the statements made above, that all creatures possess life only accidentally and contingently, as gifts from the Creator. We might say, then, that Origen holds the soul’s immortality to be “contingently natural” to it.⁸⁷ (This does not diminish the soul’s immortality, however, but strengthens it, since it is held in existence not by its own power, but God’s.)⁸⁸ Hence, the prospect of annihilationism is ruled out by Origen: “All of us human beings die the ordinary death which we think of as a dissolution. No human soul ever dies this death.”⁸⁹ For it is inconceivable that anything

83. *Dialogue with Heraclides* 27–28.

84. See Lawrence R. Hennessey, “Origen of Alexandria: The Fate of the Soul and the Body after Death,” *Second Century* 8, no. 3 (1991), 170–71.

85. *On First Principles* 2, 3, 2.

86. See *Dialogue with Heraclides* 24–26.

87. See Henri Crouzel, “Mort et Immortalité selon Origène,” *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 79 (1978): 87.

88. “For God made all things so that they would exist; and what has been made in order to exist is incapable of not existing.” *On First Principles* 3, 6, 5.

89. *Dialogue with Heraclides* 25–26. Elsewhere he argues that the many threats

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immortal and incorruptible by nature—and this holds true not only for men but also for angels and all rational creatures—should be subject to mortality.⁹⁰ A significant portion of Origen's *Dialogue with Heraclides* is spent arguing against the Thnetopsychites, who identified the soul with perishable blood.⁹¹

This is not so of the body, for which immortality is not a natural property. In fact, for Origen the body is naturally mortal, prone to death and decay; its life is “required of it.”⁹² If the body is to survive death it must be “clothed with the soul,” which in turn is “clothed with Christ,” as was said above:

We cannot conceive, so far as the concept goes, of a mortal essence changing into an immortal one, and a corruptible nature changing to incorruption. For this is like saying that something changes from a corporeal into an incorporeal nature, as though something common underlies the nature of corporeal and incorporeal beings, and that this continues constant, as those who are clever about these things say that the material remains although the qualities change into incorruption. But it is not the same for the corruptible nature “to put on incorruption” and for the corruptible nature to change into incorruption. And we must say the same things also concerning the mortal nature [i.e., the body], which does not change into immortality, but puts it on.⁹³

found in Scripture regarding the destruction of the soul are not to be taken literally, for they have for their “object the conversion of the hearers.” *Against Celsus* 6, 58.

90. “For on the one hand, because the soul is capable of sin, and the soul that sins shall die, we also will say that the soul is mortal. But if he supposes that death means the total dissolution and destruction of the soul, we will not agree, because we cannot conceive, so far as the concept goes, of a mortal essence changing into an immortal one, and a corruptible nature changing to incorruption.” See *Commentary on John* 13, 427–30.

91. “Origen said: ‘It has come to my ears, and I speak in full knowledge of the situation, that some people here and in the surrounding regions think that the soul, after its deliverance from this life, no longer perceives anything but lies in the tomb, in the body.’” See *Dialogue*, 10–24. Origen responds with his “law of homonymy,” where he allows that the soul is blood only in a spiritual sense, since each of the spiritual senses corresponds with a bodily organ. Origen betrays the passion that he feels for this subject: “And I recall being carried away with some vehemence on this matter against the other Heraclides and Celer, his predecessor, indeed with such vehemence that I wanted to drop the subject and leave.”

92. See *Commentary on John* 19, 98–101. Note that this is not so with Christ, whose bodily death was not required by nature, but freely permitted nonetheless for the purposes of redemption. See *Commentary on John* 19, 15–16.

93. *Commentary on John* 13, 427–30.

The soul receives immortality, then, indirectly, by virtue of its being animated by a soul that is privileged with the gift of immortality.⁹⁴

Origen not only believed in the natural immortality of the soul, but—like his Greek contemporaries—he believed that solid philosophical arguments could be made for it.⁹⁵ He was certainly aware of the sound arguments already made by his predecessors,⁹⁶ which he insisted that the Christian could accept in good conscience,⁹⁷ but did not hesitate to develop them along the lines of his own thinking. First, Origen argues that the soul must be immortal in order to undergo the final judgment: “No human soul ever dies [a natural] death; for if it did die, it would not be punished after death.”⁹⁸ And such a judgment, for Origen, is strictly necessary in order to ensure that the cosmic demands of justice are met. (What is more, Origen argues, it makes no sense that the soul should be punished without the body, since the latter is responsible for so many of its sins.)⁹⁹ Secondly, Origen also uses an argument from man’s existential desire for eternal life: no natural desire can be in vain, lest anything in the created order be found to be futile or meaningless. Man’s desire for knowledge cannot possibly be satisfied in the present life; hence, it would be absurd if God did not give the occasion for its satisfaction:

And as, when our eye beholds the products of an artist’s labor, the mind, immediately on perceiving anything of unusual artistic excellence, burns to know of what nature it is, or how it was formed, or to what purposes it was fashioned; so, in a much greater degree, and in one that is beyond all

94. See *On First Principles* 2, 3, 2; Crouzel, “Mort et Immortalité,” 89–90.

95. “We have still to prove the doctrine of immortality, not only by what the Greeks have so well said regarding it, but also in a manner agreeable to the teaching of Holy Scripture.” *Against Celsus* 3, 22.

96. Hence, Origen demands of Celsus, “let him meet the arguments, which are not lightly advanced among Greeks and Barbarians, regarding the immortality of the soul or its duration after death, or the immortality of the mind.” *Against Celsus* 3, 80.

97. “And do not suppose that it is not in keeping with the Christian religion for me to have accepted, against Celsus, the opinions of those philosophers who have treated of the immortality or after-duration of the soul; for, holding certain views in common with them, we shall more conveniently establish our own position.” *Against Celsus* 3, 81.

98. *Dialogue with Heraclides* 25–26.

99. *Fragment on Matthew* 208.

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comparison, does the mind burn with an inexpressible desire to know the reason of those things which we see done by God. This desire, this longing, we believe to be unquestionably implanted within us by God; and as the eye naturally seeks the light and vision, and our body naturally desires food and drink, so our mind is possessed with a becoming and natural desire to become acquainted with the truth of God and the causes of things. Now we have received this desire from God, not in order that it should never be gratified or be capable of gratification; otherwise the love of truth would appear to have been implanted by God into our minds to no purpose, if it were never to have an opportunity of satisfaction.¹⁰⁰

Thirdly and finally, the angels are shown to possess immortality due to their participation in the eternal light of the Triune God; since “only like knows like,” they must be intelligible and incorruptible like God. And, since mankind shares a common nature with these creatures, he must likewise be as immortal as they are.¹⁰¹ To these philosophical arguments Origen adds numerous arguments from biblical revelation, since belief in the immortality of the soul could not be taken for granted even among Christians in Origen’s day.¹⁰²

Even if such “natural” immortality occupied a central place in the moral vision of the Middle Platonists, however, it could hardly satisfy Origen, who had a far grander vision of life. When he is asked by bishop Demetrius whether the soul is immortal, Origen draws a distinction between three kinds of death that the soul might undergo:

I will reply that the soul is both immortal and not immortal. First, let us carefully define the word “death” and all the meanings that come from the term “death.” ... I know of three deaths. What are these three deaths? [1] Someone may live to God and have *died to sin*, according to the Apostle [Rom6:10]. This death is a blessed one [2] I also know another death by which one *dies to God*. About this death it is said, “The soul that sins shall die [Ez 18:4]. [3] And I know a third death according to which we ordinarily consider that those who have left their body are dead.¹⁰³

100. *On First Principles* 2, 11, 4; cf. Crouzel, “Anthropologie,” 238.

101. *On First Principles* 4, 4, 9–10. See Crouzel, “Mort et Immortalité,” 86.

102. See *Dialogue with Heraclides* 22–24, where he argues that biblical references to a blissful afterlife become nonsense if the soul dies with the body.

103. *Dialogue* 25, emphasis added. Origen is here following closely the Stoic ethical distinction between the good, the bad, and the indifferent.

There is a profound link between supernatural death and natural death, since the former is the cause of the latter.¹⁰⁴ According to Origen, the soul is altogether immortal with respect to the third, or natural, death, for the reasons discussed above. In relation to the first and second kinds of death—death to sin and death in sin—Origen replies that the soul is mortal in one sense and immortal in another. Since the soul in its present, earthly state remains free, it is not immune from either death. Only “if it is confirmed in blessedness so that it is inaccessible to death, in possessing eternal life it is no longer mortal but has become, according to this meaning, immortal.”¹⁰⁵ This latter manner of immortality, supernatural immortality found in permanent adhesion to the divine life of the Trinity, is *true* immortality, and of this the former, natural immortality of the soul is merely a shadow.

The same discussion occurs in Origen’s *Commentary on John*, when he takes issue with the denial of the soul’s immortality by the late second-century Gnostic Heracleon. Origen insists that, in regard to natural death, “the total dissolution and destruction of the soul,” the soul is altogether immortal. Yet he also grants his opponent that “because the soul is capable of sin, and the soul that sins shall die, we also will say that the soul is mortal.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, when Origen reads St. Paul’s desire to be among those “who are alive” (1 Thes 4:17) at the coming of Christ, he interprets it spiritually, for the “living” are those who have been brought to life in baptism.¹⁰⁷ Those who are truly alive, for Origen, are those who have undergone the first resurrection in baptism and who have kept this life unstained by any grave fault, regardless of whether or not they have experienced natural death.¹⁰⁸ Thus, while natural death is neither good nor bad, far more dangerous is spiritual death: “spiritual death is as-

104. The exception, of course, being Christ, whose death was not required but permitted for the purposes of redemption. See *Commentary on John* 19, 15–16. In fact, Christ’s natural death becomes a means of supernatural life for others.

105. *Dialogue* 27.

106. *Commentary on John* 13, 427–30.

107. See *Commentary on John* 20, 26; cf. Crouzel, “La ‘première,’” 14–15.

108. See Crouzel, “La ‘première,’” 17.

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surely called 'death' from the fact that, just as the common death separated the soul from the body, so also it strives to separate the soul from the love of God, and this surely is the death of the soul."¹⁰⁹ The mere survival of the soul beyond the death of the body, for Origen, is unworthy of the name "life": only an eternal sharing in the divine, vivifying life of God can be called true life.

Origen and the Destiny of the Individual Soul

If the individual soul survives death, whither does it go upon its departure from the body?¹¹⁰ The ambiguity found in the Old Testament had not been entirely resolved by the New Testament, and early Christian writings were surprisingly ambiguous about the so-called interim state of the soul between death and resurrection. The Old Testament had spoken of *Sheol*, the abode of the dead, which was often identified with the Hades (*infernium*) in the parable of Lazarus and Dives (Lk 16:23) or the "Paradise" Jesus promises to the thief at his side (Lk 23:43). Origen himself continues this identification, and even affirms that this Hades was the resting place of Samuel (before being summoned by the witch of Endor), Lazarus (before being raised by Christ), and even John the Baptist (after his beheading).¹¹¹ While many early Christians held this Hades to be the locale of all souls awaiting the resurrection,¹¹² Origen insists that the role of this "region of souls"¹¹³ was restricted to the righteous of the Old Covenant.¹¹⁴ These had been freed by Christ in his descent to "preach to

109. *Commentary on Romans* 6, 12, 4; cf. *Commentary on John* 13, 140.

110. For methodological purposes, this section will discuss only the eschatological destiny of the individual soul, apart from any larger, cosmological considerations as to the destiny of mankind or the cosmos as a whole. The latter issues, far more important to Origen, will be treated in the last section of this chapter.

111. For references, see Lawrence R. Hennessey, "The Place of Saints and Sinners after Death," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Peterson (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 298–99.

112. Other Christians believed that souls clung to corpses as ghosts. See *Against Celsus* 2, 60, e.g.

113. See *Commentary on John* 28, 43.

114. See Henri Cruzel, "L'Hadès et la Géhenne selon Origène," *Gregorianum* 59 (1978).

the spirits in prison" (1 Pt 3:19–20),¹¹⁵ and thereupon Hades had exhausted its role, and presumably ceased to exist.¹¹⁶ Once the gates of heaven have been opened by Christ, the righteous dead ascend there immediately and without delay. Origen was a pioneer in this doctrine, namely, of the immediate entry to heaven on the part of the saints,¹¹⁷ and was largely responsible for its "mainstreaming" in the Christian theological tradition. (Similarly, of course, the wicked enter immediately upon their own punishment, which will be discussed below.)

If the righteous are delayed at all upon entering heaven, in Origen's view, it is due to a moral, rather than a cosmological, hindrance, for the soul that would enter heaven must first be purged of sin. The baptism of water is a prefiguration of, and also a prerequisite for, the "baptism of fire" (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16) that would occur after death.¹¹⁸ Origen is not rigid in his terminology for this state. He prefers biblical images—St. Paul's language of "passing through fire" (1 Cor 3:11–15),¹¹⁹ the "prison" of Luke 12:58–59, from which one will not escape "until he has paid the last farthing,"¹²⁰ or the "flaming sword" that guards Paradise in Genesis 3:24, and through which those who would enter must pass.¹²¹ Yet he does not hesitate to resort to the Platonic myth of "custom officials of the beyond," understood as a *schola animarum* where souls are progressively educated by celestial beings in their path toward heavenly wisdom.¹²² The purpose of Origen's doctrine of the eschatological purification—which should

115. "[W]hen He became a soul, without the covering of the body, He dwelt among those souls which were without bodily covering, converting such of them as were willing to Himself." *Against Celsus* 2, 43.

116. See *Commentary on John* 8, 6, 43; 28, 7, 54.

117. Tertullian believed that only the martyrs were admitted to heaven immediately; *De Anima* 55, 4; *De Resurrectione* 17, 2; the same belief can be found in the martyrdom account of Perpetua. Cf. Crouzel, "Mort et Immortalité," 188–89.

118. See *Homilies on Luke* 24. Cf. Crouzel, "La 'première,'" 5–7.

119. See *Homilies on Jeremiah* 2, 3, e.g. See Henri Crouzel, "L'exégèse origénienne de 1 Cor. 3, 11–15 et la Purification Eschatologique," in *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 272–83.

120. See *Homilies on Luke* 35.

121. See *Homilies on I Kings* 28, 10.

122. See *Homilies on Matthew* 51; *On First Principles* 2, 11, 6. Cf. Crouzel, "Mort et Immortalité," 190; Hennessey, "Place of Saints," 303–5.

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be neither anachronistically confused with nor artificially distinguished from the later doctrine of purgatory¹²³—is to explain how those with minor sins might still be admitted to the presence of God. Those who have kept the grace of their water of baptism unstained will have no need for the baptism of fire,¹²⁴ although Origen's usual expression is that *all* will undergo the purifying fire—which is nothing other than God's very presence—but only sinners will experience pain from this presence.¹²⁵ Although Origen refrains from crude speculations about the exact manner of punishment, he is under no illusion that it will be a pleasant process: "Thrice unfortunate are those who have need of being baptized by fire!"¹²⁶ At the same time, it is also a time of education and illumination, which satisfies the soul's thirst for knowledge.

One factor that sets Origen's views apart from later, medieval speculation is Origen's apparent indifference toward chronological factors related to the afterlife. He rarely describes this purification in temporal terms, and when he does so it is clearly in the context of allegory. Nor do we find any suggestions that the righteous soul must "wait" in the interim between its death and the final judgment and general resurrection. Indeed, it seems that the later concepts of the particular judgment, the final judgment, and purification are all merged together in the mind of Origen; one might even suggest that the resurrection, heaven, and hell are viewed in tandem. All seem to be features of the self-same "event"—the soul's exposure to the fire of the divine love. Immersion in this fire accomplishes the tasks of judgment, purification, bliss, and punishment all at once. We should not suppose that Origen has developed a systematic teaching on this matter; rather, one should conclude that the careful distinctions of later theology simply never occurred to him.¹²⁷

123. Crouzel calls Origen "un des premiers grands théologiens du Purgatoire," in an expression that is perhaps excessive but not altogether untrue, if understood in the sense of the development of theological concepts. "Mort et Immortalité," 190.

124. See *Homilies on Jeremiah* 1, 3.

125. "Those who draw close to me, draw close to fire." *Homilies on Joshua* 4, 3.

126. *Homilies on Jeremiah* 1, 3.

127. "It does not seem, however, that the eschatological purification should be

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Having been purged of any remnants of minor sin, the righteous soul enters immediately into the full and blessed union with its Creator, needing no delay in Hades.¹²⁸ Here it may “enjoy repose in the bosom of Abraham.”¹²⁹ Far from conceiving this as a mere passive state (given the lack of a terrestrial body), Origen considers the blessed to be thoroughly active in the worship of God.¹³⁰ The soul will know God fully, no longer by means of some external mediator, but inasmuch as it has been interiorly conformed to God’s very Wisdom or *Logos*.¹³¹ What is more, the saints are not without concern for their fellow creatures on earth, those who are still pilgrims on the way to their heavenly homeland. Thus, the saints actively intercede for those still on earth, weeping for their sins and longing for union with them.¹³² The martyrs, in particular, are “co-redeemers” (cf. 1 Cor 3) with Christ, offering their blood in union with Christ’s for the purification of those still on earth.¹³³ The righteous of the Old Covenant, too—the patriarchs and prophets—do spiritual warfare on behalf of their brothers and sisters below.¹³⁴ Origen holds that due to the mystical solidarity that unites all of God’s people, the happiness of the blessed will be incomplete until they experience full communion with their beloved on earth:

My savior may not rejoice until I no longer remain in iniquity. . . . The apostles themselves have not yet received their joy, but they wait until I may participate in their joy. They will not entirely receive the full recompense of

distinguished from the final judgment. In Origen’s writings there is no difference between the particular judgment and the general judgment, nor is there any speculation about the intermediate period between time and eternity, which would extend from the death of the individual until the general resurrection. This will be the preoccupation of later theology. Rather, after death, each person passes through the process of purification, the baptism of fire: the saints and repentant sinners—the former unscathed and the latter painfully purified—pass on afterwards to heaven, while the hardened, unrepentant sinners are sent to the ‘eternal fire’ of Gehenna.” Hennessey, “Place of Saints,” 303.

128. “We too will pass through the flaming sword, and we will not descend into the region of those who fell asleep before the coming of Christ, awaiting His arrival.” *Homilies on I Kings* 28, 10.

129. *Dialogue with Heraclides* 23.

130. Crouzel, “Mort et Immortalité,” 193.

131. *Commentary on John* 29, 7, 47.

133. See *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 50.

132. See *Commentary on John* 13, 58, 403.

134. See *Homilies on Numbers* 26, 6.

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their merits, but they await us, although we tarry, although we are delayed. There is no perfect joy for them so long as we suffer our errors and are full of sin.¹³⁵

Origen and the Destiny of the Body

The most decisive chasm between Origen and his fellow Middle Platonists, at least in the area of eschatology, was Origen's conviction that the soul could attain no destiny apart from the body to which it was joined. Part of the difficulty in assessing Origen's contributions here is the unique theological challenges of his own age. Saint Paul, in his masterful and picturesque description of the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15, would capture both the *identity* and *difference* of this body, vis-à-vis the present body, in the images of a seed and its growth. Later generations of Christian thinkers would face a more acute "spiritualization" of the doctrine of the resurrection, borne along by the rapid Hellenization of Christian thought, and would therefore have to lay greater stress upon the *identity* of both bodies, and hence upon the true corporeality of the glorified body. Hence, Methodius of Olympus (d. AD 311) would attack with great ferocity Origen's theology of the resurrection, accusing the Alexandrian of teaching a purely spiritual resurrection. But Origen, writing little less than a century earlier, had far different concerns, for the tendency in his day was to stress far too heavily (and naively) the *identity* of the resurrection body with the earthly one. Hence, many Christians in Origen's day (whom he blithely dubs the "lovers of the flesh," or *philosarkoi*) saw the resurrection as a crude, bodily resuscitation.¹³⁶ Some of the fiercest debates in Origen's day, which appear so curious and ironic to later thinkers, concerned the effects of cannibalism on the resurrection body.¹³⁷ Many well-reputed theo-

135. *Homilies on Leviticus* 7, 2.

136. Origen also calls these the "children" (*innocentes*), or "rustics" (*rustici*), and accuses them of believing the glorified body will have the same constitution as the earthly, complete with identical bones, blood, hair, feet, hands, eyes, genitals, and the like. See Gilles Dorival, "Origène et La Resurrection de La Chair" in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lother Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 295.

137. See *ibid.*, 295. This question is addressed by Augustine in *City of God* 22, 12,

logians, later to be dubbed “millenarians” or “chiliasts,” believed that the resurrected body would enjoy a thousand-year reign of earthly happiness, preliminary to the final judgment.¹³⁸ In response to these tendencies Origen was led to emphasize the significant *difference* between the earthly and glorified bodies,¹³⁹ and much of his teaching on the resurrection seems oriented toward this pastoral situation.¹⁴⁰

Part of Origen’s struggle against millenarians or chiliasts in the Church concerned the “first resurrection” of Revelation 20:4–6, which many interpreted as a resurrection of the righteous to enjoy the thousand-year reign of earthly happiness.¹⁴¹ Origen’s ingenuity was to interpret this “first resurrection” as that of sacramental baptism:

The just are raised, saying, “We have been buried with Christ in baptism and we will be raised with Him” [cf. Rom 6:3]. We have here a pledge of the Holy Spirit, whom we will receive in full when the perfect comes, and therefore a pledge of the resurrection, because each of us has not yet been raised with the perfect resurrection. Yet we have been raised, for Paul says: “We have been buried with Christ in baptism and we will be raised with Him.”¹⁴²

This “first” or “partial” resurrection is a conformation to the death and resurrection of Christ, which liberates us from the demonic powers that dominate this world and sets us on the path to new life. Bap-

where he addresses it as the “most difficult question” raised by the doctrine of the resurrection.

138. “It is toward and against the Millenarians above all that Origen directs his own theology of the resurrected body,” Hennessey, “Origen of Alexandria,” 176.

139. Some theologians have concluded that Origen “over-emphasized the difference of the resurrected body from the earthly one to the point of putting the identity in real danger” (Hennessey, “Origen of Alexandria,” 177), but this judgment presumes the perspective of a historical hindsight that Origen lacked. It is unlikely that Origen saw any danger of a heretical misinterpretation of his views on this subject, so far from his mind were the errors of later centuries.

140. It is often debated whether or not Origen’s teaching develops substantially over the course of his career on this issue. Gilles Dorival rightly denies that Origen’s teaching is incoherent or undergoes radical change, but he does suspect that Origen gradually comes to a greater appreciation of the “faith of the simple” on this issue. Dorival, “Origène et La Resurrection,” 309.

141. See Crouzel, “La ‘première,’” 5.

142. *Homilies on Luke* 24.

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tism into Christ thus vivifies our mortal body and unites it with the spirit. Hence, Origen's dubbing of baptism as the "first resurrection" is no mere feint of apologetics but a genuine sacramental theology.¹⁴³ It is no substitute for a bodily resurrection, but an anticipation of the same, the beginning of a spiritual process of conversion that culminates in the "final" resurrection. For the saint "enjoys already the fruits of the resurrection . . . for he walks in a certain newness of life, but without being yet resurrected with the blessed and perfect resurrection for which we hope."¹⁴⁴

With regard to this "blessed and perfect resurrection," Origen emphasizes once again the great difference between the glorified body and the body that the believer now possesses. In Origen's conception of physics, all things were composed of four material elements; when a substance dissolves (e.g., in death), each of the four elements returns to its source: the breath to the air, the humors to the waters, the heat to the ether, and finally, the flesh to the earth.¹⁴⁵ The "flesh" that makes up this particular body, considered as a material element, does not persist beyond death as a part of the person, of *this* particular human body, but rather returns to the earth. This is how Origen interprets St. Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:50, "Flesh and blood shall not inherit the Kingdom of God." Consequently, in the resurrection there will be no fleshly passions.¹⁴⁶ This is not because of some rigid dualism, according to which the flesh or body are evil; rather, it is because the body, to be glorified, must be entirely submitted to the spirit or *pneuma*, and this requires the stripping away of the body's present covering of "flesh" that would seem to present an obstacle to this end. This does seem to raise a problem concerning the resurrected body of Christ, which certainly seemed, in the biblical accounts, to have been raised with the same (albeit transformed) material flesh as it had previously; but in Origen's view

143. See Crouzel, "La 'première,'" 9–10.

144. *Commentary on John* 10, 35, 231–2.

145. Dorival, "Origène et La Resurrection," 296.

146. See *Commentary on the Psalms* 1, 5.

Christ's resurrected body was an "intermediate body," between "the grossness of that which He had before His sufferings, and the appearance of a soul uncovered by such a body."¹⁴⁷

As to the glorified body, Origen is as reluctant as St. Paul (1 Cor 15:51) to speculate about the exact constitution or makeup of this body, but he does lay down some general lines of interpretation. There are, in fact, two divergent strands of speculation found throughout Origen's writings. The first is that the nature of any body must be appropriate to the environment in which it finds itself (as, e.g., the bodies of fish are appropriate to the sea, birds to the air). Hence, the glorified body, which must reside in the ether of the heavens, must be appropriate to its environment, or "ethereal":

The soul, which is immaterial and invisible in its nature, exists in no material place, without having a body suited to the nature of that place. Accordingly, it at one time puts off one body which was necessary before, but which is no longer adequate in its changed state, and it exchanges it for a second; and at another time it assumes another in addition to the former, which is needed as a better covering, suited to the purer ethereal regions of heaven.¹⁴⁸

Origen also implies that the righteous soul is drawn to the heavens because this environment "suits" it: "pure souls which are not weighed down with sin as with a weight of lead ascend on high to the region of purer and more ethereal bodies."¹⁴⁹ The second strand of speculation holds that the body appropriated by a given soul will be given, in Origen's words, "according to the merits of the indwelling soul."¹⁵⁰ That is, the quality of a given resurrected body will depend upon the quality of the soul who inhabits it. (This is akin to Origen's belief that the quality of a person's death depends upon the quality of the life it terminates.)¹⁵¹ The distinction between these two criteria—is the body refashioned according to its new environment, or according to its merits?—Origen never seems to resolve, but appears to cite both as though they were not in contradiction.

147. *Against Celsus* 2, 62.

149. *Ibid.* 7, 5.

151. See *Commentary on Romans* 9, 39.

148. *Ibid.* 7, 32.

150. *On First Principles* 3, 6, 5.

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The bodies of the righteous will be entirely transformed, such that the body will be altogether submitted to the mind, as the mind is to the spirit—a “spiritual” body. Origen also addresses the question of the resurrection of the wicked, a question never addressed by St. Paul to any degree of satisfaction. For Origen, the resurrection is not an exclusive prerogative of the righteous, but will belong also to the wicked. Their bodies, however, can hardly be called spiritual. Having shunned and stunted the influence of the *pneuma* for the duration of their earthly lives, the wicked will have their *pneuma* withdrawn from them entirely and returned to God.¹⁵² As the complete inverse of the righteous, their souls are entirely given over to the flesh, and their bodies become wholly carnal, murky and dark: “The wicked also, who in this life have loved the darkness of error and the night of ignorance, may be clothed with dark and black bodies after the resurrection, that the very mist of ignorance which had in this life taken possession of their minds within them, may appear in the future as the external covering of the body.”¹⁵³ Even if Origen lays a great emphasis on the *difference* between the earthly and glorified bodies, he is not in any way ignorant of the *identity* of these bodies, at least substantially.¹⁵⁴ It will not be a new body, but the same body having undergone a radical transformation. Origen offers three analogies to explain the tension between identity and difference: First, he echoes the Hellenistic distinction between the material body and its “qualities,” the former of which remains stable and constant while the latter is in flux. (In this case, the qualities of the body change from “terrestrial” to “celestial.”) Second, Origen uses the Stoic concept of seminal reason, or spermatic *logos*, which constitutes the identity, say, between a seed and its later growth, the latter in some way “anticipated” in the former. Third and finally, Origen points to the “form” (*eidos*) of an object, which remains constant

152. See *On First Principles* 2, 10, 7.

153. *Ibid.* 2, 10, 8.

154. For this topic, see the valuable article by Gilles Dorival, “Origène et la Résurrection.”

while its material components change and are continually replaced, using the example of a river and its waters.¹⁵⁵ Origen understands the “form” of the body as that which assures its identity at each moment of its existence in history, and which also guarantees the identity of the earthly body with the resurrected body.¹⁵⁶ Gilles Dorival compares Origen’s teaching to the “genetic code” of modern science, which distinguishes each individual from all others, and remains constant amidst all external changes.¹⁵⁷ Thus, the resurrected body will be just as much a *body* as the earthly body: beatitude is given on the condition of creaturehood—namely, bodiliness.¹⁵⁸ Hence, while emphasizing the spiritual nature of the glorified body, Origen does not hedge one bit over its genuinely corporeal and bodily nature, even if his understanding of corporeality is unique.

As for the qualities that will characterize the glorified body, Origen prefers a reverent silence. Yet many scholars have found in his work references to the Platonic notion of the *ochēma*, or “vehicle of the soul.”¹⁵⁹ Platonists had used this notion to explain the connection between the material body and the immaterial soul; the *ochēma* served as a kind of quasi-material medium¹⁶⁰ between the two substances.¹⁶¹ The Neoplatonists, in fact, would describe the *ochēma* as a “material envelope” that clothed the soul upon its descent to earth, and was abandoned when the soul ascends to its original position of pure immateriality. Origen’s use of the term is quite different, as he seems to identify the *ochēma* with St. Paul’s “spiritual body” of 1 Corinthians 15:44, and likewise with the bodies of

155. See Crouzel, “Idées platoniciennes,” 377–78.

156. See *Commentary on the Psalms* 1, 5. One of the illustrations Origen uses, of a “form” that assures identity at each stage of existence, is a birthmark!

157. See Dorival, “Origène et La Resurrection,” 312.

158. Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, III. Cf. *On First Principles* 2, 2, 2: “an incorporeal life will rightly be considered a prerogative of the Trinity alone.”

159. On this theme, see Crouzel, “Le thème,” 225–37.

160. Lawrence Hennessey calls it a *tertium quid*, neither strictly material nor immaterial. “Origen of Alexandria,” 174.

161. The notion of the *ochēma* can be traced from Plato through Aristotle into Neoplatonism and the hermitic literature. See Crouzel, “Le thème,” 225.

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the angels.¹⁶² It is this body that clothed the soul in its preexistence, and will clothe it again in the afterlife: it is nothing other than the earthly body, having been refined and spiritualized: the saints “will not be able immediately to escape all bodily clothing, they are just to be considered as inhabiting more refined and purer bodies, which possess the property of being no longer overcome by death, or of being wounded by its sting.”¹⁶³ In the interim, while the soul is clothed with a terrestrial body, the *ochēma* remains as a kind of “linear envelope” that perpetuates the form of the body,¹⁶⁴ and translates its form to the surviving soul in the refashioning of the glorified body.¹⁶⁵ In Origen’s exegesis of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, here allegorized as Christ’s ascension into Heaven, Origen writes, that the angels of heaven “gape at the novel sight of His corporeal vehicle,” that is, the glorified body of Christ, symbolized by the colt and ass.¹⁶⁶ Elsewhere, Origen uses the same concept to affirm that the glorified bodies of the saints will be no different from that of Christ.¹⁶⁷ Hence Origen utilizes the philosophical doctrine of the *ochēma*, ironically, not to emphasize the soul’s essential immateriality, as the Platonists did, but rather to emphasize its essential corporeality.

Origen and the Destiny of Creation

It would be remiss, however, to discuss the destiny of the individual creature apart from the far more central question of Origen’s cosmology, which is the destiny of the created order as a whole. Origen took very seriously St. Paul’s exquisitely phrased description of the destiny of creation in 1 Corinthians 15:23–28, which describes the subjection of all things to God, such that “God will be all in all.”

162. *Commentary on Matthew* 17, 30; cf. Verbeke, *L’evolution de la doctrine du pneuma*, 465.

163. *On First Principles* 2, 3, 3.

164. “... being in the same form [*homoieides*] with the dense, earthly body.” See the presumably Origenist fragment in Methodius, *De resurrectione* 3, 17.

165. See *Against Celsus* 2, 60.

166. *Commentary on Matthew* 16, 14–19.

167. See *Against Celsus* 3, 41–42.

The phrase that St. Luke puts into the mouth of St. Peter in Acts 30:20–21, the “restoration of all things,” gave Origen his preferred term for this destiny, that is, “restoration,” or *apokatastasis*.¹⁶⁸ Origen is well aware of the relative ambiguity and silence of Scripture on the exact nature of this “restoration,” and he never attempts to put forward anything like a systematic exposition on this theme. His answers are speculative, tentative, and always hedged with cautious and self-conscious caveats.¹⁶⁹ Later thinkers, nonetheless, wrongly interpreted Origen’s suggestions as dogmatic formulas, and then condemned them by council at Constantinople in AD 553.¹⁷⁰ But for Origen, the “final restoration” was certainly more a matter of Christian hope than of settled dogma.¹⁷¹

As Henri Crouzel notes, criticisms of Origen’s doctrine can usually be fitted into three categories: (1) that he teaches the non-eternity of punishment for demons and the damned, (2) that the resurrection body is itself suppressed in a purely immaterial *apokatastasis*, and (3) that the final restoration of all things into God dissolves into pantheism.¹⁷² The second point can be dispensed with rather readily, since we have repeated many times Origen’s insistence that no created being can exist without a body of some kind.¹⁷³ Even if the terrestrial qualities of the body will be cast off, resulting in the luminous and glorious body of the *ochēma*, this is no less a body, without which a soul cannot exist. The resurrected body in Origen’s eschatology is not a preliminary stage, but a final one.¹⁷⁴ While Origen shows a fa-

168. Even so, Origen’s actual use of this term is rare; cf. *Commentary on John* 1, 16, 91; *On First Principles* 3, 1, 15–19.

169. See Henri Crouzel, “L’Apocatastase chez Origène,” in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 283. When Mark Edwards claims that Origen expressly denies the *apokatastasis*, he refers to the narrow, Stoic understanding of that term. See *Origen against Plato*, 112.

170. See Percival, *Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 318–19; cf. Denziger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, nos. 212–28.

171. See Crouzel, “L’Apocatastase,” 289.

172. *Ibid.*, 282.

173. See *On First Principles* 2, 2, 2: “an incorporeal life will rightly be considered a prerogative of the Trinity alone.”

174. Cf. views to the contrary expressed by Jean Daniélou, not to mention the Fifth

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miliarity with the hypothesis of a purely spiritual *apokatastasis*, and notes many arguments that can be made in the favor of “those who think” it is true,¹⁷⁵ Origen explicitly condemns the hypothesis:

And if any one imagine that at the end material, i.e., bodily, nature will be entirely destroyed, he cannot in any respect meet my view, how beings so numerous and powerful are able to live and to exist without bodies, since it is an attribute of the divine nature alone—i.e., of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—to exist without any material substance, and without partaking in any degree of a bodily adjunct.¹⁷⁶

In the words of Henri Crouzel, an “avalanche” of texts support Origen’s conviction that the bodily resurrection, whether of Christ or of the saints, is final and definitive, and not a transitional state.¹⁷⁷

The third question, as to whether Origen conceived of the *apokatastasis* in a pantheistic sense, as the dissolution of individual things into the primeval unity of God, concerns Origen’s relation to Middle Platonism, which generally conceived of the end in exactly these terms. But Origen views the question differently, since his view of God is more complex: the Christian God is not only personal but tri-personal, which does not compromise his essential unity but certainly “personalizes” it.¹⁷⁸ The distinctions between the persons in God (to use later terminology) are not dissolved in the end; Origen believes the Son’s generation from the Father is eternal,¹⁷⁹ and never implies that the Son himself would be “subjected” to the Father in

Ecumenical Council at Constantinople, for which Origen’s supposed teaching on a Paradise of “free spirits” was a particularly sore point: “The resurrection is not therefore denied, but it will be only a stage on the way back to pure spirit.” Daniélou, *Origen*, 218.

175. *On First Principles* 2, 3, 3.

176. *Ibid.* 1, 6, 4.

177. See, e.g., *Dialogue with Heraclides* 5–8. Crouzel, “L’Apocatastase,” 285.

178. “Among the Greek Fathers the unity of God, the one God, and the ontological ‘principle’ or ‘cause’ of the being and life of God does not consist in the one substance of God but in the hypostasis, that is, the person of the Father. The one God is not the one substance but the Father, who is the cause both of the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. Consequently, the ontological ‘principle’ of God is traced back, once again, to the person.” John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 40–41.

179. See *On First Principles* 1, 2, 9; 4, 4, 1; *Commentary on Romans* 1, 5; *Homilies on Jeremiah* 9, 4.

a monistic sense.¹⁸⁰ And the final union of souls with the Father is a union of knowledge and love, not a mechanistic fusion; it is also a union *in the Son*, by means of the Son's own personal relationship with the soul.¹⁸¹ This manner of union, in the mind of Origen, attains complete unity without compromising the distinction between, or individual identity of, the two parties; in Origen's terms, neither "duality" nor "unity" are compromised.¹⁸² He cites the examples of the union of husband and wife ("one flesh"), of Father and Son, of the righteous and God ("one spirit"), and of the Church and the individual soul.¹⁸³ Likewise, and more to the point, the saint's final union with God is compared to iron placed in a fire, which becomes "wholly fire" without losing its individual identity as iron.¹⁸⁴ In the same way, "the just person, while distinct from Christ, is said by the Apostle to be one in relation to Christ: "For whoever is united to the Lord is one spirit with Him" [1 Cor 6:17]."¹⁸⁵ When Origen takes up in *Against Celsus* the Stoic theory that all things will end by being dissolved into the divine fire, he repudiates abruptly the notion that the "incorporeal soul . . . can be dissolved by fire."¹⁸⁶ These are explained not by the Platonic notion of "sympathy," but by Origen's theological notion of participation.¹⁸⁷

More difficult is the first question raised by Crouzel: will the punishment of the damned (both men and demons) be temporary or permanent? Origen is aware of the biblical threats of "eternal" and "inextinguishable" fire, and he uses these terms himself.¹⁸⁸ He knows of the biblical *Gehenna*, a place of profound ignorance of God and of fire

180. Even if he seems to say as much in *On First Principles* 3, 5, 6, he is here saying no more than St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:28, and for Origen this implies no subordinationism, any more than it does for St. Paul.

181. See *Commentary on John* 1, 16, 32.

182. *Dialogue with Heraclides* 4.

183. *Ibid.* 3; cf. Crouzel, "Anthropologie," 242.

184. *On First Principles* 2, 6, 6.

185. *Dialogue with Heraclides* 3.

186. *Against Celsus* 6, 71. See Crouzel, "L'Apocatastase," 288. Cf. *Against Celsus* 8, 72.

187. See Balas, "Idea of Participation."

188. See *Homilies on Jeremiah* 5, 19, 15, e.g.

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capable of burning even immaterial substances like the human soul.¹⁸⁹ He describes this fire in a psychological sense that is no less real: “each sinner kindles himself with his own fire” inasmuch as he is tortured by the sight of his own sins, an experience prefigured in the pricks of conscience felt even here below.¹⁹⁰ But he is also aware that most of these phrases are connected with the term “age” (*aiōn*), which for him is ambiguous: does it mean eternity, or simply a prolonged period of time?¹⁹¹ Origen was also convinced that divine punishment was always remedial or medicinal by nature, designed to effect the reformation and restitution of the sinner, a conviction that seemed to clash with the notion of an eternal hell.¹⁹² Origen knew, philosophically, that evil was not a substance but resided only in the wills of men, and he knew, pastorally, that the experience of evil and its consequences leads men to abandon it and turn to good.¹⁹³ Origen never comes to a decisive conclusion on this question, though; in many places he is content to echo the biblical description of unending, eternal punishment,¹⁹⁴ even distinguishing explicitly between the purifying fire of

189. See *On First Principles* 2, 10, 8; *Homilies on Matthew* 72.

190. *On First Principles* 3, 10, 4.

191. See Henri Crouzel, *Les fins dernières selon Origène* (Brookfield, Vt.: Gower, 1990), 291–331.

192. “[I]t is understood that the fury of God’s vengeance is profitable for the purification of souls.” *On First Principles* 2, 10, 4–6. “God is good and merciful. If enforcing penalties against sinners were not useful for their conversion, he would never requite sins with punishment.... All the bitter-seeming things God sends turn out to be educative or medicinal.” *Homilies on Ezekiel* 12; cf. Crouzel, “L’Apocatastase,” 287. This conviction was an important defense against the Marcionite assault on the goodness of God, which often used an eternal hell as proof of the malevolence of the Old Testament God. See *Homilies on Luke* 11, 2. In the same vein, Origen proposes that God’s threat of eternal punishment “has for its object the conversion of the hearers,” and need not be taken literally. *Against Celsus* 6, 58.

193. “Sin is allowed to exist so that if men want to see what it is like, they may wallow in it, and then, finding how bitter it tastes, grow weary of it and of their own accord go back to the good. Experience of evil thus appears as the essential preliminary to the recovery of the good by creatures possessing freewill.” Daniélou, *Origen*, 277.

194. “[W]e must fear the Word who is able, as God, to destroy and obliterate both soul and body, whether in Gehenna, or however he wishes.” *Commentary on John* 20, 82–83; cf. *Homilies on Jeremiah* 18, 1. Likewise, mention should be made once again of Origen’s suggestion that the *pneuma* of hardened sinners is permanently withdrawn and returned to God. *On First Principles* 2, 10, 7.

repentant sinners and the penal fire of hardened sinners.¹⁹⁵ And when he proposes that the punishment of sinners may be temporary, he does it always by way of hypothesis, never by way of conviction.¹⁹⁶

This same hypothesis relates not only to the wicked among mankind but also to the fallen angels, or demons. Origen's troubles with his local bishop, Demetrius (AD 189–232), seem to have begun when Origen was accused of teaching that the devil could be saved. Origen, for his part, immediately and explicitly denied that he ever taught such a blasphemous notion.¹⁹⁷ But his conviction that Satan was evil not by nature, but by choice, coupled with his strong belief in the enduring power of freedom, made it hard to deny at least the *possibility* of the devil's eventual conversion.¹⁹⁸ Since rational creatures cannot cease to exist, their subjugation to Christ cannot mean their destruction, but their conversion; as Origen says of the "last enemy, death": "Its destruction, therefore, will not be its non-existence, but its ceasing to be an enemy."¹⁹⁹ For "nothing is impossible to the Omnipotent, nor is anything incapable of restoration to its Creator."²⁰⁰ But even if the redemption of demons is possible, it is by no means a certainty, for Origen can readily imagine a different possibility, leaving it an open question "whether any of these orders who act under the government of the devil, and obey his wicked commands, will in a future world be converted to righteousness be-

195. "But God, the fire, consumes human sins; He crushes, devours, and purifies them, just as He says elsewhere: 'I will refine you with fire, until you are pure' [Is 1:25]. This is how He eats the sin of the one who offers sacrifice for sin. He Himself has taken on our sins, and within Himself, in so far as He is fire, He eats them and destroys them. And so, on the contrary, those who remain in their sins are said to be swallowed up by death, as it was written: 'Death prevails over them and will swallow them up' [Ps 48:15]." *Homilies on Leviticus* 5, 3.

196. Crouzel's statement that "Origène semble bien lui ôter alors toute possibilité de conversion [of the damned]" in "L'anthropologie d'Origène: *de l'arché au telos*," 46, seems to go beyond the evidence and to contradict Crouzel's own statements elsewhere, where he admits that Origen's opinions are ambiguous; cf. "L'Apocatastase," 287.

197. For texts, cf. Crouzel, "L'Apocatastase," 287.

198. See *Homilies on Leviticus* 9, 11; *Homilies on Joshua* 8, 4.

199. On *First Principles* 3, 6, 5. Henri Crouzel thinks it can be "easily deduced" that when Origen speaks of death in this passage, he means the devil. See "L'Apocatastase," 286.

200. On *First Principles* 3, 6, 5.

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cause of their possessing the faculty of freedom of will, or whether persistent and inveterate wickedness may be changed by the power of habit into nature."²⁰¹ At the same time, even if Origen believes all punishment to be medicinal, the eternal punishment of the demons (along with the wicked among mankind) may not be considered as a punishment at all, but rather as the state of the soul so permanently ensconced in wickedness that it is incapable of rising to God, its free will being wholly perverted.²⁰² In any case, it seems best to take Origen at his word that he never proposed the salvation of the devil, but to conclude at the same time that he never explicitly ruled it out.

Finally, we may add to Crouzel's list two further objections often raised to Origen's eschatology: (1) that the final *apokatastasis* is metaphysically necessary, a *fait accompli*, and (2) that, due to free will, the final *apokatastasis* will never be reached, since there will always remain the possibility of successive "falls" from God. That these objections are mutually exclusive opposites and are both made with some regularity only goes to show the paucity of evidence behind them. Some complain that since evil will eventually cease to exist, "universal salvation becomes a matter of purely physical necessity," which "makes nonsense of . . . the terrible power [man] has, through freewill, of refusing his God."²⁰³ This complaint, however, seems to underestimate the profundity of Origen's doctrine of human freedom. Granted, Origen seems to have no doubt that "the Word shall prevail over the entire rational creation, and change every soul into His own perfection." But for Origen this end can only come about by the means of free choice: "in which state every one, by the mere exercise of his power, will choose what he desires, and obtain what he chooses." And if Origen is confident that all creatures will in fact choose this end, it is not because they have been coerced, but because Origen could not imagine any creature rejecting a love so profound and penetrating as that of God, once it has experienced such love:

201. *On First Principles* 1, 6, 3. Cf. *Commentary on John* 20, 21, 174.

202. See Crouzel, "L'Apocatastase," 287.

203. Daniélou, *Origen*, 288.

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For although, in the diseases and wounds of the body, there are some which no medical skill can cure, yet we hold that in the mind there is no evil so strong that it may not be overcome by the Supreme Word and God. For stronger than all the evils in the soul is the Word, and the healing power that dwells in Him; and this healing He applies, according to the will of God, to every man.²⁰⁴

If Origen sounds more confident in this end than his theology would seem to allow, this is not because of some cosmic, mechanistic law of necessity that would require it, but perhaps because Origen's vision of hope is far grander than our own.²⁰⁵

Often the second complaint is made that because they are fundamentally free, souls can go on "falling" for all eternity, a thesis to which Christians must object as "contrary to another element in Christian dogma, viz., the doctrine that the choice made in this life is decisive in character."²⁰⁶ This "permanent instability" of the cosmos is far too like Platonist metempsychosis, and too unlike Christian providence.²⁰⁷ This does seem to pose a genuine problem in Origen's theology: how can free creatures obtain any definite end, without ceasing to be free? But Origen views freedom not in terms of whimsical arbitrariness, but as confirmed and consummated in the permanent embrace of love. He resolves this beautifully in his discussion of the soul of Christ, which became impeccable without ceasing to be free:

But since the power of choosing good and evil is within the reach of all, this soul which belonged to Christ elected to love righteousness, so that in proportion to the immensity of its love it clung to it unchangeably and inseparably, so that firmness of purpose, and immensity of affection, and an inextinguishable warmth of love, destroyed all susceptibility for alteration and change; and that which formerly depended upon the will was changed by the power of long custom into nature; and so we must believe that there

204. *Against Celsus* 8, 72.

205. See Crouzel, "L'Apocatastase," 289. See, in this connection, Hans Urs von Balthasar's work, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), whose chief tenets are drawn largely from Origen.

206. Daniélou, *Origen*, 288.

207. "This comes from the Platonist theory of metempsychosis, which set its mark indelibly on Origen's arguments and distorted them." Daniélou, *Origen*, 288.

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existed in Christ a human and rational soul, without supposing that it had any feeling or possibility of sin.... In this way, then, that soul which, like an iron in the fire, has been perpetually placed in the Word, and perpetually in the Wisdom, and perpetually in God, is God in all that it does, feels, and understands, and therefore can be called neither convertible nor mutable, inasmuch as, being incessantly heated, it possessed immutability from its union with the Word of God.²⁰⁸

Thus, Origen's view of freedom certainly does not rule out a definitive *apokatastasis*, any more than it demands successive "falls" or "worlds." If at times he mentions the possibility of successive worlds, or of the eruption of evil after the consummation, it is always as a purely academic hypothesis,²⁰⁹ and clearly not as an established matter of faith.

Comparison and Conclusion

In the end, what comparison can be made between Origen and the Middle Platonists on the destiny of the soul? First, it is hard to avoid the impression that the soul-God relationship, as conceived by the Middle Platonists, is impersonal, mechanistic, and individualistic. Middle Platonic eschatology, if one can speak of such a thing, lacks a personal viewpoint simply because the soul lacks any real identity apart from the World Soul from which it emerges, nor can it have any hope for a fate or destiny as a distinct and personal being.

Origen's Christian eschatology, on the other hand, assumes a soul-God relationship characterized by the highly personal realities of freedom, love, and grace. Union with God is conceived as a permanent adhesion in love, allegorized in the love poetry of the *Canticle of Canticles*.²¹⁰ The soul attains this union not by its own Herculean struggles to cast off the flesh, but primarily by the gratuitous,

208. *On First Principles* 2, 6, 4–6.

209. "The consummation of all things is the destruction of evil, although as to the question whether it shall be so destroyed that it can never anywhere arise again, it is beyond our present purpose to say." *Against Celsus* 8, 72; cf. *On First Principles* 2, 3, 3.

210. On this topic, see J. Christopher King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture: The Bridegroom's Perfect Marriage Song* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Frances Young, "Sexuality and Devotion: Mystical Readings of the Song of Songs," *Theology and Sexuality* 7 (2001): 80–96.

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redemptive benevolence of God, who seeks to “woo” the soul, thereafter ransoming it by the death of his own Son. While the soul may possess a “natural” immortality due to its own innate constitution, its “true” immortality, “death to sin” as a prophylactic against “death in sin,” can only occur through a radical re-creation from above. The soul neither attains nor enjoys its eternal reward in isolation: it attains it only through the mediation of the Church and its sacraments, and will not enjoy it in full until its fellow “pilgrims” have arrived, for which arrival it continually strives even in heaven. (So “corporate” is Origen’s conception of the afterlife, in fact, that he has trouble imagining anyone being excluded from it!) Far from losing its personal identity in this final union, the rational creature retains fully its distinct personhood, and even its freedom, which is never in the least compromised throughout the process.

Second, to draw out more fully the most “personal” element in Origen’s eschatology, Origen’s conception of the soul’s destiny is as Trinitarian as the rest of his theology: it is union *with* the Father, *in* the Spirit, *through* the Son. The Christological element certainly looms the largest, from beginning to end. Far from being a mere ornament or accretion, the role of Christ in Origen’s theology changes everything, radically reorienting the direction of Origen’s eschatology and giving it all of its characteristic features. The soul’s destiny, as an image of God, is to be refashioned in the form of the True Image, to be divinized in and through the Son, who fully possesses the Father’s deity, to become “fully rational” through union with the one who is Reason itself. The means by which the soul attains this destiny is not mere bodily asceticism or philosophical reasoning, but the infusion of the grace and the iconic imitation of Christ, as mediated through the rites and preaching of the Church. The creature can possess eternal life only accidentally²¹¹ and indirectly, by being clothed with him who is Life itself, through which it possesses that Life of which natural immortality is a mere shadow. Origen’s “topography” of the afterlife—that uniquely Christian *mélange* of Hades, the Kingdom

211. That is, *per accidens*, in the Thomistic sense, rather than *per se*.

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of Heaven, purgatory, and Gehenna—is entirely constructed around the redemptive work of Christ. It is he who frees the souls from Hades, purifies souls from sin, opens up the Kingdom of Heaven, and, when rejected, casts the soul into Hell. The general resurrection, too, is modeled upon that of Christ, and is contingent upon his. And the final *apokatastasis*, whatever its function in Origen's theology, is conceived essentially as the subjection of all things by the Son to the Father. Christology is undoubtedly the "linchpin" of Origen's entire eschatology, without whom the entire structure would fall apart.

Third and finally, given the dualistic anthropology of Middle Platonism, the entire structure of Platonic eschatology has an abstract and intangible air to it. Since the body is excluded from any real consideration of the person, the soul (or its highest part) must enjoy eternal bliss on its own. Furthermore, not only the body but the entire sensible cosmos, the material world taken together, ends up being not only irrelevant to the soul's destiny, but a hindrance to it. The material world in which the soul presently lives is, at best, irrelevant scenery, or at worst, a nefarious prison, in relation to which the soul must struggle for its own salvation. Origen's eschatology, on the other hand, is one in which the sensible and material world is neither irrelevant scenery nor a nefarious prison, but the very theater in which the drama of redemption is played out. While Origen echoes Middle Platonists in his general ethic of asceticism, he does not view the body or its desires as intrinsically evil; he desires their subjugation, not their destruction. Immortality belongs not only to the soul, but also to the body with which the soul is "clothed." Most Middle Platonists lacked even the vocabulary to discuss the bodily resurrection; even Philo the Jew seems uncannily reticent on the subject. Even if Origen is at greater pains to emphasize the "spirituality" of the resurrection body than its corporeality, he does not compromise the latter, and possesses a consistent and systematic teaching on the resurrection of the body. The soul attains its destiny not alone, but in conjunction with the body, the two of which together constitute the human person, the object of the redemptive love of God.

Conclusion



This concluding section will assess, briefly, the individual conclusions of each chapter, followed by a general conclusion. A subsequent appendix will address how Origen's anthropology influenced the later Greek patristic tradition.

The first three chapters treated Origen's responses to Middle Platonic speculations on the soul—the questions regarding its division, its relation to the body, and whether or not one could speak of “two souls” in Origen's theology. Chapter 1 concluded that Origen rejects tripartite soul division, but does seem to allow for some modified form of soul bipartition, while insisting on a primordial unity for the soul. The soul, for Origen, is only conceptually divisible inasmuch as it possesses a “tension” between higher and lower powers, its spiritual vocation and its fleshly condition. This division is not so much ontological as it is ascetic and spiritual, reflecting the moral crisis within the soul. Chapter 2 affirmed Origen's positive view of matter, while allowing that matter can become an “occasion” of evil indirectly, inasmuch as man's free will uses it for evil purposes. This view is essentially Middle Platonic, although it is less dualistic and gives a greater primacy to human freedom, in light of Christian revelation. Chapter 3 proposed that Origen accepts a “two-level” or “hierarchical” dualism, in which a higher and lower soul are in tension, but the lower soul is not evil in principle. This is less of an ontological division than a moral polarity, although it is not without

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ontological implications. While Origen draws upon Middle Platonic language in this respect, his essential framework is fundamentally Christian.

The fourth and fifth chapters discussed Origen's view of the higher and lower souls, respectively. Origen accepts the Platonic identification of the higher soul with "mind" or rationality. He enriches this concept, however, by associating the mind with the divine *Logos* incarnated in Christ, along with the biblical images of the "heart" and the "image of God." These associations allow Origen to incorporate the rational functions of the Platonic mind into the broader schema of the Christian moral and spiritual life. In this framework, the higher soul finds itself in an ontic and dynamic relationship with the Triune God. Middle Platonists had difficulty integrating the "higher soul," which carries out cognitive functions, and the "lower soul," which carries out vital functions. Yet Origen approaches the question not as an exclusively philosophical but also as a theological problem, in light of man's creation in God's image and His reincorporation into the divine *Logos*. Thus he relates the two by positing that they are one and the same principle at different levels of moral functioning, thereby incorporating the question of the soul into the larger context of the moral and spiritual life, and at the same time relating the task of the soul to the exemplary life lived by the divine soul of Jesus himself.

The final three chapters placed Origen's anthropology in the context of his view of the divine economy of salvation: the preexistence, fall, and destiny of rational souls. While Origen borrows vocabulary and concepts from Middle Platonic speculation on a pre-existent state, his doctrine of this state is framed primarily by the theological concepts of God and creation, divine providence and justice, and the Trinity. For Origen, the preexistent state was not Plato's supracosmic world of Ideas, nor the Middle Platonic realm of eternal, disembodied divinities, but the prehistory of the Bride of Christ, the creation of a Trinitarian God through his own providential Wisdom. Origen's belief about the "descent" of souls picks up important themes from the Middle Platonic tradition (e.g., that the

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soul “merits” its present embodiment by a freely committed fault in the preexistent state), and yet Origen views the descent of souls in the context of salvation history, which unfolds not according to rigid, quasi-mechanistic laws of dualistic ontology, but rather according to the providential plan of a loving God to secure the redemption of each of his individual creatures, a plan culminating in the descent of the preeminent soul of Christ. Origen’s eschatology draws upon themes from Middle Platonism (e.g., the soul’s immortality and goal of “likeness to God”), and yet—due to his Christology and his positive view of the material creation—Origen’s views revolve around the Christian doctrines of freedom, divine love, and grace, not the impersonal, mechanistic, and individualistic principles of Middle Platonism. Hence, Origen sees the sensible world as the very theater of salvation, and the body as an object of salvation, rather than a hindrance to it. His entire eschatological system hinges upon the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ on earth.

In sum, it has already been noted that Origen’s anthropology—and in particular, his view of the soul—is crucial both to his theological system and also to his historical legacy as a thinker. The preceding survey, both historical and critical in its methodology, has sought to elucidate Origen’s view of the soul, in part through a comparison to his Middle Platonic contemporaries. This study has found that, while Origen was highly aware of Middle Platonic speculations on the soul and does borrow extensively from their vocabulary, he never accepts the overriding philosophical assumptions, and is in fact subtly critical of Middle Platonic theories of the soul (as found, e.g., in *On First Principles* 3, 4). His own views on the soul, in its own constitutive elements and in its context in salvation history, are framed less by speculative, philosophical concerns than by the hermeneutical strictures of Christian revelation, especially the moral and ascetical dynamics of the spiritual life, whereby the soul is reunited with the divine *Logos* in whose image it was created.

APPENDIX

*The Influence of Origen's Anthropology
on the Greek Patristic Tradition*

A brief attempt will be made here to trace the influence of Origen's anthropology—in particular his distinction between the “mind” (*nous*) and the “soul” (*psychē*)—on the Greek patristic tradition. In general, it can be said that Origen's disciples carry on, faithfully if sometimes overzealously, his doctrine of the soul, while allowing it to be tainted with a dualistic suspicion of the body. This latter element will, in the context of the Origenist disputes of the fourth and fifth centuries, throw Origen's whole anthropology into disrepute, leading to its condemnation by the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople.

Didymus the Blind, who led Alexandria's catechetical school for half a century and considered himself a disciple of Origen, echoes his master's teaching on the soul almost exactly. Didymus carries on Origen's belief in the preexistence of souls, which—like Origen—he uses to explain the descent of the soul of Christ.¹ He also follows Origen in identifying the preexistent soul as a transcendent intellect (*nous*), “an incorporeal and intelligible essence,” which was made in God's image and constitutes the very essence of man.² He similarly holds that, after the fall, the mind is degraded into a soul (*psychē*), which subsequently serves as an intermediary (*meson*) between mind

1. See Le Boulluec, “Controverses au sujet,” 224–27.

2. See *Commentary on Genesis* 57, 7.

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and body.³ The quality of a body, for Didymus, is altered to suit its environment, and thus he describes the fallen soul as characterized by a “luminous” and then progressively “dense” body.⁴ Regrettably, Didymus compromises Origen’s belief in the necessity of embodiment for all creatures, and seems to hold that the preexistent mind was bodiless, a departure from Origen’s thought that will theologically cripple the Origenist tradition and lead to its demise.

Evagrius Ponticus, the fourth-century monastic writer, also considered himself a disciple of Origen and claimed to represent his master’s teaching faithfully, and yet a comparison of the theological anthropology of the two figures reveals both similarities and differences. On the one hand, Evagrius seems to echo faithfully Origen’s doctrine of the *nous*,⁵ and in particular Origen’s understanding of the “soul” (*psychē*) as a fallen “mind” (*nous*), which Evagrius systematizes and articulates even more clearly than Origen. Evagrius gives a central role to Origen’s doctrine of preexistent minds, including but not limited to the mind of Christ.⁶ Evagrius describes the *nous* as becoming “thick” upon its descent from God, descending to the level of practical existence, whereby the “soul” emerges as the mind’s “outgrowth”: “The soul is the *nous* which, due to negligence, has fallen from Unity and which, due to its lack of vigilance, has descended to the level of *praktikē*.”⁷ At the same time, the practical, bodily functions of the soul—the imaginations and passions—can become a distraction to the mind, constantly tempting it to betray its noble purpose.⁸ Both Origen and Evagrius hold in common the twin notions of

3. See Hermann S. Schibli, “Origen, Didymus and the Vehicle of the Soul,” in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 384.

4. *Commentary on Genesis* 107, 8.

5. See Bertrand, “L’implication du Nous,” 359.

6. See Le Boulluc, “Controverses au sujet,” 227.

7. *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3, 28. Note: Michael O’Laughlin believes that on this point Evagrius has betrayed his master and misinterpreted Origen. The present author holds that, at least on this point, Evagrius has echoed Origen’s teaching with great precision. See O’Laughlin, “The Anthropology of Evagrius Ponticus and Its Sources,” in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Petersen (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 364–66.

8. See *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2, 48. Henri Crouzel, like O’Laughlin, holds that Evagrius is

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the *nous*, the highest contemplative element in man, and the *psychē*, or degraded mind. If there are differences in emphasis these are slight: Origen assigns to the *nous* more the functions of freedom and cognition, Evagrius more the functions of spirituality and prayer.⁹

Much has been made of the alterations that Evagrius makes to Origen's tripartite anthropology. As we have already seen, Origen's anthropology situates the soul between the twin poles of the "flesh" (*sarx*), on the one hand, and the "spirit" (*pneuma*), on the other. The soul (*psychē*) is thereby understood as a fallen "mind" (*nous*), in its mode of animating the body rather than of contemplating the divine *Logos*. The anthropology of Evagrius, which is considerably more systematic and even rigid than Origen's, situates the soul (*psychē*) between the twin poles of the "body" (*sōma*) and the "mind" (*nous*), disregarding almost entirely the role of the *pneuma*. Here, says Michael O'Laughlin, "the disciple has evidently abandoned the master."¹⁰ Yet, for all the difference that this may make in Christian mysticism, it does not seem to affect the crucial distinction that both Origen and Evagrius make between the "mind" and "soul." Apparently this distinction was more than a mere academic one, but had been distilled into popular monastic piety: Evagrius recalls discussions among monks in the Egyptian deserts about whether the divine ascent of the *nous* might be observed visually.¹¹ The shared assumption by these monks was that the "soul" (*psychē*), because it represented a lower level of anthropological function, represented a "hindrance and danger to the *nous*" in spiritual combat, and must be made "obedient and submissive."¹² The final goal was the reabsorption of the

misinterpreting Origen by degrading Origen's *psychē* to a lower principle, whereas (according to Crouzel) Origen held the *psychē* to be morally neutral. It seems, on the contrary, that Evagrius and Origen hold nearly identical positions on this point, even if they differ on the role of the *pneuma*. See Crouzel, "Recherches sur Origène et son Influence," 111.

9. Bertrand, "L'implication du Nous," 361–62.

10. "The Anthropology of Evagrius Ponticus and Its Sources," in Kannengiesser, Charles, and William L. Petersen, eds. *Origen of Alexandria: His World and his Legacy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 359.

11. See O'Laughlin, "The Anthropology of Evagrius Ponticus and Its Sources," 370.

12. *Ibid.*

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soul into the “mind,” along with the spiritualization of the body, such that “the body and soul . . . will enter the realm of the *nous*.”¹³ While one might wish for a clearer role for the human *pneuma* in this transformation, the relationship between body, soul, and mind is clearly inspired by Origen. Gregory of Nazianzus, the close associate of Evagrius, makes the same distinction between “soul” and *nous*.¹⁴ All of the Cappadocians would make use of Origen’s claim that there are “two men in man,” the “inner” and outer” man, in their writings on the mystical life and the spiritual senses.¹⁵

Origen’s view of the body, and therefore by extension his view of the resurrection, would be at the heart of later disputes over his legacy. Origen’s view of matter, as a pliable substructure of all created beings, is behind his conviction that the present state of the body need not mirror its final state, nor its preexistent state. Origen’s view on this point is shared by many of his contemporaries,¹⁶ and few in his own day wished to press the identity of the natural and the resurrected bodies. The Cappadocians, and especially Gregory of Nyssa, began to wish for a stronger statement of this identity than they believed Origen had given, and thereby initiated a sharp break from Origen’s understanding of this doctrine.¹⁷ In this they were preceded by Methodius of Olympus, who offered a grossly exaggerated interpretation of Origen’s dualistic anthropology, and in response insisted that “the very flesh and bones of the present body were those that rose again in heaven.”¹⁸

The debates spurred by these views led, of course, to the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553, in connection with

13. *Kephalaia* 61.

14. *Epistula* 101, 38.

15. Marguerite Harl, “La ‘Bouche’ et le ‘Cœur’ de l’Apôtre: Deux Images Bibliques du ‘Sens Divin’ de l’Homme (Proverbes 2,5) chez Origène,” in *Studi in Honore di M. Pellegrino* (Torino: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1975), 17–42.

16. Athenagoras and Hippolytus, to name two. See Edwards, “Origen No Gnostic,” 36–37.

17. See Christopher G. Stead, “Individual Personality in Origen and the Cappadocian Fathers,” in *Colloquio internazionale su ‘L’antropologia di Origene e dei Cappadoci: arché e telos. Analisti storico-religiosa*,” ed. Ugo Bianchi (Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1981).

18. See Edwards, “Origen No Gnostic,” 36.

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which a series of “anathemas against Origen” was issued. Although it remains unclear whether the propositions condemned at this council can actually be attributed to Origen himself, or whether they ought to be attributed to misguided disciples such as Evagrius, there is no doubt that Origen himself is the presumed target of the anathemas. It is his name, in any case, that is attached to the condemned propositions. Several propositions deal with the preexistence of souls, the resurrection and the *apokatastasis*, which are relevant to our purpose but less so. At the heart of condemned statements is the position—almost certainly held by Origen—that there is an “identity of substance” between all rational creatures, and that, in consequence, men may be called fallen angels, and angels unfallen men.¹⁹ Thus, the second anathema is issued against those who “say that the creation of all reasonable things includes only intelligences [*noes*] without bodies,” while the fifth condemns those who “say that a psychic [*psychikēn*] condition has come from an angelic or archangelic state” in whom “the divine love had grown cold.” The first condemnation issued by the Emperor Justinian is directed at those who believe that preexistent spirits have “become souls [*psychas*]” as a result of their sin.

Thus, the position that the “soul” is a fallen “mind,” a position that had proven so important to Origen’s mystical theology, here seems to meet its end. What could be the motive for condemning a doctrine that appears, by itself, so innocuous? The entire Origenist dispute seems to revolve around the increasingly ineradicable suspicions that, somehow, Origen’s entire system was shot through with metaphysical dualism, and that of the sort altogether irreconcilable with Christian orthodoxy. In this light, many of the central tenets of Origen’s theology—the preexistence, the *apokatastasis*, and most importantly, the distinction between *nous* and *psychē*—appeared to be attempts to circumvent the Christian doctrine of the goodness of matter. Although Origen had insisted that even preexistent minds were embodied, his disciples were less insistent on this point, and thus the whole doc-

19. For this and the following, see Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, 318–20.

Appendix

trine of preexistence appeared as a roundabout way of casting aspersions on human embodiment. Origen's attempt to separate the *nous*, man's transcendent and intelligible faculty of contemplation, from the *psychē*, which arose from man's connection to the material body, came to be seen as irredeemably dualistic. From what has been said already regarding Origen's view of the soul, it should be clear enough that such was never Origen's intention, and yet the truculent tirades of the fourth century did not lend themselves to perspicacity.

The distinction between the transcendent *nous* and fallen *psychē* in Origen's thought was not a minor element, but one of the pillars of the whole system. When it was pulled out, the whole structure collapsed—preexistence, Christology, eschatology, and the rest. If Rowan Williams goes too far in laying the blame for nearly all patristic Christological controversies at the door of those who rejected Origen's anthropology,²⁰ he is right to note the vital centrality of this concept—that is, the distinction between the *nous* and the *psychē*—for patristic theology as a whole. There is no doubt that there was much in Origen's system that required correction, and he himself would hardly have been scandalized at the notion that the developing tradition would find certain of his suggestions more useful than others. The developing "Origenist" tradition that led to the Fifth Ecumenical Council, even if it overemphasized and exaggerated some of his teachings, did assist in bringing to light some of their imperfections. And yet the conclusion of David Balas seems *apropos*:

Some of his doctrines have been corrected by subsequent theologians, others better developed, although, in most cases, it was Origen himself who provided the language and ideas which enabled his successors to go beyond him. We have to ask, however, whether the *per se* legitimate . . . concerns of post-Nicene theology have not sometimes prevented it from preserving and developing Origen's deep and rich vision of the vocation of man (and of the whole creation) as an ongoing participation in the Trinitarian dynamism of God's very Life.²¹

20. Williams, "Origen on the Soul of Jesus," 134–37.

21. Balas, "The Idea of Participation in the Structure of Origen's Thought: Christian Transposition of a Theme of the Platonic Tradition," *Origeniana* 12 (1975): 275.

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