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# The Preexistence of the Soul in Medieval Thought

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## I

While the concept of the human soul was always central to Christian thought, as to the origin of the soul Christian thinkers felt uneasy and did not hesitate to declare themselves ignorant. For once, Augustine did not point the way and found himself "beset with great trouble and utterly lost for an answer" in view of some of the difficulties that the issue raised.[1] Of course, man's soul was universally believed to be created by God, but the questions "how", "when" and "where" did not admit of straightforward and unambiguous answers. Very broadly speaking, medieval thinkers could either argue that the soul is transmitted from parents to their children, rather like the conception of a new body out of the parents' "bodies", *or* that God creates new souls daily.

Both doctrines had their advantages and disadvantages. On the first view, that of the traducianists, the soul's immortality was jeopardized, for if the soul comes into existence with the body, why, one could rightly ask with Gregory the Great, does it not perish with the body?[2] Moreover, how should we understand a division of the soul in procreation? Is a new soul physically cut off from the parent's soul, "a chip off the old block"?[3] One of the strong points of traducianism, however, was that it could easily be made to account for a central tenet in Christianity, namely original sin: with the transmission of souls through the generations, Adam's sin was to taint every new-born soul.

For creationists this very question of the sin of man's soul and its damnation was more difficult to explain. For either God gave a soul that was already tainted with sin to a new-born child or the sinless soul became corrupt as soon as it was united to a body. In both cases, God did not seem to be a very fair and just Creator.

A way out of these dilemmas - in the words of Pascal, "qu'il faut que nous naissions coupables ou Dieu serait injuste"[4] - was to posit a preexistent life of the soul before its union to a body. On this view, one could argue that it was the soul's own fault that it had to leave its lofty place among the Platonic Forms or their Christian equivalents, and to descend into an

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[1] Augustine, *Epistulae* 166.16. His lack of guidance for future generations was noticed by, for example, Cassiodorus, Alcuin and Rhabanus Maurus. More on Augustine further below in section II.

[2] *Epistolae* in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epist.* II.147.13 (IX, pp. 147-148), letter to Secondinus, May 599. It may be said that at all times this question was at the back of the mind of most scholars, but with the introduction of Aristotle's account of the soul, and in particular the materialistic reading of it by Alexander of Aphrodisias, later medieval scholars felt its force stronger. I shall come back to that at the end of this article.

[3] N.P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (London 1927), 236.

[4] Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Léon Brunschvieg (Paris 1972), No. 489.

earthly body on account of crimes committed in a previous life. In referring to a previous life in which the soul had sinned in greater or lesser degree on account of the use or abuse of its own free will, Origen, for example, thought that only this doctrine, coupled with universal salvation, could save God from his apparent injustice and arbitrariness in condemning some souls while electing others.[5] Because of this metempsychosis which implied the preexistence of the souls, his theodicy was naturally rejected by the Church (by a decree of Justinian in 543 and by a synod in Constantinople), and in later times the use of his name was enough to brand someone as a heretic by guilt of association.[6] But his theodicy had pointed to a weakness in creationism, and had shown a sense in which a Platonic scheme of some sort could circumvent the problems of the origin and descent of the soul.

Generally speaking, in the Platonic scheme the soul emanated from the world soul or from the ideas that are immanent in the world soul. Whether it is only its rational part or the whole entity, the soul is immortal, and will return to its heavenly state after its temporary dwelling on earth. I am not concerned with the several versions of this scheme of *processio* and *reditus*, only with the structural similarity between the patterns that underlie both Platonism and Christianity, and indeed a number of other religious and metaphysical systems.[7] In its most simple form, man's soul (or its equivalent in the different religions), that was once in union with its creator, separated itself, became embodied but returned after a period of earthly dwelling. A succinct statement to that effect is to be found in Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*:[8]

> In truth, the soul is not destroyed by its death but is overwhelmed for a time; nor does it surrender the privilege of immortality because of its lowly sojourn, for when it has rid itself completely of all taint of evil and has deserved to be sublimated, it again leaves the body and, fully recovering its former state, returns to the splendor of everlasting life.

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[5] See his *De Principiis* I.7.4, I.8.4 and III.6.3; eds. H. Görgemanns and H. Karpp, *Origenes vier Bücher von den Prinzipien* (Darmstadt 1985), 238-40, 258-65 and 650-52. For a good, short account of Origen, see H. Chadwick in ed. A. Armstrong, *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge 1967), 182-92; henceforth abbreviated as *CHLGEMP*. Exculpating God from injustice and arbitrariness was often the reason for believing in the soul's preexistence; cf. Joseph Glanvill's *Lux Orientalis* (the 1682 ed.) in which he writes that this doctrine "clears the *divine* Attributes from any shadows of harshness or breach of equity, since it supposeth us to have sinned and deserved all the misery we suffer in this condition before we came hither"; quoted in D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell. Seventeenth-century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London 1964), 147.

[6] On Origen in the Middle Ages, see H. de Lubac, "L'Origène latin" in his *Exégèse médiévale* I (Paris 1959), 221-304; J. Leclerq, *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu* (Paris 1957), 93-96.

[7] See R. Moore, "Pre-existence" in ed. J. Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (13 vols.; Edingburgh 1908-1926), X, 235-41 where mention is made of a.o. Orphic religion, Stoicism, Talmud and Midrash, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Egyptian religion, Taoism and Hinduism. Notwithstanding the many, great differences, the structural similarity of these worldviews is to be noted.

[8] I.12.17, ed. J. Willis (Leipzig 1970), 51; transl. W.H. Stahl (New York 1952), 137. For an excellent account of the early transformation of the Neoplatonic, pagan view of reality into a Christian one, see S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden 1978), esp. 193-288.

As in Platonism, Christian terminology often refers to this circular course. To mention a few expressions that we will meet shortly: earthly life is only a temporary affair after which the soul *returns* to its spiritual *home*; at the moment of its embodiment the soul *lost* its *natural powers* but some *seeds* of truth have *remained* that might be stirred up by doctrine and learning, and so forth.[9] While Christian thinkers and, especially, mystics talk a lot about the *return* of the soul to its source and creator, i.e. the ascending part of the Platonic circle, a *descent* of the soul is rejected although implied and hinted at in Christian terminology. Of course, a descent of some sort remained part of the Christian scheme: Adam's sin could be interpreted as a loss of a perfect and sinless condition which the soul once had thanks to its close connection with its creator, as a "descent" from its heavenly place into the world of labour and misery. But the difference between the two schemes is immediately clear: Adam's fall was a unique event, and a descent along the same line is not to be postulated for later souls. They are created and united to a body without having been subject to the temptations and, consequently, the faults of Adam.

The Christian scheme, then, might be said to be metaphysically unsatisfactory because in rejecting the preexistence of the soul - which seems a natural thing to do given the linear time scheme of Christianity - Christian thinkers not only kept the old problem of the contraction of original sin in new-born life, but also cut out an essential part of the Platonic circular course with which it had much in common otherwise.[10]

In what follows I shall focus my attention on the appeal of this Platonic scheme and Platonic terminology to Christian authors, and how they tried to cope with the problems as indicated. The problem may be briefly put like this: While the soul's *return* to its source and creator - a return which the Christian soul had in common with its Platonic counterpart - was a crucial element in the Christian scheme, its divine creation did not run parallel with the Platonic *processio* and thus with the preexistence of the Platonic soul and its descent through the planetary spheres. Needless to say, the theme is very large and its ramifications manifold, and I shall have to deal only cursorily with relevant themes such as the theological meanings of the fall of the soul and original sin, and the orthodox positions of traducianism and creationism. But I shall discuss commentaries on what were key-texts for the notion of the preexistence of the soul and its descent towards earth, and the related theme of the soul's knowledge as recollection. In restricting myself largely to a discussion of texts that offered the medieval reader and commentator the most unambiguous statement of these doctrines, I hope to show what kinds of strains the Christian scheme had to put up with. But I shall also

[9] For the related image of the body as a prison of the soul, see P. Courcelle, "Tradition platonicienne et les traditions chrétiennes du corps-prison", *Revue des Etudes Latines*, 43 (1965), 406-43 who shows the persistence of the metaphor in classical and medieval times, although Christian authors from the time of St Ambrose had to reject the doctrine behind the metaphor. The force of the metaphor on early Christian thinking is well brought out by P. Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York 1988), *passim*.

[10] I take the phrase "metaphysically unsatisfactory" from the excellent article by D.P. Walker, "Eternity and the Afterlife", *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes* 27 (1964), 241-50, repr. in a collection of his essays, ed. P. Gouk, *Music, Spirit and Language* (London 1985), ch. XIII, who argued that the Christian doctrine of time and eternity "is metaphysically unsatisfactory because it is untidy", this untidiness owing mainly to the Christian afterlife (p. 241). I shall come back to this later.

broaden my discussion by briefly discussing other texts and positions that illuminate what may be thus called the metaphysical unsatisfactoriness of the Christian scheme in this respect.

## II

The first thinker who must be considered is St Augustine, for his opinions and especially his lack of guidance for medieval thinkers about the issue of the origin of the soul, was of paramount importance. I shall discuss Augustine's ideas in fairly broad terms, for this is not the place to review a complicated and protracted debate in which many scholars have taken part.[11]

As is well known, Augustine's position was largely shaped and developed by the controversies between Christianity, Manichaeism and Pelagianism. One of the central questions in this debate was: How could God have created everything there is without responsible for man's miserable condition and the evil in the world? Without going into detail, we may summarize the core of the debate in order to bring out the problems at stake more clearly. To postulate, as the Manichaeans did, an independent principle of Evil that was being responsible for the wrongs of man, was of course no option for Augustine anymore. Man must bear the full responsibility of his condition, which on account of his own sins is to be characterized as penal. But where and when did man sin so that he is justly punished by God? Of course, Adam and Eve must be held responsible for man's condition, but this answer makes it even more urgent to exculpate God from punishing post-Adamite souls. If the souls could be said to be "in" Adam in some way, then the transmission of inherited sin is easily accounted for. But Augustine firmly rejected the materialism which was implied by the traducianist's position, and did not hesitate to call Tertullian's opinion mere "dementia". If God creates souls daily, the question naturally arises why he creates souls already tainted with sin or, if he creates them untainted, why souls that carry no responsibility of the sin of Adam and Eve, are to be punished as soon as they are conjoined to a body. What about young children, for example, who at the moment of their death (and many died early in those days) had not yet had the opportunity to contract the guilt of original sin but who would nevertheless go to hell because they had not received the sacrament of baptism in time. In Augustine's own words the problem cries out for a solution:[12]

> What kind of justice is it that so many thousands of souls should be damned because they departed from their bodies by death in infancy, without the grace of the Christian sacrament, if new souls, created separately by the will of the Creator, are joined to separate bodies at birth, with no previous sin of their own, when He certainly knew that each one of them by no fault of its own would leave the body without the baptism of Christ?

[11] Much of the debate has been spawned by R.J. O'Connell's publications, esp. his *St Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386-391* (Cambridge, Mass. 1968) and *The Origin of the Soul in St Augustine's Later Works* (New York 1987), where more literature is cited. My discussion is much indebted to these books, to J. Rist, *Augustine. Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge 1994) and the articles cited below.

[12] *Ep.* 166.10, transl. W. Parsons, *St Augustine. Letters 1-270* (Washington 1955), 16.

The problems are more easily formulated than the answers, and in particular Augustine's answers to these issues have been subject to a fiery and long debate. It seems likely, however, that the early Augustine, under the influence of "the books of the Platonists", favoured a preexistent life of the soul in which the soul sinned and hence became fully responsible for the penal condition in which it consequently fell.[13] In his later works he seems to have refuted the "fallen soul" theory, and have developed a so-called "double-life" theory according to which we not only live our personal life but also have lived a transpersonal life in Adam. We lived, sinned and died in Adam, and hence are justly punished in our own historical life. It has rightly been remarked that the "relationship between Adam and each of us looks in some respects like that of the Plotinian hypothesis of Soul - though in Plotinus Soul cannot fall - to the individuals which are `parts' of it"[14], and seen from a Neoplatonic point of view, Augustine's solution in his later works (although traces can be found in the *Confessiones*) can be considered as a reconciliation between the Neoplatonic emphasis on man as intelligible nature and the historical, individualized *persona* that man is in the Christian anthropology of Augustine.[15]

When in the *Retractationes* he came to reconsider his former opinions, Augustine recognized that on the question of the origin of soul, he did not know then and does not know now ("nec tunc sciebam, nec nunc scio"; I.1.13) how to find a solution, and most scholars have argued that these words must be taken at face value. Gerard O'Daly, for example, has argued, *pace* O'Connell, that Augustine always refers disapprovingly to "the Origenist view of the soul's embodiment as punishment for previously committed sin", and that Augustine's "exegetical scrupulosity betrays an anxiety to keep the options open".[16] According to Rist, Augustine's "inability (or unwillingness) to make his own position clear is probably not unrelated to his perceived incapacity to explain the more basic nature, in our fallen state, of our soul-body complex and its imperfect phenomenological unity".[17]

It is beyond the scope of this article to enter this debate. But the debate itself and the fiery character of it, already begun in Augustine's own lifetime by his critics, shows how difficult it is to disentangle Platonic terminology from the orthodox position Augustine might have taken on these issues. As Anton C. Pegis has said: "One cannot but affirm the far-reaching attachment of the early Augustine to Platonism". Platonism "answered to a no less deep and permanent need in him, namely, the need to live with an intense interior

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[13] See Rist, *Augustine*, 122 n. 89 for the passages from the *De libero arbitrio*, *Contra academicos*, *Soliquia* and *De quantitate animae*.

[14] Rist, *Augustine*, 126.

[15] Cf. the discussion in Rist, *Augustine*, 121-129; O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul*, *passim*.

[16] "Augustine on the Origin of the Souls" in *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für H. Dörrie*, eds. H.-D. Blume and F. Mann (Münster 1983), 184-91, on p. 186 and 185. But see O'Connell's criticism in *The Origin of the Soul in Augustine's Later Works*, 121 ff. and 140-5.

[17] *Augustine*, 320; cf. 92-147. In the *De trinitate* chapter, Platonic preexistence is unacceptable but, as Rist argues, "by then Augustine is experimenting with the unplatonic alternative of our existence outside our *propria vita* in Adam" (p. 122, n.89).

concentration and collectedness".[18] Small wonder, then, that the debate on Augustine's debt to Platonism has often been carried on in a polemical vein, for one's understanding and appreciation of Augustine depends to a large extent on one's appreciation of Platonism and what that has meant to Augustine's thinking and at what stages during its long development.

Before we shall turn to some medieval thinkers to see how they coped with the issue of the origin of the soul and its possible descent, we must briefly look at the related issue of the soul's power of understanding in Augustine. Not surprisingly, the problems of interpretation spring up again. Some passages in his earlier works in particular, such as *De quantitate animae* and the *Soliloquia*, seem to contain endorsements of the Neoplatonic view of knowledge as recollection of things the soul had seen in a former life. Augustine's use of the impressed notions in our minds points to this as well.[19] As is well known, Augustine's theory of divine illumination in which the mind comes to know, or rather to "see" the immutable truths not only of logic and mathematics but also of morality and aesthetics, was meant to be an assertion of the independence of the mind. It did not need the senses or past experience to come to certain knowledge. Much of this hinges on the term *memoria*. *Memoria* was of course Augustine's rendering of the Platonic anamnesis, but with this big difference that for Augustine it did not necessarily presuppose a life of the soul before entering a body. "Knowledge of the eternal truths", as Markus has argued, "is not the result of the rediscovery of a residual deposit left in the mind from a previous existence, but is the work of continuous discovery by the mind, made in the intellectual light which is always present to it and is its means of contact with the world of intelligible reality".[20] On this view, *memoria* is a turning of the mind towards God and the archetypal ideas in God's mind, as Augustine writes in the *De Trinitate*, and as such represents the contact with and participation in God's Logos. And in the *Confessiones* Augustine writes: "Memoria embraces the multitude of principles and laws of arithmetic and geometry, none of them derived from any sense-impression... ". As Markus concludes: "In its simplest terms, *memoria* is the whole potential knowledge of an individual mind at any one time".[21]

But even though Augustine seems to have rejected the Neoplatonic notion of a preexistent life of the soul that might be implied in this remembering, much of his discussion continues to use terminology that originated and functioned in a Neoplatonic scheme. In the *Confessiones* he writes that learning is an ordering and knowing of things "which memoria already contained in a scattered and random way"[22], and in the *De Trinitate* he stresses the potential and latent knowledge that awaits activation by the mind's attention. To quote a famous passage from this work:[23]

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[18] "The Second Conversion of St Augustine", in *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Literatur. Rezeption und Originalität im Wachsen einer Europäischen Literatur und Geistigkeit*, ed. K. Bosl (Stuttgart 1975), 79-93, on. p. 92 and 83.

[19] *Sol*. II 20.35 and *De quant. animae* 20.34; Again O'Connell's arguments for a strong Neoplatonic colouring of Augustine's ideas on these issues have proven controversial.

[20] *CHLGEMP*, "Augustine", 341-419, p. 366.

[21] *De trinitate* xiv.15.21; *Conf.* X 12.19. Transl. Markus in *CHLGEMP*, 371.

[22] *Conf.* X.11.18. Transl. Markus in *CHLGEMP*, 372.

[23] *De Trin*. XIV 15.21. Transl. Markus in *CHLGEMP*, 372 and 368-9.

> God is wholly everywhere; whence it is that [the mind] lives and moves and has its being in him, and therefore it can remember him. Not that it remembers him because it knew him in Adam, or at any other time and place before entering the life of its body, or at the time it was created and inserted into its body; it remembers none of these things, *whichever of them really happened to it*, they are all consigned to oblivion. It remembers him by turning towards the Lord, as to the light which in some fashion had reached it even while it had been turned away from him.

From our brief survey of Augustine's ideas on the origin of soul, it is clear that Augustine's indebtedness to Platonic philosophy and terminology is profound, but also that despite his later rejection of a Platonic preexistence of the soul, his solution of a "double-life" theory as summarized above and his remarks on the soul's knowledge, shows how the fall of the *persona* (and not only man's soul) must in some way be considered as referring to a historical fall on account of which our *condition humaine* is penal. Even in his un-platonic view of the relationship of Adam and man, something of the strength and the appeal of the Platonic scheme can be felt.

## III

From what has been said above it has become clear that Augustine did not believe in any "spatial" descent of the soul from heaven into this earth and its earthly bodies. But it was precisely this descent of the soul that medieval scholars found alluded to or extensively discussed in four texts that from Carolingian times held an important place in the curriculum in the cathedral and monastic schools: Macrobius' *Dream of Scipio*, Martianus Capella's *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, Calcidius' translation of Plato's *Timaeus*, and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.[24] These texts are well known as *loci classici* for the Neoplatonic theme of the preexistence of the soul and its descent to earth. In dealing with commentaries and glosses on these texts, I shall not aim at completeness but at giving an array of possible strategies that were available to medieval scholars.

The descent of the soul is dealt with most extensively by Macrobius in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. In chapter 12 of book 1, Macrobius gives an elaborate account of the several stages the soul passes through on its way to an earthly body.[25] The soul experiences a "tumultuous influx of matter rushing upon it", it becomes forgetful of its divine origin and loses all or most of the knowledge which it had when still in heaven. In order to carry out its duties during the time the soul is embodied, it obtains reason and understanding in the sphere of Saturn, the power to act in Jupiter's sphere, a bold spirit in Mars'", sense-

[24] There is also an explicit treatment of the soul's descent in its several stages in Nemesius' *De natura hominis*. Virgil's *Aeneid* VI was also sometimes interpreted in terms of a preexistence of soul, but I shall not discuss these texts, because they were not as much commented upon as the other texts.

[25] ed. Willis, 47-51; tr. Stahl, 135-137 for the following quotations. On the background of Macrobius' teaching on the descent of the soul, see J. Flamant, *Macrobe et le néo-platonisme latin, à la fin du IV^e siècle* (Leiden 1977), 546-65; M.A. Elferink, *La descente de l'âme d'après Macrobe* (Leiden 1968).

perception and imagination in the Sun's sphere and so forth, until it has become the body's "first substance", nothing more than "the dregs of what is divine" (*faex rerum divinarum*).

As is well known, Macrobius' encyclopedic work was extremely popular in the Middle Ages. Surprisingly, the passage on the soul's descent attracted hardly any critical remarks from its early medieval glossators; they were content to solve the classical allusions, to elucidate and amplify Macrobius' meaning without hinting that the pagan myth needed rejection or allegorisation.[26] Thus Alison White, who has studied the pre-twelfth-century glosses on Macrobius, writes that "Servius' Commentary on the *Aeneid*, Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* and, ironically, Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, were used to substantiate Macrobius' mythological and Platonic references". The idea of metempsychosis was only sporadically accompanied by a gloss to the effect that this was entirely at odds with the Christian faith. Hartwic of St Emmeran and Manegold of Lautenbach seem to have been the ones who were most aware of the dangers of Macrobius' teachings.[27]

On the issue of knowledge as recollection which, as we have seen in the case of Augustine, was closely linked to the descent of the soul, a glossator notes "Augustine's shift of opinion from the *Soliloquies*, where he alludes to innate knowledge of the arts, to his *Retractationes*, where he says that clever questioning can produce the appearance of knowledge once forgotten, but that it is really a gift of God".[28]

A wider array of hermeneutic strategies is to be found in the long and complicated commentary tradition on Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.[29] The reception of this work in the early Middle Ages focussed on the author's Neoplatonism and his sympathy for pagan ideas. In the famous ninth metre in Book III (*O qui perpetua*), for example, Boethius wrote that God had each soul allotted to a star, a light chariot (a *levis currus*), for its companion from which it descended at its appropriate time into a body. Elsewhere (book III, metre 11) it is stated that upon embodiment the soul forgets the perfect knowledge it enjoyed in heaven where it could gaze at the Platonic forms. But although tainted by the "bulky oblivion" that its embodiment had caused, the soul has retained some "seeds of truth". If the soul knows something in its embodied life on earth, this is, therefore, due to the knowledge it had in its previous life in heaven. Thus, for Boethius, following the Platonic tradition, knowledge is recollection (anamnèsis).

One of the earliest sets of glosses, probably originating from St Gall and dating from the late ninth century, makes clear in elucidating Boethius' cryptic allusions to Neoplatonic

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[26] See most recently A. Hüttig, *Macrobius im Mittelalter. Ein Beitrag zur Rezeptionsgeschichte der Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* (Frankfurt a.M. 1990) who, however, does not take into account the commentary tradition. For this side of the "Rezeptionsgeschichte", see A. White, *Glosses Composed before the Twelfth Century in Manuscripts of Macrobius' Commentary on Cicero's Somnium Scipionis*, D.Phil Thesis (2 vols.; Oxford 1981). For the lack of critical remarks on the *descensus animae* passage (Hartwic of St Emmeran being the exception), see vol. i, pp. vi, vii and 173; but a gloss from the tenth century (vol. ii, p. 344) speaks of the lying Manichaeans who believed that God created all souls at once at the beginning of the universe.

[27] Manegold of Lautenbach, *Liber contra Wolfelmum* I, ed. W. Hartmann (Weimar 1972), 44-46 opposes the doctrine of reincarnation in animals: man is made in the image of God. Hartwic's gloss in White, vol. ii, 367.

[28] White, *Glosses*, 148 and 182.

[29] ed. Bieler, CCSL XCIV (Turnhout 1984); transl. Tester in the Loeb ed. of Rand and Stewart (Cambridge, Mass. 1973).

doctrine, that Boethius' use of the term "light chariot" must be considered by way of metaphor, albeit a pagan one: "Gentili more loquitur".[30] Although being aware of the dangers of Boethius' Neoplatonism for the Christian faith, where he writes that Boethius "tangit hic ueterum opinionem philosophorum qui dixerunt corporis mole animam esse caecatam, ut iterum non possit intendere lumen", the glossator nevertheless is assured of Boethius' Christianity. Boethius' words on the soul's return to its origin is interpreted as a return to God and hence the words "animas uitasque minores" (lesser living souls) could refer to the souls of man and angels.

In the commentary of Remigius of Auxerre, without doubt the most influential commentator before the twelfth century, we find a more overt tendency to christianize the *Consolation*. His glosses have been revised several times and formed the basis for many later glossators. On Boethius' allusions to the descent of the soul, Remigius writes that this should not be reprehended because Augustine has said similar things; but, he adds, "in libro *Retractationum* se idem redarguit; dicit autem tempore certo animas creari et certo tempore eas in corporibus destinari", at which Courcelle ironically asks "Qu'aurait pensé saint Augustin d'une pareille utilisation de ses oeuvres?".[31] In his commentary on the Boethian "lesser living souls", Remigius surveys several explanations that scholars have given of these verses. Some thought that the "animas" refer to the angelic spirits and the "uitas minores" to human souls, of which the latter have been supplied by "leues currus", that is "subtili contemplationi ad consideranda caelestia". Others thought that learned and wise men were meant by "animas", stupid men by "uitas minores". But to wiser interpreters these verses seem to mean, Remigius carefully adds, that "animas" refer to the human souls and the "uitas minores" to the souls of brute animals. The "leues currus" can thus be said to mean the subtle contemplation and intellect by which God directs man to the "caelestem conservationem".[32]

This interpretation, however, does not accord very well with what Remigius had written on Boethius' phrase "media anima" (ix.13-14). By "media anima" was meant the rational soul which corresponds very closely with the world, but, as Beaumont has rightly remarked, "it is implicit in his acceptance of the `media anima' as the rational soul of man and his designation of man as the microcosm that he was trying - unhappily and indirectly - to effect a reconciliation between the notion of macrocosm and microcosm, with all its implications for the received Christian opinion of `creation out of nothing'".[33] The resulting picture is confusing since on the one hand the human soul is a mean between the angelic spirits and the souls of animals, and on the other hand it is qua rational being close to the world soul, but "Remigius had neither the intellectual capacity nor the philosophical training

[30] P. Courcelle, *La consolation de philosophie dans la tradition littéraire. Antécédants et posterité de Boèce* (Paris 1967), 277 quoting from Paris, BN ms lat. 13953, fol. 36$^{r}$.

[31] *La consolation de philosophie*, 287. Partial edition of Remigius' commentary in H. Silvestre, "Le commentaire inédit de Jean Scot Érigène du mètre IX du livre III du `De cons. phil.' de Boèce", *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 47 (1952), 44-122.

[32] ed. H. Silvestre, 65.

[33] J. Beaumont, "The Latin Tradition of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*", in ed. M. Gibson, *Boethius, his life, thought, and influence* (Oxford 1981), 278-305, on p. 292.

to cope adequately with Neoplatonic philosophy in relation to Christianity".[34]

Remigius' ideas on the soul's knowledge can be more easily gathered from his commentary on Martianus Capella.[35] Here Remigius following John Scottus Eriugena, argues that knowledge of the liberal arts is inherent in the soul, but that owing to original sin, we have lost this natural knowledge. Only some sparks have been left but these can be kindled by the study of the arts leading to a recuperation of our knowledge. The Boethian echos of a loss of knowledge, the sparks ("seeds of truth") that need to be kindled, and the recall of knowledge already in the memory, are obvious and became in fact stock phrases in subsequent glosses and commentaries on works like those of Boethius and Martianus Capella. Although explicit references to the descent of the soul and metempsychosis in these works are mostly dismissed as fancies of ancient poets and pagan philosophers in most of these commentaries, the Platonic terminology of knowledge as recollection and the loss of the soul's knowledge on entry the soul, which made sense in the Platonic scheme, was the natural vehicle to account for the ideas readers met in these works.[36]

What the use of this kind of language could lead to, we can gather from the dispute between Fredegisus, an intimate of Alcuin, and Agobard of Lyon that took place some fifty years before the time Remigius was active. From the exchange of letters between these two Carolingian scholars, only one, by Agobard, has survived, which was occasioned by Fredegisus' defence of positions he had taken in earlier works and letters and that were being criticised by Agobard; it has been dated to about 830.[37] What apears from this letter is that in a work that has not survived, Fredegisus had used the phrase "anima quando ad corpus peruenit" (when the soul reached the body), and later on defending himself had argued that souls were created from *incognita materies* in a vacuum, before they were infused into bodies.[38] Interestingly, one of Fredegisus' arguments was that in the Bible it is written that the "spirit returns to God who had given him" (Eccl. 12:7) and "Lord, let the soul of this child return in him" (3 Reg. 17:21). Fredegisus seems to have thought that when the soul is said to return to its creator it must also come from Him, and in such a way that the soul was created before entering a body. But this, as Agobard does not fail to point out, is contrary to what "ecclesiastici doctores" have held. (The almost arrogant certainty with which Fredegisus had spoken about such a difficult issue as the origin of the soul was repugnant to Agobard.) Here again, a circular course of the soul away from and back to his creator was easily implied but difficult to maintain.

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[34] *ibid.*

[35] C. Lutz, "Remigius' Ideas of the Seven Liberal Arts", *Traditio* 12 (1956), 65-86; Courcelle, *La consolation*, 278-90; Beaumont, "Latin tradition", 286-7.

[36] To point out that the pagan origin of ideas is not to reject them out of hand, as we can see in Remigius' commentary on Martianus, for which see Lutz, *Remigii Autissiodorensis Commentum in Martianum Capellam*, (Leiden 1962-65, 2 vols.), i, 91-92. For Eriugena's/Eriugenean commentaries on Capella see below.

[37] In the ed. by Dümmler in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epist.* V, pp. 210-21 the letter is dated to about 830; on the preexistence of the soul, p. 217:17-43.

[38] "Sed nos hoc reprehendimus, quod vos de animabus corporibus infundendis dixistis: `anima quando ad corpus peruenit', quasi noveritis, de qua regione adveniat, aut forsitan nostis, in qua regione iaceat illa incognita materies, unde animas dicitis creari in vacuo..."; ed. p. 217:25-28.

That this was not an isolated incident but that the issue was well debated is clear not only from the glosses on the texts considered above but also from another text from the circle of Alcuin. In the *dicta Candidi*, Candidus, another intimate of Alcuin, writes that like God, the soul too is unchanging is some sense, in that it always exists, knows and wishes to know.[39] As Marenbon suggests, in view of the controversy between Agobard and Fredegisus, "it is quite possible that Candidus believed that all souls had existed, and would go on to exist, eternally".[40] Alcuin himself raised the question too but was prudent enough to leave the question to "solius Dei cognitioni".[41]

A thinker who in the eyes of later generations of schoolmen was not so prudent was John Scottus Eriugena. He constructed his metaphysical system out of many Neoplatonic building blocks, and his great work, the *Periphyseon*, is structured around the theme of the Neoplatonic circular course of *processio* and *reditus*.[42] A crucial notion within his system is the preexistence of mankind - and with it, the entire world - in the primordial causes that have existed from eternity in God's Word. Nevertheless, since it is a preexistence of a special kind, I shall only briefly discuss his position.

It has often been stated that fundamental to Eriugena's philosophy is the eternal *restauratio* of the perfect and original unity of mankind in and through God. Mankind has eternally been present as a primordial cause in God's Word. This is a preexistence of a very fundamental, Augustinian kind.[43] But what is equally important is that there is no place for a descent of the soul into a body on account of sins done in a previous life in the Eriugenean system, for there is no previous life in any temporal sense. Soul and body were created together in their intelligible state and from all eternity in accordance with the divine council.[44] When the primordial causes of soul and body, which are hidden in God's Word, are made manifest, this must be seen as a natural, almost necessary stage in the circular course of the *divisio* and *reversio*. The life before the Fall is characterised as angelic by Eriugena, after the Fall mankind was sexually differentiated and became subject to a life of labour and pain, but the two phases are aspects of the same creative act of God. As Moran clearly states in her study of the philosophy of Eriugena: "Although the Fall seems to shatter the integrity and unity of human nature, it is more accurate to say that it cloaks and hides our true nature from

[39] "anima quodam modo suo incommutabilis est, nam semper anima est, et scit et scire uult"; ed. in J. Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre* (Cambridge 1981), 163 with discussion in *ibid.*, 46-47.

[40] *ibid.*, 47.

[41] *De animae ratione* 13, PL 101:645B.

[42] For discussions of the Eriugenean system, see Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1989) and Willemien Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden 1991). Both books contain good bibliographies. See also the volume ed. R. Roques, *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie*. Colloque International du CNRS no. 561, Laon 7-12 juillet 1975, (Paris 1977). I use Sheldon-Williams' edition for the first three books (Dublin 1968-81), PL 122 for books 4 and 5.

[43] See J. Moreau, "Le verbe et la création selon S. Augustin et J. Scot Erigène" in *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie*, 201-210.

[44] Book 4, PL 122:800C.

our own understanding, but in fact does not destroy the ontological work of creation, which is timeless and perfect, and cannot suffer destruction or corruption from any source".[45]

As a consequence, the Fall in the Eriugenean system must be viewed not so much as a moment in the historical past but as a structural aspect of man's life or in the words of Trouillard: "la faute originelle n'est pas un instant, même privilégié du passé humain. Elle est un présent supérieur et décisif, tout entier immanent à chacun des points de la durée..."[46]. Like in the system of Origen, creation is an eternal act for Eriugena, and links the *processio* and the *reditus* of the circular course from and to the Source: "the end of every movement is its start, for it terminates at no other end than its beginning from where it began to move, and to which it always longs to come back in order to halt and come to rest".[47]

A result of the view that everything was created eternally in God's Word is that man was created with the seeds of sin, so to speak, already in him.[48] The entire *restauratio* is a process which in the Eriugenean system takes on a particular meaning: a reintegration of man - and with man, nature as a whole - with God.

In Eriugena's system, then, we find a version of an Augustinian double-life theory in the sense that mankind, created eternally as a primordial cause in God's *Verbum*, lives its temporary life, but the *restauratio* is already given with its creation from eternity. All created things are to be considered from the perspective of their temporary existence in time and place, but also from the eternal perspective of the divine reason which continues to be active. As Moreau writes: "Dans l'entendement divin les choses ne préexistent pas seulement *en idée*, comme des possibilités en attente de réalisation, elles subsistent sur un mode tel que leur réalisation temporelle n'y ajoute rien; celle-ci n'est qu'une manifestation déficiente de leur réalité éternelle".[49] Much more could be said about Eriugena's philosophy, and my summary serves no other purpose than to show that for Eriugena speaking about the *reditus* phase of the circular course is as natural as speaking about the *processio*. Although the preexistence of man is a crucial facet of Eriugena's system, it does not, however, take on the character of the unorthodox position of a preexistence and descent of the soul.

In his reading and glossing the text of Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, Eriugena meets the idea of metempsychosis in a direct way, and does not hesitate to call this and related Neoplatonic doctrines *poetarum deliramenta*.[50] When Martianus Capella refers obliquely to the purgation or punishment of souls in the "rapid eddies and whirlpools"

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[45] *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 178. Cf. also Francis Bertin, "Les origines de l'homme chez Jean Scot" in *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie*, 313, and J. Moreau, "Le verbe et la création", 203-205. *Periphyseon* III 8, PL 122:640C-D (ed. Sheldon-Williams, 74-76 and elsewhere).

[46] "L'unité humaine selon Jean Scot Erigène", in *L'homme et son prochain*. Actes du VIIIe Congrès des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française (Toulouse 1956), 299.

[47] Book 5, PL 122:866C.

[48] Book 4, PL 122:807B-C: "peccati consequentia in homine et cum homine simul concreauit".

[49] "Le verbe et la création", 204; *Periphyseon* II 16, PL 122:549B (ed. Sheldon-Williams, 56).

[50] *Iohannis Scotti. Annotationes in Marcianum*, ed. Cora E. Lutz, (Cambridge, Mass. 1939), 17 and 21; cf. Cl. Leonardi, "Martinanus Capella et Jean Scot: Nouvelle présentation d'un vieux problème", in ed. G.-H. Allard, *Jean Scot Ecrivain*. Actes de IVe Colloque Internationale, Montréal 28 août-2 sept. 1983, (Montréal-Paris 1986), 187-207, esp. 202-203.

of the rivers of the planets, Eriugena writes that this whole passage is full of false opinions (*falsis opinionibus plena*), and that the Platonic school is perverse in holding that souls, after their purgation in which they are liberated from the stains of a former life, return to bodies to sin again and so on. "And this is what Martianus feigns (*machinatur*) to teach".[51]

In another commentary on the *De Nuptiis*, of which Eriugena's authenticity has been doubted, the same passage is discussed at somewhat greater length.[52] The glossator first writes that rational souls, in their relationship to God and their strivings towards him, are without contagion, but that when they descend to the *inferiora* out of love for lower and base things, they are weighed down by the bodies. After their damnation, they return to heaven via the same planetary courses along which they had descended, and "there they find good and bad things, like they found on their descent [to earthly bodies]; and later they return as if out a prison (*quasi ex carcere*) and go to the stars, or they also stay in hell".[53] More striking than the absence of any repudiation of the idea of metempsychosis, is the occurance of hell, which is not in Capella's text. Apperently, Martianus' poetical *deliramentum*, taken from the Neoplatonists, *could* be read as a statement of the Christian doctrine of the afterlife. The first sentence of this quotation reminds one of a central notion of Eriugena's system, namely that all created things are to be considered from the perspective of their temporary existence in time and place, but also from the eternal perspective of the divine reason.

In a second passage the Neoplatonic doctrine is described at length, but the glossator ends his explanation, couched in rather neutral terms, by saying: "This is enough about the misery of human thought and the figments of the infidels", as if to make sure that his heart is at the right place after all.[54]

Whether or not the glosses on the *De Nuptiis* are by Eriugena himself, they definitely bear the mark of Eriugenean teaching. The pagan origin of the Neoplatonic doctrines is recognized and rejected, but the glosses also show that the Neoplatonic teaching on the *apostrophia animarum* was attractive enough in order to be linked with elements from the Christian scheme.

## IV

As has been said, it was in the commentaries on Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, more than in those on the works of Martianus and Macrobius, that much of the debate on the issue of the origin of the soul and its possible preexistence before its entry in a human body took

[51] ed. Lutz, 21-22.

[52] The text is edited by Ed. Jeauneau in his *Quatre thèmes érigéniens*. Conférence Albert-le-Grand 1974 (Montréal-Paris 1974), 91-166 (text on 101-166). According to Leonardi ("Martinanus Capella et Jean Scot", 197-198), who follows G. Schrimpf, the two commentaries should not to be considered as two redactions by the same author (i.e. Eriugena), as Liebeschütz had once argued. Rather they are "le résultat de la transcription, en texte continu, sans le texte du *De nuptiis*, des gloses présentes dans un manuscrit où elles avaient été écrites (sinon même déjà copiées) en marge et dans les interlignes des Martianus".

[53] ed. Jeauneau, 122.

[54] ed. Jeauneau, 132: "Sat est de humanarum cogitationum miseria deque infidelium machinamentis".

place. This certainly holds true when we move on a bit in time. Although much work is still to be done on the many glosses and commentaries on the *Consolatio*, some of them have attracted attention from scholars, most notably the commentaries on "O qui perpetua" by Bovo of Corvey, Adalbold of Utrecht and the so-called Anonymous Einsiedlensis.[55] Bovo of Corvey's commentary dates from the early tenth century. He is rightly said to have explained "Boethius' allusions to exemplars, the World Soul and the preexistence of human souls with a clarity due in no small part to the absence of attempts to equate these doctrines with Christian ones".[56] On this last theme, Bovo is very clear: after having elucidated Boethius' allusions to the preexistence of souls and their vehicles by sketching Macrobius' description of the descent of the soul through the various heavenly spheres, Bovo roundly condems these "inanissimas fabulas" and writes: "Who is so silly not to keep these monstruous comments far from his Christian belief?"[57]. He notes that according to Platonic philosophy, the souls emanate from the World Soul, and this is, of course, contrary to Christian faith.

Adalbold of Utrecht's attitude is very different from the cautious one of Bovo. In his attempt to reconcile Christian faith with Boethius' Platonism, Adalbold goes so far as to equate the Platonic world of Ideas with the Word of God, Christ.[58] When he comes to discuss our theme, he is cautious enough to share the company of Augustine and Jerome in professing his ignorance as to the way in which the soul was created by God. He then interprets Boethius words as follows: the souls which Boethius calls "sublimes" are the souls of men, not of angels as some have maintained. The chariots ("currus") of these souls are reason and intelligence ("ratio et intelligentia"). Hence, when Boethius writes that God sows the souls in heaven and earth, this must be understood as that they, although hampered to some extent by their bodies, can gaze ("cogitant") at both heavenly things and earthly things, and thanks to the wings of freedom that are allotted to them, they may attain a glorious life.[59]

What we have seen so far is that the hermeneutic strategies in interpreting the obviously pagan idea of a preexistence of the soul and its descent into a body, could range from an uncritical exposition to a rather hostile reaction. Some tried to reconcile the doctrine with Christian faith, and were led to do this by the language of the return of the soul to its creator which implies a route which descended from him; others were more cautious and declared themselves ignorant or roundly condemned the idea. But in this last case, one had to excuse oneself in studying and even commenting upon these pagan, Platonic ideas. Bovo of Corvey, for example, says that he examines the idea of the descent of the soul in order that no naive reader shall be mislead when other scholars express the same ideas in different, "sweet"

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[55] Courcelle, *La consolation*, 290-9; Beaumont, "Latin tradition", 293-5, Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy (480-1150). An Introduction* (London, 2nd ed. 1988), 85-7; editions of Bovo, Anonymous Einsiedlensis and Adalbold in R.B.C. Huygens, "Mittelalterliche Kommentare zum *O qui perpetua*", *Sacris Erudiri* 6 (1954), 373-427; references are to these editions.

[56] Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy*, 86.

[57] "sed quis tam demens est ut haec monstruosa commenta non procul a fide sua remoueat?"; ed. Huygens, p. 397:411 and 420-1.

[58] ed. Huygens, p. 410:18-21.

[59] The third, anonymous, commentator simply explains Boethius' Platonism and does not condemn the overtly pagan doctrines; ed. Huygens, p. 403:87-93 on the preexistence of souls.

wordings, and he even reminds his addressee of the case of Augustine who had to describe the scandalous rites of the pagans in order that they can be avoided.[60] All strategies had their disadvantages: distortions of Platonic philosophy or Christian faith were likely to result from the attempts to reconcile the two systems.[61]

## V

When we turn to the twelfth century to look for the vicissitudes of the theme of the origin of the soul and its possible preexistence, a host of texts can be drawn upon in order to illustrate the uneasiness scholars felt in giving a treatment that would both do justice to the texts that they commented upon and to Christian faith that had rejected the idea of a preexistence of the soul. I shall focus again on the commentaries on the works of Boethius, Marcobius and Plato, which, as we have seen above, played already an important role in the schools of Carolingian and later times. But since the twelfth century also saw the rise of the new kind of systematical theology, I shall briefly look at the debate on the origin and transmission of original sin which was hotly debated by theologians.

A text that might be viewed as a transition text from the early medieval period to the twelfth century, is the treatise *De mundi celestis terrestrisque constitutione*. Indeed, it has been dated both from the ninth century and the twelfth century, but according to its editor it must probably be placed in the latter half of the eleventh century and in a German region.[62] The treatise contains *inter alia* an interesting section on the world soul and the human soul, which might have derived from a commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*, and in its turn it was probably used by a commentator on Macrobius around 1200.[63] The author first catalogues the pagan opinions on the origin of the soul and then gives the orthodox Christian opinion. He begins by describing the Macrobean descent of the soul, and mentions the ethereal and airy envelopes which, according to Neoplatonic teaching, the soul takes on while sliding down through the heavenly spheres. From the author's remarks on these ethereal envelopes, one gets the impression that the issue of the descent of the soul was a theme lively discussed by scholars at that time. For example, the question is raised whether souls are embodied in these envelopes or not. Objections are formulated to possible solutions and more questions arise, for example concerning the soul's immortality and the soul's knowledge. The author follows Plato, "whose authority carries more weight",[64] in holding that the soul is an incorporeal substance moving itself. If Plato seems to have said that the soul is both generated and ungenerated, he meant that the soul is ungenerated because it cannot be destroyed actually, only if God wishes it to be destroyed; generated, "because, according to many, it had a

[60] ed. Huygens, p. 397:421-5 and pp. 383:29-384:36.

[61] cf. Marenbon's clear exposition in *Early Medieval Philosophy*, 87-89.

[62] *Pseudo-Bede. De mundi celestis terrestrisque constitutione: a treatise on the universe and the soul*, ed. and transl. by Ch. Burnett and others (London 1985), 1-2.

[63] ed. Burnett, 1-2; E. Garin, *Studi nel platonismo medievale* (Florence 1958), 33-46.

[64] ed. Burnett, 63.

preexisting matter - hyle - and, although Plato does not say this anywhere, he does not contradict it anywhere".[65] The question also arises whether souls, if they are generated, were created together in the first establishing of the world by their creator. Or did the creator make new souls every day? The Boethian opinion of the souls allotted to stars as their vehicles, here termed as the opinion of the "philosophers", agrees, according to the author, with[66]

> the revelation of the Hebrews which says "Behold, the voice of the blood of your brother cries to me from the earth" - that is, the souls which were to be embodied were born from the blood of Abel. For they cried for the reason that they wished to merit perfect blessedness whilst in bodies.

"But God, the author concludes, makes nothing superfluous; therefore this opinion is weightless (*frivola*)".[67] Three other opinions are mentioned: soul as part of the divine essence, as born from angelic substances, and as born from the passing of the sperm (traducianism), but as the true origin of soul, the author holds that souls are born together with the body itself, that is they come into existence some time "after the conception of the seed which is fashioned into the human body".[68]

The impression that this section leaves behind on the reader is somewhat confusing. The author compares the relationship between soul and body with a jewel in the mud, a lantern under a bushel, a lion in a cage, and he even speaks of the body as the soul's hell; the Platonic view of the soul is neither rejected nor affirmed, and although a preexistence is definitely not what the author has in mind, his discussion of the airy envelopes and the Macrobean descent of the soul through the planetary spheres is written in neutral, certainly not depreciatory terms. Although he does not seem to subscribe to traducianism, in the last paragraph on the true origin of souls, he seems to suggest that the soul comes into existence in a natural way out of the seed. What makes the discussion valuable is not so much the catalogue of opinions, which is largely based on Macrobius, but the presence of some admittedly crude arguments that gives the impression that the issue of the origin of the soul was debated even in terms of *obiectio*, *solutio* and *quaestio* as early as the eleventh century and probably much earlier.[69]

As we have seen, the Macrobean account of the origin of the soul offered the

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[65] *ibid*., 65.

[66] ed. Burnett, 67; his transl. slightly adapted.

[67] An anonymous commentator on Macrobius ascribes two heresies to the Hebrews: that the soul is a part of the divine essence referring to "Inspiravit in faciem eius spiraculum vitae" (Gen. 2:7) and that the souls were created at the beginning of the world and descend from stars. Here the commentator quotes the same words "Voces sanguinem clamant ad me de terra" (Gen. 4:10) (ed. by Burnett in *ibid*., 76-78). The commentator also notices that "plures occurunt quaestiones", questions which appear to derive from the pseudo-Bede text.

[68] ed. Burnett, 67.

[69] The presence of these discussion-terms relativizes P. E. Dutton's claim that it was the twelfth-century master Bernard of Chartres who "may stand close to the beginning of a tradition of the scholastic question-and-answer method that was to figure so prominently in the universities of the next century"; *Bernard of Chartres. Glosae super Platonem* (Toronto 1989), 55.

medieval reader an opportunity to visualize what happened to the soul on its descent through the Milky Way and the planetary spheres. For example, in a short twelfth-century treatise, entitled *Omnibus convenit Platonicis*, the anonymous author used Macrobius, updated by Helperic on astronomical matters, to present in the words of his editor an "allegory of the successive stages of depravity that a human soul may go through before eventually reaching a turning point and progressing towards virtue".[70] To this end the soul's descent through the planetary spheres was altered "into a journey of the soul through the Zodiac on the analogy of the journey of the Sun along the ecliptic."[71]

Moreover, the visual quality of the image of the soul's descent through the heavenly spheres led Platonizing poets such as Bernard Silvestris and Alain de Lille to exploit this motif. In Bernard's *Microcosmos*, Natura sees "a numberless throng of souls clustered about the abode of Cancer" wearing "expressions fit for a funeral", for they were to glide down to earthly bodies.[72] And though Alain de Lille denies the preexistence of souls in his *Quoniam homines*, the idea is present in his great poetical works, *De planctu naturae* and *Anticlaudianus*.[73] Although we should beware of taking these descriptions as meant literally, we cannot dismiss them as merely literary figments either, bearing in mind Huizinga's wise words: "In diese Sphäre der ästhetischen Verbildlichung von Ahnungen, die er logisch nicht ausdrücken kann, vermag sich der Dichter des zwölften Jahrhunderts noch zurückzuziehen... Die Dichtung des Alanus schwebt in einer Zone des halben Glaubens, zwischen Überzeugung und Phantasie, zwischen Spiel und Ernst".[74]

Treatises such as the *De mundi celestis terrestrisque constitutione* and *Omnibus convenit Platonicis* belong to the same world of learning as that of William of Conches, and much of the interest and cosmological explanations can also be found in the latter's works. Poetical creativity of a Bernard Silvestris or an Alain of Lille was not available to him, but he had plenty of opportunity to come to terms with the doctrine of the soul's descent, for he wrote commentaries on all the three major sources for the *descensus animae*: Plato, Boethius and Macrobius.[75] As is well known, William of Conches' strategy to reconcile pagan doctrines

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[70] Ch. Burnett, "*Omnibus conuenit Platonicis*. An Appendix to Adelard of Bath's *Quaestiones Naturales*" in ed. H. Westra, *From Athens to Chartres. Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeauneau* (Leiden 1992), 259-81, on p. 266.

[71] Burnett, "*Omnibus conuenit Platonicis*", 267.

[72] *Microcosmos* III.8, ed. P. Dronke (Leiden 1978), 125: "Itaque Cancri circa confinium turbas innumeras, vulgus aspicit animarum, que quidem omnes vultibus quibus itur ad exequias et quibusdam quasi lacrimis exturbate"; transl. W. Wetherbee (New York 1973), 95.

[73] See the edition of P. Glorieux of *Quoniam homines* in *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 28 (1953), 113-364, on p. 150, and *Anticlaudianus* VI.

[74] "Über die Verknüpfung des Poetischen mit dem Theologischen bei Alanus de Insulis" in *Verzamelde Werken* (9 vols., Haarlem 1948-53), iv, 70-71.

[75] On what follows, see the fundamental studies of T. Gregory, *Anima mundi. La filosofia di Guglielmo di Conches e la scuola di Chartres* (Florence 1955), esp. 158-74 and the articles of E. Jeauneau collected in his *"Lectio Philosophorum": Recherches sur l'École de Chartres* (Amsterdam 1973); see also A.J. Minnis and L. Nauta, "*More Platonico loquitur*: What Nicholas Trevet really did to William of Conches", in A.J. Minnis (ed.), *Chaucer's "Boece" and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius* (Cambridge 1993), 1-33. I am currently preparing an edition of William's commentary on Boethius as part as the *Opera Omnia* edition under the general editorship of

with Christian faith was an extensive use of *integumenta*. Acceptable, i.e. Christian meanings are to be sought under the veils of pagan words and pagan doctrines.[76]

Let us first look at the passage in *The Dream of Scipio* where Macrobius had written that the souls descend to earth through Cancer and ascend through Capricorn. Here William comments:[77]

> The sun is the cause of our life. But the sun descends from Cancer, and ascends through Capricorn. The descent of souls is thus said to take place through Cancer *sub integumento*, the ascent through Capricorn. Other people think that it is due to some qualities of the sun, some of which, such as warmth, are the cause of our life, some of which, such as coldness, are the cause of dissolution; hence every dead being is cold. But when the sun is in Cancer, a warm breeze (*fervor*) dominates, because Cancer is a warm sign. Therefore, because all life takes its being from warmth, it is justly said that souls descend through Cancer... [and ascend in the cold sign of Capricorn when life is dissolved because of the coldness]

Just as the sun's warmth in spring causes new life to grow, so the soul's uniting with the body is most likely to take place in spring, i.e. in Cancer.

This ability of what we may call free interpretation or, in the apt words of Edouard Jeauneau, "tours de passe-passe", can also be observed in William's commentary on Boethius' *Consolation*. William of Conches, building on and extending the Boethian commentary tradition in significant ways,[78] tries here again to find acceptable meanings under the veils or coverings of pagan words. But as in the case of his Macrobius commentary, his interpretation amounts to "tours de passe-passe." In writing that God placed the souls on top ("supra") of companion stars from whence they proceeded into human bodies, Boethius, William justly asserts, followed Plato. After having explained Plato's meaning, William writes that the "leves currus", i.e. the companion stars in Boethius' text, might be identified with reason and intellect, which bring the soul to knowledge of its creator ("on top" taken in a "spatial" sense). Alternatively, the "leves currus" might be interpreted as being stars, because by stellar influence the soul is able to exist in the human body.[79] In both interpretations, William seems to

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E. Jeauneau for *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis*.

[76] On this concept see P. Dronke, *Fabula. Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden 1985) en E. Jeauneau, "L'usage de la notion d'*integumentum* à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches", *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 24 (1957), 35-100, repr. in his *"Lectio Philosophorum"*, pp. 127-192.

[77] I translate from the text from Bern, Bürgerbibl. ms lat. 266, fol. 9$^{v}$ as given in E. Jeauneau, *"Lectio Philosophorum"*, p. 295 n.69.

[78] See A.J. Minnis and L. Nauta, "*More Platonico loquitur*".

[79] In his *Timaeus* commentary William stressed that in the first alternative "on top" should not be taken "localiter" but "causaliter". The second, "astrological" interpretation was favoured by William, and is found in a number of authors, e.g. in the commentary edited by H.J. Westra as *The Commentary on Martianus Capella's* De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii *Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris* (Toronto 1986), 146-147; William of Aragon's commentary on Boethius for which see C. Terbille, *William of Aragon's Commentary on Boethius "De consolatione philosophiae"*, Ph.D. thesis (2 vols., Michigan 1972), ii, 132-33, and more notably in Dante,

think, souls do not have a previous life. In the first, the soul's heavenly status refers only to its ability to understand heavenly things. In the second, its heavenly origin refers to the influence of the stars by which it is able to unite with an earthly body. Elsewhere, William makes it quite clear that he favours the creationist's position that God creates souls daily.

As William has now rejected the idea of a previous life of the soul, what remains of the notion of the soul's perfect knowledge that it possessed when it was not yet joined to a body? Here William writes that "if the body had not weighed it down, the soul, *because of its very nature*, would have known all that men could know. But because the soul is joined to a body, it is not able to make use of this perfect knowledge; it needs exercise and doctrine to stir the seeds of truth in order to grow to its natural power of understanding" (emphasis added).[80] Thus, a fall of the soul along Platonic lines was rejected, but William certainly thought of a way in which the fall of the Platonic soul could stand for the fall of the Christian soul. In his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, he retains much of his previous interpretations, but adds that when Plato wrote that God bid the souls to gaze at the nature of the universals, the Greek philosopher hinted at (*insinuat*) the first condition of the human soul ("primum statum humane anime insinuat"):[81]

> For God gave the first human soul perfect understanding, free will and insoluble essence. Hence, the first man at his creation had a perfect understanding not on account of any doctrine or experience but solely on account of the grace of its creator.

Due to Adam's sin, souls lost their perfect knowledge, while they kept their insoluble character, and "to this *sententia* we have to adapt the *littera*", William concludes. The verb *adaptare* is revealing, for it shows that for William the gap between Platonic and Christian teaching on this point could easily be bridged, and that at the level of the deeper meaning, they were not at all at odds.[82] But inevitably, this type of interpretation hardly does justice to the difference between the fall of the Platonic soul, which is a recurrent event and presupposes a preexistent life, and Adam's fall, which was supposed to be a unique event. And it is even less easy to link the Platonic fall with the fall of *any* Christian soul, for either God must be credited with the daily creation of imperfect and even tainted souls (which contradicts William's assertion that only after the conjunction of soul and body, which is the same for all, does the soul turn to a vicious or a virtuous life) or the soul's loss of knowledge on the entry of a body refers not to that conjunction but to a later phase, in which case the Platonic terminology is used in a rather misleading way.

In a general sense, then, we must conclude that William has not refuted the Platonic

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*Paradiso* iv, 37-63. For discussion of Dante's position see B. Nardi, "L'origine dell' anima umana secondo Dante" in his *Studi di filosofia medievale* (Rome 1979), 9-68 and P. Dronke, *Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions* (Cambridge 1986), 25-31, who also discusses William of Conches.

[80] For the passage see T. Gregory, *Anima Mundi*, 161 and the discussion in Minnis and Nauta, "*More Platonico loquitur*", 24; Jeauneau, "L'usage de la notion d'*integumentum*", 172-176.

[81] *Guillaume de Conches. Glosae super Platonem*, ed. Jeauneau (Paris 1965), 213.

[82] See also the excellent discussion of T. Gregory, "The Platonic Inheritance" in ed. P. Dronke, *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy* (Cambridge 1988), 54-80.

tenet that the soul has lived a preexistent life. The discussion in terms of a loss of knowledge on the entry of the soul in the body, the recovery of such knowledge by learning, the body as a hindrance to the natural functioning of the soul, and the soul's return to its source - this whole complex of expressions, suggested by the reading of Macrobius, Plato and Boethius, only makes sense given there *was* a previous life in which the soul had once known that perfect knowledge which was then lost on entering the body.[83]

## VI

William's solution to see the fall of the soul in terms of original sin by which all later souls are tainted, ultimately goes back, as we have seen, to Augustine, who had faced but not adequately solved this whole cluster of problems on the origin of the soul. In William's time, the first generations of systematic theologians reflected Augustine's doubts and uncertainties in their handling of these issues. Needless to say, their discussions are of a different nature than the discussions in the glosses and commentaries on authors such as Boethius and Macrobius, which, as we have seen, had to cope with overt pagan ideas on the origin of the soul and its transmigration, nevertheless it is well to remember that the two types of activities - doing systematic theology and commenting on these schooltexts - where not always very distinct from each other. They often took place in the same intellectual milieu as the debate on, for example, the world soul shows. I shall, however, not say very much on this theological debate, but only show the difficulties which they faced when dealing with the theme of the origin of the soul. My point is that the Neoplatonic terminology cast a much wider shadow over their debates than they would have admitted. The circular course of Platonic philosophy could not find a parallel in Christianity but it played, as we shall see, a role at the backstage.

According to the twelfth-century writer Odo of Cambrai, traducianism was still held by many people to be the best account of the origin of the soul,[84] and hence of the transmission of original sin. Odo's own position is an interesting outcome of his Platonic realism according to which the universals are prior to particular, created beings that participate in universals. Souls of individual human beings are, consequently, to be considered as deriving from and participating in the universal human soul, i.e. the soul of Adam and Eve considered as one.[85] A new soul for new-born life is only new in respect of the *persona*, i.e. the individual, personal property of the soul: `In persona nova est, in specie nova non est. Nova est proprietate personali, non nova proprietate communi... Creatur igitur non humana anima, sed individua anima. Individua anima creatur, quia prius non erat, humana anima non creatur,

[83] Here William's master, Bernard of Chartres, had kept closer to the *littera* of Plato's text. See the edition in P. Dutton, *Bernard of Chartres. Glosae super Platonem*, 196 on *Timaeus* 41D: "Stellae dicuntur competentia uehicula animarum, quia sicut anima aeterna est, ita competens est, ut uehiculum aeternum esset. Vel sicut anima in motu est semper, ita competens est, ut uehiculum eius tale esset, quod in semper moueretur"; and p. 216 on *Timaeus* 47C: "*Perturbatos* bene dicit, quia antequam anima incorporaretur, habebat puram rationem, quae in corporis coniunctione perturbatur".

[84] *De peccato originali* II, PL 160:1077. He adds that their arguments "non sunt spernandae".

[85] `Igitur quando primum factus est homo, humana anima facta prius in uno individuo, et deinde divisa in alio, ipsius humanae animae natura in duabus personis erat omnis et tota' (*ibid.*, PL 160:1079).

quia prius erat, et in aliis personis erat'.[86] Hence, with the corruption of the universal soul in Adam and Eve, every soul as a sort of modification of this common, universal soul has been tainted by original sin: `In anima Adae ergo et in anima Evae, quae personaliter peccaverunt, infecta est peccato tota natura humanae animae, quae communis substantia est et specialis utriusque'.[87]

T. Gregory has well described what this position in fact amounts to: `la consequenziale logica del realismo ha portato ad una interpretazione tutta particolare dei "padri ortodossi", riducendo l'opera di Dio alla formazione di nuove proprietà dell'unica sostanza creata in Adamo e identica in tutti gli uomini'.[88] Odo's position, Gregory notes, resembles the Platonic account of the creation of souls out of the world soul in Plato's *Timaeus* and Plotinus' *Enneads*. In general, we may view Odo's Platonic realistic interpretation of the origin of the soul and the transmission of sin as a natural and logical counterpart of the Platonic circular course. Although, like in the system of Eriugena, there is no hint at the descent of the soul along the Platonic lines of metempsychosis, it is clear that on this account, to put it roughly, the creation of the soul presupposes a preexistent soul, i.e. the universal human soul out of which the particular souls are `created'. Anselm of Canterbury's position on the transmission of sin is similar to Odo's, and in much the same way, it may be argued, a consequence of his Platonic realism, whatever the precise nature of his realism.[89]

Odo's remark that the arguments of the traducianists `should not be scorned' (*non sunt spernandae*) reflects his own ambigious position in which, from a bird's-eye view, creationism (God's creating new individual *personae* daily) and traducianism (each soul deriving its particular characteristic from the common, universal soul) both contribute to a position which is indebted to Platonic philosophy as well. That traducianism was still a widely held opinion in the twelfth century shows its attractiveness for explaining original sin and its transmission in terms of a common nature of man. To illustrate to what extent traducianism was indeed widely accepted by twelfth-century theologians, we need to know what kind of transmission of what kind of sin was meant.

In her magisterial study of Peter Lombard and his twelfth-century predecessors and collegues, Professor Colish has discussed some of the answers to these questions.[90] A first view on the effects of original sin, and hence on what is meant by the fall of man, stresses the

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[86] *ibid*., PL 160:1091.

[87] *ibid*., PL 160:1082.

[88] `La dottrina del peccato originale e il realismo platonico: Oddone di Tournai', in his *Platonismo medievale. Studi e ricerche* (Rome 1958), 31-51, on p. 49.

[89] Anselm, *De conceptu virginali et de originali peccatu* 2: `tota humana natura in illis [Adam and Eve] erat, et extra ipsos de illa nihil erat' (*Opera*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, vol. ii [Rome 1940], 141); and *ibid*., 7: `Sic in Adam omnes peccavimus quando ille peccavit, non quia tunc peccavimus ipsi qui nondum eramus, sed quia de illo futuri eramus, et tunc facta est illa necessitas ut cum essemus peccaremus' (ed. p. 148). On Anselm's realism see Peter King, *Peter Abailard and the Problem of Universals*, unpubl. doctoral thesis (Princeton University 1982), 124-36.

[90] For what follows see her *Peter Lombard* (2 vols., Leiden 1994) i, 381-97. A.M. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik* (Regensburg 1955), iv, part 1 is still valuable, see esp. pp. 155-85 on the question of the transmission of sin.

*physical* consequences of sin. Man is subject to sickness, pain, mortality and sexual desire. Robert Pullen's position has a strong version of this view. Robert does not deny that the soul is affected too, but it is because of the union of the soul to the body that man is fallen in his miserable, post-lapsarian condition. A second view, taught by the Porretans, Hugh of St Victor and others, holds that soul and body alike are afflicted by the effects of original sin: The body is afflicted by concupiscence and the soul by ignorance. A third view is that of the members of the School of Laon to which Peter Lombard's position comes closest. They emphasize that the effects show themselves most clearly and dramatically in man's *intellectual* abilities and, most importantly, in man's free will. After the fall, free will has been depressed, and the Augustinian theme of the need for God's grace is consequently prominent in many of the holders of this view.

Despite the many doctrinal differences between these views and the modified views of their proponents, we can already clearly see that some problems are not to be solved by any of them. If one speaks of the suffering of the soul on account of the union of soul and body, this can only make sense in reference to a situation of a normal, *non-suffering* condition of the soul, suffering being a relative term. But at what time did the soul not suffer? Not before uniting with the body, for there is no place for the soul's preexistence in the Christian scheme. The only possible explanation is that the soul was born in this condition of suffering, which presses the question more strongly of why God creates new souls daily that are already tainted and suffer. The answer that Adam's prelapsarian state forms the non-suffering condition of any soul, brings to the fore the question of the relationship between Adam and the rest of mankind. Only traducianists can formulate some sort of answer to this, but in the case of Robert Pullen, for example, who thought of the effects of original sin in terms of *physical* suffering, this is still an open question.

Not only this sort of terminology of suffering and the stains of the soul by the corrupt body,[91] but also the continuing use of the terminology of the remnants of one's conscience and learning points to a certain uneasiness of the Christian position. When Peter Lombard speaks of the *scintilla rationis*, his terminology reminds us of the Boethian *semen veri*, the seeds of truth that have remained in the weakened soul. Of course, this is now to be viewed in the light of Adam's sin and the consequences for all the souls that after that unlucky moment have been created. But the use of this terminology, that made good sense within a Neoplatonic circular course, points to the unresolved question of the relationship between Adam and his "progeny".

Several attempts were made to answer these difficult questions, but twelfth-century theologians were not very succesful in solving them in a satisfactory way.[92] If one argued that the transmission of sin was conveyed via the body, that is, if parents conveyed to their children the guilt of original sin, the penalty of mortality and the spark of future sin, then one had to favour some kind of traducianism. According to traducianists, the genetic material was vitiated by the fall and corrupted the body, and the body, in its turn, corrupted the soul that was infused into it. But if one were averse to traducianism as for example Peter Lombard and others were, and thought that the voluntary consent of the will should be held responsible for

[91] Roland of Bologna, *Sent*., see Colish, *Peter Lombard*, i, 389.

[92] Colish, *Peter Lombard*, i, 386: "However problematic they found it, none of them, including the Lombard, was able to find a satisfactory substitute for it"; cf. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte*, iv, part 1, 155 ff.

our miserable condition, one has, of course, to explain why each new-born life should contract the guilt of original sin. Peter Lombard could only answer that God does this because man was created as body *and* soul, and is to be glorified in body and soul, and therefore it is necessary that God infuses a soul, albeit weakened, in the body. Moreover, according to the Lombard, baptism does not free one of the *poena* and the *fomes peccati*, and releases only the guilt of original sin.[93]

It is has not been my intention to discuss this very large issue of original sin and its transmission in any detail, but only to point out that, although a Neoplatonic scheme of some kind was not what twelfth-century theologians were most anxious to refute, the theological debate on the origin of sin and its effects used some of the terminology that originally had its place within a Neoplatonic scheme. Terminology such as a *scintilla rationis*, the loss of perfect knowledge and free will, the suffering of the body or the soul or both, that made sense within such a Platonic scheme, found its way in the debate on original sin and its transmission, but like in the case of William of Conches, the transposition of these terms from one metaphysical system to another pointed to some weaknesses in the Christian scheme, to questions which Augustine had found unresolvable.

## VII

From the thirteenth century onwards, the idiom in which Christian scholars thought and wrote on the question of the soul's origin changed from a largely Platonic-Augustinian to an Aristotelian signature, a process much too complicated to deal with here in any proper way. In the Platonic-Augustinian tradition, as Kuksewicz summurizes "the human soul was treated as a spiritual substance, having innate knowledge, illuminated by God, composed of a *ratio superior* directed toward the spiritual world and a *ratio inferior* tending toward lower beings, not dependent on the body, and accomplishing its cognitive function all by itself".[94] On the Aristotelian view, the soul as the form of the body, became much more closely associated with the body, and hence the question of its origin was to be formulated not so much in Platonic-Augustinian and Boethian terms of a loss of knowledge on the infusion of the soul into a body and its retaining a seed of truth and so forth, but rather in terms of the physiological development from the vegetative via the sensitive to the rational soul. Needless to say, this picture is vastly more complicated, but in general we can say that where Platonic and Augustinian elements were retained in theories about intellectual cognition, innate knowledge in the soul was restricted to knowledge of first principles of understanding, and interpreted as a sort of disposition of the (passive) intellect to cognition of truth. With the physiological development from the vegetative via the sensitive to the rational soul, new problems arose such as how to reconcile God's creation of the soul and this physiological development, but these problems fall outside the scope of this article.[95]

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[93] *Sent.* 2, d. 32. c. 6; Colish, *Peter Lombard*, i, 396-97.

[94] Z. Kuksewicz, "The potential and the agent intellect" in eds. N. Kretzmann *et al*., *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge 1982), 596; henceforth abbreviated as *CHLMP*.

[95] On this question see esp. B. Nardi, `L'origine dell' anima umana secondo Dante', 9-68; S. Laurent, *Naître au Moyen Age. De la conception à la naissance: la grossesse et l'accouchement (XII$^{e}$-XIV$^{e}$ siècle)* (Paris 1989).

In the last section of this article, I shall briefly look at this later period and shall try to draw a few general conclusions about the implications of this change in intellectual climate for our theme. One of the first scholars in the Latin West who tried to formulate an Aristotelian theory of the soul was John Blund who wrote his *De anima* as presumably a magister of the Faculty of Arts in Paris before 1210. Although his remarks on the intellect have been characterised as "very imprecise"[96], his attempt to integrate the new Aristotelian teaching on the soul within an Augustinian framework (coloured by the doctrines of Avicenna on the potential and the active intellect), certainly embodies an important step towards an Aristotelian theory of the soul. One of the last chapters of his work is devoted to "whether a new or an old (*antiqua*) soul is infused within a body", and gives an interesting piece of argumentation in favour of creationism. The previous chapter in which he had rejected the existence of a world soul, ended with the "primus dator formarum" which infuses a soul into a body that has been prepared by nature to receive the soul as form of the body.[97]

Blund now tries to argue that it is more appropriate that a new soul is created and infused into the body than that an old one is united to it. In favour of an old soul, Blund argues that the soul's salvation is preferable to its damnation. Therefore, it is more appropriate that an old soul, that is oppressed by the weight of its sins, is infused in a body in order that it may attain eternal bliss by purging itself from its sins than that a new soul is united to a body.[98] Interestingly, Blund objects to this argument not by pointing out the heretical character of the notion of the soul's preexistence, but by arguing that the soul, able to choose the good and resist the bad, must be held responsible for its choice of acting, and hence that "after its separation from the body, the soul is not given to another body lest it inclines to sin again. It is therefore more appropriate that a new soul that is clean from the fall, apart from original sin (*mundam a labe, praeterquam ab originali peccato*), is infused into a body in order that by using reason and intellect, the soul conserves the rectitude of its will in accordance with rectitude itself".[99]

In the next question, the terminology of the soul's suffering is used to argue that the separated soul is capable of understanding although knowledge is usually derived from sense-experience. As Augustine, Jerome and many others have said, the soul, because it is oppressed by the weight of the body, is darkened and can only attain knowledge by having recourse to the senses. A separated soul is therefore better off in using its intellect than when united to a body.[100]

Blund's treatise is a typical product of an artist, not of a theologian, and he himself is aware of this. No question is raised concerning the effects of original sin, and the transmission

[96] Kuksewicz, in *CHLMP*, 597.

[97] eds. D.A. Callus and R.W. Hunt, *Johannes Blund. Tractatus de anima* (Oxford 1970), 98:18-23.

[98] "animam antiquam mole peccatorum oppressam, ut ipsa existens in corpore mereatur purgando se a peccatis suis et summum bonum sibi adquirat"; *ibid*., 99:15-24.

[99] *ibid*., 100:16-26. Blund takes God's justice to mean that God prevents the soul from sinning again, but one could also argue, as was done much later in the seventeenth century by Glanvill, that it was the very doctrine of the preexistence of the soul which made God to be just, for God gave the soul at least a second chance of salvation on earth.

[100] *ibid*., 101:15-21.

of sin, although he rejects traducianism explicitly.[101] Instead, he gives much attention to the physiological aspects of the soul and its faculties, using Avicenna and medical treatises as well as Augustine and Aristotle on epistemological processes. Thus, it comes as no surprise that when Blund discusses the origin of soul, he mixes idioms from two different philosophies which causes some strains in his discussion. On the one hand, he seems to approve of the opinion of Aristotle and others that the soul is created imperfectly and is only to be perfected by the sciences and the virtues,[102] which is a version of some kind of the Augustinian-Boethian notion of the soul's ignorance on account of its union to a body; on the other hand he had argued that it is more appropriate that a new, clean soul is to be infused rather than an old one. The words "praeterquam ab originali peccato" come almost as an afterthought, and regrettably so for Blund, for it spoils his argument: a soul tainted by original sin can hardly be called *munda*. The terminology of a soul that is oppressed by the weight of the body is apparently not easily reconciled with the argument that a new, clean soul is infused rather than an old one.

We have often observed this same problem of rejecting the soul's preexistence while retaining the Platonic expressions, especially in the commentaries on the works of Martianus Capella, Macrobius and Boethius. Although these works were not studied as much as they were used to be up to the twelfth century, commentaries on Boethius continued to be written. The most popular and influential commentary was the one written by Nicholas Trevet about 1300.[103] The work was used by Chaucer and Jean de Meun while they were translating the *Consolatio* into the vernacular, and more than 100 manuscripts have survived. It is one of the last great medieval commentaries on this work, and it is of great interest to learn in what way Trevet, living in an scholastic milieu as he did, interpreted the Neoplatonic passages.

Commenting on the *descensus animae* passage which implies knowledge through recollection of things which the soul once had known in a previous life, Trevet writes that by "light chariot" (*levis currus*) Boethius could have meant "the immortal power of the soul, by means of which, when the body has been dissolved, the soul flies out from it."[104] And he adds that "though the soul is created in the body by God, nevertheless the uniting with it of the various arrangements of corporeal substances depends on power given by heaven." Trevet - like William, on whom he probably drew here - offered a solution that involved interpreting the soul's heavenly home and its companion star in terms of the mediating influence of the stars on the union of soul and body and its duration. He obviously wants to have it both ways: God is the soul's creator but "natural processes" determine the conditions of when and how the union of the soul with the body takes place, and how long it will last.

When he comes to speak on the related issue of knowledge as recollection, Trevet draws on Thomist psychology to explain Boethius' allusion to Plato's theory of knowledge as recollection in the lines "so if the Muse of Plato speaks the truth, that which each man learns,

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[101] *ibid*., pp. 7-8; and 9:24-27.

[102] *ibid*., 87:24-27.

[103] For texts and translations of the passages at stake, see E.T. Silk (edition) and A.B. Scott (translation) in ed. A.J. Minnis, *Chaucer's Boece*, 35-81; for what follows see the discussion by Minnis and Nauta, "*More Platonico loquitur*", 15-17 but my orientation here is different.

[104] transl. Scott, 75 in ed. Minnis, *Chaucer's "Boece"*.

forgetful he recalls" (III, metrum 11). According to Trevet, "Forgetful" (*immemor*) does not refer to a preexistent life of the soul but "is used here in as much as, if the soul existed by itself [separately from the body] it would have in its memory, albeit in a confused state, that which it learns."[105] And "recalling" (*recordatur*) is glossed as the "recovery of that which the soul would know (although in a confused way) when separated from the body, but which it does not know [in that way] when joined to the body." This *hypothetical* state of the soul - for Trevet naturally denies the soul's disembodied life *before* entering the body - is explained by invoking Thomist psychology on the disembodied life of the soul *after* it has left the body, which is acceptable Christian doctrine. Echoing Aquinas, Trevet writes that the soul has a certain perfection when united to the body, because without bodily sensation it cannot gain any knowledge. But when separated from the body, the soul has *also* a certain perfection because in this case it does not suffer any hindrance from the body and "therefore its power is more unified." Despite this latter sort of perfection, the mode of knowing in the disembodied state is said to be *confusa*, for in this condition the soul cannot know things individually (since it lacks the body's sensory experience of things) but only universally.

This rather incoherent position is basically that of Thomas Aquinas. On the one hand, the soul without body is said to be *imperfectior* and *praeter naturam*, because it can only reach its perfection *in unione ad corpus*; on the other hand, the body is an *impedimentum* and hinders the soul in its search for full knowledge.[106] About the mode of knowing of the disembodied soul, Thomas has hardly more to say than the *anima separata* having another mode of being (*alius modus essendi*) and another mode of knowing (*intelligendi*) than the *anima coniuncta*.[107]

In drawing on Thomist psychology, Trevet has not really succeeded in refuting the notion of the soul's preexistence. Not only has he exposed himself to the same objections that can be raised against Thomas' psychology, but in using the soul's "post-existence" (if I may coin a phrase) for explaining the soul's preexistence, he has unintentionally pointed to a certain arbitrariness in the Christian scheme: why does the soul's immortality and eternity stretch only in one direction, i.e. in the afterlife? In other words, if the soul is said to be eternal why only, in scholastic terminology, *a parte post* (i.e. with a beginning but no end) and not also *a parte ante*, having no beginning either?

This aspect of eternity and the afterlife, which is obviously connected to our theme, has been well treated by D.P. Walker who argued that the Christian doctrine of time and eternity is "metaphysically unsatisfactory because it is untidy."[108] While the Platonic scheme

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[105] Translation of this and the following quotation by Scott, 81. William had hinted at something similar to the mode of knowing things *confusa*, when he wrote that "dedit [sc. Deus] aptitudinem spectandi naturam universe rei, *si non actualiter*" (ed. Jeauneau, 213; emphasis mine).

[106] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-I, q.89, especially art.1, and *Quaestiones de Anima*, qu. 17 and 18, ed. J.H. Robb (Toronto 1968), 227-44. Cf. J. Mundhenk, *Die Seele im System des Thomas Aquin. Ein Beitrag zur Klärung und Beurteilung der Grundbegriffe der thomistischen Psychologie* (Hamburg 1980), 124-27.

[107] Pluta, *Kritiker*, 18: "Bei der Frage nach der Erkenntnisweise der anima separata gerät Thomas von Aquino vollends in eine Aporie." J. Mundhenk, *Die Seele*, 127 and A. Kenny, *Aquinas* (Oxford 1980), 49 come to the same conclusion.

[108] "Eternity and the Afterlife", 241.

consists of only two kinds of eternity - that of the Intelligible World and of the everlasting cyclical course of the world, along with souls ascending and descending up and down between them -, the Christian scheme in its orthodox form has four: the non-successive still eternity of God; the partially non-successive eternity of angels and dead elect; the finite, successive time of this world; and the successive eternity of hell. The two kinds of *aeternitates a parte post* (with a beginning but no end) of hell and heaven of the Christian scheme disturb the tidy, Platonic scheme by introducing an arbitrary asymmetry. As Walker writes:

> why not an *aeternitas a parte ante* instead of *post* (beings who have no beginning but an end)? or why not both? or why not a successive eternity with neither beginning nor end, as in the Neoplatonic scheme? To anyone thinking in Platonic terms the *aeternitas a parte post* would of course seem highly paradoxical; such a truncated, lop-sided eternity would be an absurdly inadequate image of the ideal, still eternity.[109]

Walker goes on to show that what he had superbly shown in his book *The Decline of Hell* in more detail, namely the attempts that were made especially in the seventeenth century to make the Christian scheme metaphysically more satisfying.[110] One could eliminate the *aeternitates a parte post* by either accepting the preexistence of souls and their circulations, by denying the eternity of hell or of heaven (or both), or a combination of these.

Although it is evident that no drastic revisions were put forward in the Middle Ages, I think the strains within the Christian scheme which, as I have argued, were partly caused by the Platonic terminology of the descent of soul, were sometimes formulated in these very terms of *aeternitates a parte post* and *a parte ante*. Buridan, for example, in his *Quaestiones de Anima*, writes that "if the human intellect had been perpetual *a parte post*, it must also have been perpetual *a parte ante* and vice versa."[111] Of course, faith prohibits holding this opinion but, according to Buridan, its falsehood cannot be demonstrated "on purely natural reasoning, i.e. sense experience" (*ex rationibus naturalibus puris, scilicet purum habentibus ortum ex sensibus*). Buridan believes that if we are to follow reason alone, the materialist psychology of Alexander of Aphrodisias is to be preferred, who held that the human intellect does not have an eternal life or an incorruptible nature but comes into existence with the body and dies with it.

Also in thinkers as Nicholas Oresme, Heinrich Olting of Oyta, Marsilius of Inghen and Pierre d'Ailly we come across the idea that if the human intellect is eternal *a parte post*, one should expect it to be also eternal *a parte ante*,[112] as indeed some form of Averroeistic

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[109] *ibid*., 246.

[110] D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell*. In an article in the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 4 (1996), 79-100 I have shown another aspect of this "tydying up" of the Christian scheme by the Cartesian Pierre Cally who imports Cartesian notions in his commentary on Boethius from 1680.

[111] For this and the following quotation, see the text in O. Pluta, *Kritiker*, 85.

[112] Nicholas Oresme: an argument against the eternity of the human intellect is "quia nullum generabile a parte ante est perpetuum a parte post, ut intendit Aristoteles demonstrare in primo Caeli. Modo secundum veritatem anima non est a parte ante aeterna, sed de novo producta. Igitur a parte post corrumpetur". Much the same in Heinrich Olting of Oyta: "si intellectus humanus est perpetuus a parte ante, ipse est perpetuus a parte post et e

teaching on the soul may have suggested, witness the condemnation of it in 1277 by Bishop Tempiers of Paris. More than one of the condemned articles on the list aims at an equality between the past and the future, not only with respect to the existence of the intellective soul but also with respect to the world.[113] In saving the soul's immortality while not ascribing to the soul's preexistence (in the form of an eternal existence of the human intellect), these thinkers used a standard device of scholastic philosophy, i.e. the distinction between *proprie* and *improprie*: since the human intellect is created but not in the ordinary way (i.e. out of previous matter), it is generated *improprie*, and hence may be said to have a beginning but no end.[114] Some of them, however, must have felt the force of the materialistic argument for they admitted, like Buridan had done, that *in lumine naturali* the human intellect might be said to be eternal *a parte ante* as well as *a parte post*, but that faith prohibits one to take that view. Faith, as Marsilius of Inghen wrote in his *Quaestiones in libros De anima*, holds that the human intellect is "perpetuus a parte post et creatus a parte ante. Illa conclusio creditur fide, quia non potest probari ratione naturali".[115]

This so-called "sceptical" tendency, which is strongly marked in some philosophers of the late Middle Ages, culminated in Pomponazzi's affirmation of the soul's mortality, at least when only reason is used.[116] So instead of adapting the Christian scheme to the Platonic scheme by arguing for the soul's preexistence, one began to question the soul's immortality, which may be seen as a kind of solution to the issue at stake: if one did not believe in the soul's afterlife, one did not need to bother about its previous life either.

In conclusion, what I have tried to show is that Christianity, because it had so much in common with Platonism, quite naturally used the Platonic idiom, especially as found by the medieval reader in authors such as Plato, Calcidius, Macrobius, Martianus Capella and Boethius. But in the case of the soul's journey from its creator and its temporary abode in a body, this Platonic idiom referred to the notion of the preexistence of the soul, which had

converso. Hoc enim credit Aristoteles determinare primo Caeli". And again in Marsilius of Inghen: "Si intellectus humanus est perpetuus a parte post, etiam est perpetuus a parte ante. In lumine naturali patet per Philosophum primo Caeli, ubi dicit, quod illud, quod est perpetuus a parte post, non potest habere principium a parte ante, quia nec per generationem, quia sic esset corruptibile a parte post, nec per creationem, quia istam philosophus naturalis non concedit". These texts from their *Quaestiones de anima* in the Appendix of Pluta, *Kritiker*, 76-109, on 91, 97 and 99.

[113] R. Hissette, *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 mars 1277* (Louvain and Paris 1977), 149-150 and 206-207.

[114] Nicholas Oresme: "...quod Aristoteles non concederet, quod esset aeterna a parte post, nisi etiam esset aeterna a parte ante; tamen potest dici, quod nullum generabile, quod proprie generatur ex materia, perpetuatur a parte post naturaliter. Tamen generabile improprie, id est producibile quocumque modo, potest perpetuari. Modo anima non generatur ex materia, sed creatur in ipsa" (*ibid*., p. 94; cf. Heinrich Olting of Oyta, p. 97, and Marsilius of Inghen, p. 99).

[115] *ibid*., 100.

[116] Pluta, *Kritiker*, 50-65 for a good discussion of Pomponazzi. The term "sceptical" does not, of course, refer to the philosophical doctrine of Scepticism, which was, if known at all, universally rejected in the Middle Ages. Cf. L.M. de Rijk, *Middeleeuwse Wijsbegeerte* (Assen), 272-277 (in French: *La philosophie au Moyen Age*, Leiden 1985).

officially been rejected by the Church. While the soul's *return* to its source and creator - a return which the Christian soul had in common with its Platonic counterpart - was a crucial element in the Christian scheme, its divine creation did not run parallel with the Platonic *processio* and thus with the preexistence of the Platonic soul and its descent through the planetary spheres. For although, according to standard Christian doctrine, God creates souls daily, the use by Christian authors of phrases such as a loss of knowledge on entry into the body, the body's weight being the cause of this loss, the remaining seeds of truth in the soul that had to be stirred, the soul's return to its creator, the soul's eternity, and so on, made only real sense within a Platonic context. Solutions avoiding this discrepancy could range from a strict rejection of Platonism to a full embracing of it (including the challenged notions such as the soul's preexistence, which we find accepted by some Cambridge Platonists in the seventeenth century[117]). And although rejection of the soul's immortality was perhaps not occasioned by this discrepancy between terminology and doctrine of the descent of the soul, it was felt to be related to it as we have seen in the case of Buridan and some of his contemporaries. To the majority of medieval readers, however, these options were not available. Poetic imagery, ingenious interpretations of the passages in question in Macrobius, Plato and Boethius, along with half-hearted and rather inconsistent solutions, formed the core of the medieval attempt to escape the tyranny of the letter. Creative reading was the medieval scholar's strong point.[118]

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[117] See D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, 122-55, esp. 146-55. Even Ficino, who did more than anyone else in promoting Platonic teaching on the soul, was careful to add, when he came to speak on the astral descent of the soul and the aeterial vehicle (the Boethian *levis currus*) that "delectat interdum una cum priscis confabulari" and "delectat tamen cum antiquis interdum poetice ludere" in Theol. Plat. XVIII, cap. 4 and 5 in *Opera omnia* (Basel 1576, repr. Torino 1962), 404 and 405.

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