

Aristotle on the *οὐσία τῆς συστάσεως* of the Cosmic Body. Some Notes on *De Caelo* II 13, 293a17-293b15

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Abstract

In the *De Caelo* Aristotle posits the physical universe as the body which includes the totality of bodies that are characterised by being its 'parts' (II,268b1-5). He meticulously defines various properties of this all-embracing body (e.g. finitude, unicity, eternity) but provides limited indications of what kind of being corresponds to it. According to some, Aristotle's cosmic whole is an aggregation of beings; according to others it is an individual being. Among the latter, a few argue that such a being has a matter and a form whilst others deny it. Recently, Matthen (2001) has argued that Aristotle's universe is an individual being which has matter and form and whose form is the structure of the totality. Falcon (2005), instead, has claimed that Aristotle's universe is an individual being but that it is not a hylomorphic compound.

In this paper, I argue that Aristotle's cosmic body is an individual being and that its form is the continuous and eternal circular motion of the first body: more in particular, the motion of the first heavenly sphere, the sphere which includes the whole universe and imparts movement to all the other heavenly spheres. A key piece of evidence for my position is *De Caelo*, II13,293a17-293b15 — a passage which curiously has not yet been considered in the debate on the ontological status of Aristotle's universe. In this passage Aristotle rejects the Pythagorean thesis that fire is at the centre of the universe. Adopting a dialectical strategy, he distinguishes two meanings of 'centre': the centre of the mathematical figure (*τοῦ μεγέθους*) and the centre of the thing (*τοῦ πράγματος*) or of the nature (*τῆς φύσεως*). By means of an analogy with the case of the animal, he shows that the distinction fits the cosmic body (239b4-11). Later on, demonstrating that the centre of the thing is more precious than the centre of the mathematical figure, he identifies the former with the principle (*ἀρχή*), the limit (*τὸ πέρας*) and 'that which contains' (*τὸ περιέχον*): such a reality defines, circumscribes (*τὸ ὀρίζον*), and corresponds to the *οὐσία τῆς συστάσεως* of the cosmic body (239b11-15). In this paper I argue that this is the only passage of the treatise which contains a univocal reference to the essence of the whole universe and which, furthermore, points out what it is.

First I present Aristotle's text. Secondly I demonstrate that the concepts which imply the centre of the thing at 239b11-14 (*ἀρχή, πέρας, περιέχον*) are used in other passages of the *De Caelo* with reference to the first body and to its circular motion (Cfr. II1,284a2-8). Then, I elaborate on the conceptual equivalence of 'essence' and 'form' in the passage being analysed. Finally, I show that in the light of *De Caelo* II13,293a17-293b15 it is possible to take seriously Aristotle's statement that the universe is an individual being which has a matter and a form (I9,278b3-4) and to recognise, in the same argument, an expression that defines it: 'the body included within the extreme circumference' (I9,278b19-20).

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The Ethics of the Circular and the Rectilinear in Plato's *Timaeus*

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the relation between geometric shapes and ethical values in Plato's *Timaeus*. As is well known, geometric terms take a prominent part in the account of nature in the *Timaeus*, both in the cosmos as a self-moving sphere, and in the material constitution of the cosmos by the five elemental solids. Talk of shape, however, also pervades the description of human biological and psychological phenomena. Sedley (1999) has noted the special significance for *Timaeus* of the round shape of the human head, which, he argues, literally results from the need to house circular thoughts. Building on this, Johansen (2000) has claimed that the *Timaeus* account of the human mind and body falls under a general mechanics explaining the movement of extended figures in space. Both scholars have claimed that the accounts in terms of shapes in the dialogue should be understood as a literal description of natural processes, in contrast to earlier commentators, such as Cherniss (1944) and Lee (1976), who argued for a metaphorical reading, mainly of the circular movements of the soul. It is my contention, however, that though one indeed cannot ignore the prominent place of extended figures in *Timaeus*' mechanics of biological and psychological processes, a full understanding of his account of human nature nonetheless must simultaneously maintain that each of these geometric shapes also has a metaphorical dimension implying an overall *ethical* view. Such a reading of the dialogue will prove to shed important light on what Plato may have considered to be the geometric manifestation of virtue.

In order to clearly assess the value *Timaeus* assigns to the geometric properties of humans, I will compare the numerous descriptions of human beings in terms of shapes to *Timaeus*' model of physical perfection, the cosmic body and soul. From the start, it is clear that while the cosmos as a whole is strictly spherical and circular, human beings also partake in rectilinear shapes and motions. The rectilinear in the *Timaeus*, therefore, marks the imperfection of humanity, whereas the circular symbolizes the perfection of the divine. But human virtue, according to this model, does not simply amount to a pursuit of circular perfection. As *Timaeus* makes comically clear with his image of a human head rolling helplessly on the

ground (44d-e), the mutual existence of round and linear in human beings is essentially necessary, and attempting to repress this fact is absurd. I therefore argue that, as beauty expresses itself in the perfect proportions existing between different parts of a classical statue, human virtue analogically consists in maintaining a certain *proportion* between circular and rectilinear, in both soul and body. The round is divine, the rectilinear is mortal, but in the end, it is the proper ratio between both which defines, at least from a geometric standpoint, the nature of the good human life.

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Aristotelian Matter

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Abstract

Aristotle's hylomorphic analysis of perceptible substances is perhaps one of his most distinctive contributions to philosophy. According to this analysis, any particular perceptible substance is a composite of a form (eidos) and matter (hylê). In the case of living substances, Aristotle identifies the form with the soul and the matter with the body. This appears to straightforwardly suggest that, for Aristotle, any particular living (or animate) substance is just the composite of its form/soul and matter/body. However, this seemingly straightforward analysis is problematized by Aristotle himself—at least in the case of natural living substances.

In the central books of the *Metaphysics* (Z, H, and Θ) Aristotle undertakes an investigation of substance (particularly primary substance). He appears to affirm the straightforward hylomorphic analysis of (sensible, living) substances early in these central books: “once we have the whole, such-and-such form in this flesh and bones [i.e., matter], this is Callias or Socrates.” (Z. 8, 1034a5-6) Yet, by the end of Z.17, doubts are raised about this straightforward hylomorphic analysis. Perceptible substances cannot be composed of form and matter in the way things are composed of elements—that is, the perceptible substance cannot simply be form + matter. The form must be the principle or cause of the matter's being what it is. It must be the “cause in virtue of which the matter is something.” (Z.17, 1041b7-8)

Furthermore—and more problematically for the straightforward view—by the end of H, Aristotle is intimating a view such that form and matter are not distinct components of a substance. This view rises out of his concerns about the problem of the unity of substance. In particular, how it is that a form-matter composite can be one substance—e.g., Socrates. If ψ is the form/soul of Socrates and m is his matter/body, how can Socrates be one thing or one substance and not just $\psi + m$? Aristotle's answer appears to identify the form of a perceptible substance with its matter: “if, as we say, there is on the one hand matter and on the other shape [i.e., form], and the one [matter] is potentially and the other [form] actively, then what we are inquiring into will no longer seem to be a puzzle.” (H.6, 1045a23-24) Further: “the ultimate matter and the shape [i.e., form] are one and

the same, the one potentially, the other actively.” (H.6, 1045b17-18)

In this paper, I examine the view of matter that appears to rise out of the unity problem raised in H.6 and which sees its resolution in the investigations of actuality (*energeia/entelecheia*) and potentiality (*dunamis*) in Θ . I argue that Aristotle’s view of matter here is that matter is identity- dependent either on the form with which it is combined or on the perceptible substance of which it is the matter. En route, I also consider accounts in the literature—Scaltsas (1994), Gill (1989), and Lewis (1991 and 1994), among others—on these varying ways to understand Aristotelian matter.

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About the Corporeality of Gods and *Daimones* in Empedocles' *Katharmoi* (fr. 115 D.-K.)

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Abstract

In Empedocles fragment 115 D.-K., a group of *daimones* commit murder (φόνω, which is a correction by Estienne for φόβω) and are banished from the community of the gods. I intend to examine the issue of the corporeality of the gods and *daimones* in the *Katharmoi*, by proposing a new reading of this fragment.

The *Katharmoi* show a strong tension in the conception of gods, which has been unnoticed until now. On the one hand, Empedocles states that the godly principle cannot be perceived by sensations (fr. 132, quoted by Clemens of Alexandria, *Strom.*V.14.140.5) and that it is mind alone, holy and inexpressible (fr. 134).

However, in fragment 115, the narrative of the *daimones'* crime stands in sharp contrast with this conception of the divine as incorporeal and immaterial, since they taint themselves by committing murder. How could a divine entity commit a crime while the rest of the religious poem gives us no reason to think that gods are corporeal? Furthermore, if the *daimones* were already corporeal *before* committing the crime, their punishment would only consist in *being banished* from the gods, and not in *incarnation* itself, which does not seem consistent with the rest of the fragments we know.

I will argue that the tension introduced in the corporeality of gods is deliberate: Empedocles does not seek to propose a narrative of the *daimones'* banishment as such but to think afresh the origins and meaning of the traditional categories of mortality/immortality and corporeality/immateriality. The argument will be based on a reassessment of the sources of fragment 115, of its philological problems, and on an analysis of its narratological structure. The study will also shed light on the importance and role of Empedocles' thought on the corporeality of gods in the framework of Presocratic philosophy.

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Good Mixtures in this World: Cosmic Body and Animal Body in Plato's *Philebus*

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Abstract

This paper reconstructs the rich notions of cosmic body and animal body, and of the complex relationships between the two, that are involved in the cosmological argument Socrates introduces at *Phileb.* 29a9-30e3 to confirm the wise men's view that the universe is governed by intelligence. The paper shows that, in addition to its declared purpose, this elaborate yet often-neglected stretch of argument carries a sophisticated conception of cosmic and animal body, and that such a conception, once spelled out and contextualized, functions as an all-important interpretive hinge for the dialogue as a whole. I identify three sets of relationships: (a) the parts-whole relationship between a living body and its constituents; (b) the microcosm-macrocosm relationship(s) between the cosmic body and all animal bodies; and (c) the causal relationship between divine νοῦς and the cosmic body. I specify the nature of each set in turn to draw a robust conclusion on the ontological and metaphysical status of living bodies in the *Philebus*.

First, (a) I argue that the *Philebus*' technical discussion of pleasure and pain (31b ff.) endorses a typically medical view of the body as a harmonic κρᾶσις of constituents, and that the parts-whole relationship involved is that of an ordered compound of elements bound together in proper proportions. I draw attention to the key passage at 32b1-4, which refers to the living body's constitution as resulting from πέραις and ἄπειρον, and linking it to the general definition of the third kind of μεικτόν (26d8-9), I conclude that healthy, well-functioning living beings (both the cosmos and perfectly healthy animal bodies) are complex harmonic structures that qualify as good mixtures, whose ἄπειρα components are the four elements and πέραις component is the specific mathematical ratio allowing elements to be bound into a unified whole.

I then (b) identify three microcosmic-macrocosmic relationships, namely (1) likeness, (2) superiority-inferiority and (3) responsibility-dependency. I show that such relationships are established primarily as holding between elements in our constitution and elements in the cosmos, and from there they transfer to the wholes they constitute; and that they fully account for the interactions of both cosmic

elements with elements in our constitution and of cosmic body with animal bodies. It emerges that elements and bodies in our sphere depend on their cosmic counterparts for both their proper functioning (cosmological dependency) and their identity and value (ontological dependency).

Thirdly, (c) I specify the causal role of νοῦς by connecting the cosmological argument to the fourfold division at 23c-27c. I submit that Socrates supplies the argument as an exemplification of his treatment of the fourth kind of cause and of its relation to the other three (good mixture, πέρρας and ἄπειρον) in terms of divine craftsmanship (26e-27b). The relation between cosmic νοῦς and the living cosmos is an instance of the metaphysical relationship between the demiurgic cause and its product (good mixture), which it fashions from a certain material (ἄπειρον) and through certain measures (πέρρας), and accurately illustrates two key features of this relationship: (1) the ontological divide between the three kinds and the fourth, and (2) the priority and responsibility of the cause as a craftsman over the other three.

The pay-off of such a discussion is a strong ontological thesis on the status of living bodies in the *Philebus*: a living body governed by intelligence is an instantiation of the metaphysical kind of good mixture, an ontologically privileged entity endowed with full being, completeness and goodness, achieving the status of οὐσία. While the cosmos as a whole is one such orderly, true, good and beautiful entity 'by default', living beings may achieve this status only temporarily and at certain conditions (i.e. when ruled by νοῦς) – but, crucially for the dialogue's ethical purpose, are not ontologically prevented from doing so.

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The Body and the Unity of the Homeric Man

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Abstract

My lecture aims at analysing the meaning of the word **σῶμα** in the Homeric poems in order to get a clear picture of the conception of Homeric man. I take Koller's (1958), Harrison's (1960), and Renehan's (1979) studies as my points of departure. These have shown that, on the one hand, the efforts of the etymological research has only produced uncertain results; on the other hand, the definition given by Aristarchus does not seem to always match the wording of the Homeric poems. Aristarchus, in fact, states that **σῶμα** is never used for a living being; this had led to the assumption that that **σῶμα** denoted a corpse, a dead body – such opinion was shared by scholars such as Snell (1946) and Fränkel (1951). However, if we take into account all the occurrences where **σῶμα** seems to be referred to a living body, we might be able to give the term a broader meaning.

In order to fully understand the meaning of **σῶμα**, first we have to answer a question: what kind of self-conception did the Homeric man hold? Is it correct to assume, along with Snell (1946), that the Homeric man did not conceive either the body or the soul as unitary? Many scholars have presented convincing arguments against this view. In my opinion, the interpretation which allows us to best grasp the original Homeric conception is that of Fränkel (1951), according to which the Homeric man is a whole which only splits into **σῶμα** and **ψυχή** at the time of death. By contrast, there is no clear distinction between body and soul in a living being, as suggested by the fact that the organs and faculties of men are labelled by a mixture of 'corporeal' and 'spiritual' names, such as **θυμός**, **φρένες**, etc. In addition, the unifying principle of the human consciousness is placed in the heart (**καρδία**), the true principle of life (Guillamont 1950, Di Giuseppe 2011).

On the grounds of this definition of the Homeric man, we can return to analyse the eight occurrences of the word **σῶμα** in the Iliad and Odyssey and also compare them to the use of the word in Hesiod and in the Scutum of the Pseudo-Hesiod. We will particularly focus on the passages in which the **σῶμα** = dead body equivalence is problematic (Il. 3.21, Od. 12.66, Erga 539-40, Scutum 426-428). The essential meaning of the term will appear to be the 'physical body', a mass which does not, in itself, have the ability to move. Finally, it can be said that **σῶμα**,

although in a secondary sense, also bears the meaning of ‘corpse’, ‘cadaver’. However, this should not lead us to the misconception of **σῶμα** as the unitary word for ‘body’: if we accept its use in reference to living beings, **σῶμα** must be read in the same way as **γυῖα**, **δέμας**, **μέλεα**, **χρῶς**, etc., i.e. as a part of the human being as a whole.

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To Those Who Wish to Improve their Souls: A Reinterpretation of Galen's *QAM*

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Abstract

In his notorious late work ‘The capacities of the soul depend on the mixtures of the body’ (*QAM*), which he himself classified under the heading ‘Platonic philosophy’, Galen seems to be much more outspoken on the soul and its substance (οὐσία) or nature (φύσις) than in other works. He argues not only that the capacities of the soul depend on the mixtures of the body but also that the substance of the soul is such a mixture itself. Scholarship has struggled with this latter claim. It seems to be at odds with Galen’s repeated expressions of agnosticism regarding the substance of the soul in other works, and has been considered too radical, inconsistent, a representation of positions of others, or even mere propaganda for the office of doctor [Garcia-Ballester (1988) Lloyd (1988) Donini (1996) Caston (1997) Singer (2013)]. However, I will show that Galen’s argument in *QAM* builds on doctrine from earlier Galenic works, and points to a conception of the soul as something that is not ‘corporeal’ or ‘material’ in a strict sense, but rather the formal aspect of the simplest hylomorphic bodily units. This formal aspect of the micro-level of our constitution is a specific mixture of the elemental qualities in indeterminate matter, that together form a ‘homoeomerous’ body. These homoeomerous bodies in turn combine and constitute more complex body parts, including the three organs that are the seats of the three respective soul-parts. The activity of these organs, however, is determined by the more fundamental activity of the elemental qualities. According to Galen, these elemental qualities are the primary agents of change and activity, which is the reason why we should locate the soul at this level rather than at that of the organs. Therefore, when he says that the soul is in the three main organs, this can be taken quite literally: our soul is our specific mixture of the elemental qualities in those organs. Galen combines Aristotelian hylomorphism with his earlier Platonic-Hippocratic tripartition-cum-trilocation and the assumption that anything’s nature or substance should be sought for in its simplest parts. In consequence, the traditional distinction between

the physical and the psychical seems to lose its validity, while at the same time Galen never negates the existence of the soul. In fact, he states that what he teaches in *QAM* is of benefit to 'those who wish to improve their own souls'. After all, since our mixture is changed by all of our daily practices, we are able to shape our soul continually. Galen even presents such a care for our mixture as an ancient philosophical practice through which the followers of Plato and Pythagoras achieved virtue. Therefore, the rational part of our soul, while being a mixture like the other parts of the soul, has an exceptional status. Since it can be the agent of this philosophical practice of shaping one's own mixture, it has a likeness to its divine maker.

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“Imago et Splendor Dei Invisibilis”: Sacramentality of the Body in Origen’s Doctrine of the Spiritual Senses

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Abstract

Origen’s conception of corporeality is usually considered to be negative: the human body is the consequential punishment for a fall that happened after creation. Hitherto the soul could contemplate God but decided instead to turn away from him. This interpretation has the very modern consequence of setting freedom of choice as a pivotal element of ontology, but is based on the wrong premise that souls contemplated God directly. Souls, instead, had always a mediator: corporeality. The aim of this presentation is to show the sacramental value of corporeality through the Origenian doctrine of the spiritual senses; its originality is the connection between spiritual senses and freedom, rarely underlined by the recent studies. This doctrine will be presented in light of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s interpretation of the Alexandrine: he clearly understood that spiritual senses are not opposed to bodily senses and that these do not have to disappear in order to let the spirituals arise. A description of the earthly and the spiritual body and a reconstruction of their qualities will show that they are not, for Origen, two different elements but the same substance with different qualities. The experience of this unity-in-duality is not a mystical experience. There are some moments of human experience that open a wound in the human being and awake the spiritual senses, showing corporeality as image of the invisible God: The beauty of creation, the Scripture, Jesus’s body, the Church as mystical body. The intent of this presentation is not to analyse them all but to track the sacramental structure of corporeality, what allows us to fulfill our human nature. In order to track this structure, the example of the beauty of the creatures will be briefly presented. In the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* Origen clearly states that, if everything is created in Jesus, it is His grace that moves us when we contemplate the creation. This is evident in Origen’s idea of spousal love, that offers an analogy rather than merely an example: the bodies of the lovers are temple of God, image of His splendour, revealed by the spiritual senses, always present in the *Commentary*.

These examples of beauty and love show that corporeality is deeply tied to spiritual perception: it opens the wound of love (as the one of beauty), crucial element in Origen, and so activates the spiritual senses that can recognize God's love and be active part of it. This presentation of the spiritual senses thus provides a better interpretation of human freedom in Origen: not an act of independence and self-determination, but an active use of the spiritual senses to answer to and cooperate with God's love. The gift of corporeality, awakening the spiritual senses, allows us to freely act in a universe, which is not static and condemned to destruction, but is an uninterrupted creation where human freedom plays an active role.

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