

Introduction to De anima

The ideas of the various Gnostic heretics seem to have resonated with people in the ancient world because they syncretized Platonic and Christian thought. For that reason alone Hermogenes, Valentinus and Marcion would have been a threat to Christianity. Were they not popular, and intellectually attractive, it is unlikely that Tertullian would have devoted so much ink and effort to fighting them.

The challenges from these heresies presented major problems for the Catholic church, in particular a church of martyrs like that in North Africa. If Marcion, Valentinus, Apelles, and the rest were correct, the Incarnation was a sham and Christ did not really suffer. If Christ did not suffer, why should a martyr?

Plato's ideas about the soul, laid out in the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*, form crucial support for these heresies. In the *Phaedo*, Plato offers a theory in which the soul pre-existed the body and, in its existence in the spirit world, could apprehend the Forms and thus there possessed true knowledge while in that world. However, this knowledge was lost at birth:

“But the return to life is true, and the living come into existence from those who have died, and the souls of those who have died still exist...[and] if it is true that learning is, for us, nothing other than recollection, this would be impossible unless the soul that is in us existed somewhere before it took human shape.”
(Plato, *Phaedo*, 72d-e¹)

¹ ἀλλ' ἔστι τῷ ὄντι καὶ τὸ ἀναβιώσκεισθαι καὶ ἐκ τῶν τεθνεώτων τοὺς ζῶντας γίγνεσθαι καὶ τὰς τῶν τεθνεώτων ψυχὰς εἶναι...εἰ ἀληθὴς ἐστίν...ὅτι ἡμῖν ἢ μάθησις οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ ἀνάμνησις τυγχάνει οὐσα...τοῦτο δὲ ἀδύνατον, εἰ μὴ ἦν που ἡμῖν ἢ ψυχὴ πρὶν ἐν τῷδε τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ εἶδε γενέσθαι. All references to the works of Plato are to *Platonis Opera*, ed., J. Burnet, vols. I-IV(Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1977). All translations are by the author of this paper.

From these ideas comes the conclusion that this material world is inferior to the world of the spiritual. This idea, running from Plato through the Neo-Platonists, was one of the pillars of Gnosticism and of Marcionism, and threatened the Catholic ideas about the Incarnation. Moreover, the ideas of rewards and punishments for the soul's behavior outlined in the *Timaeus*² were completely incompatible with Christianity. Finally, the eternity of the soul would have eliminated the need for salvation.

Tertullian, as he tells us at the beginning of *De anima*, had already written a treatise against Hermogenes on the origin of the soul³. However, that treatise had not dealt with all the issues that needed to be handled. Tertullian, therefore, sets out to kill two birds with one stone. He will attack the ideas of Plato and the Platonist philosophers⁴, the ideas by which the heathen are captured, and by which the faithful are lead astray by heretics.⁵ Tertullian's method for doing so will require him to lay out his case as persuasively as he can. This requirement will mean that he must build a treatise that uses the forms and structures of classical rhetoric.

The following table attempts to create a detailed outline of *De anima*, in terms of its rhetorical structure and topical content.

² *Timaeus* 42b.

³ *De anima* 1:1. All Chapter:Section references refer to, and all Latin quotations are drawn from, Tertullian's *De anima*, ed. J.H. Waszink, *Corpus Christianorum Latinorum*, vol. 2 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1953-). English translations are the author's. The *Corpus Christianorum Scriptorum* will be abbreviated *CCL* hereafter. The *CCL* edition of *De anima* treatise will be abbreviated *De anima* hereafter.

⁴ In *De anima* Tertullian calls "Platonist" those philosophers who, at least generally, accept Plato's views on the soul. This paper will use Tertullian's classification. Modern scholars would probably call these philosophers "neo Platonist".

⁵ *De anima* 3:3 "ut et illa quibus ethnici a philosophia capiuntur...et haec quibus fideles ab haerisi concutiuntur".

Rhetorical and Topical Outline of De anima

Exordium

The first three chapters of *De anima* comprise the *exordium*⁶. Tertullian first declares that he will be jousting, mainly, with philosophers⁷. He considers, first, Socrates. He notes that the account of the soul given by Socrates in prison is hardly a disinterested exposition: Socrates is facing death, and thus can be expected to want to maintain his composure and comfort his friends. Tertullian asserts that truth can only come from God by revelation. It is better not to know God, if He does not reveal Himself, than to know about God through human presumption.⁸

Tertullian considers other sources of knowledge, principally philosophy. He acknowledges that philosophers occasionally hit upon the truth.⁹ However, no one ought to investigate farther than that which has been said by God, because what God has said is everything: “Porro non amplius inueniri licet quam quod a deo discitur; quod autem a deo discitur, totum est.”¹⁰

⁷ “nunc ad reliquas conuersus quaestiones plurimum uidebor cum philosophis dimicaturus” (*De anima* 1:1)

⁸ *De anima* 1:6.

⁹ *De anima* 2:1.

¹⁰ *De anima* 2:6.

Next he considers the question “why does heresy exist”, the same question that will be considered in detail in the first chapters of *De Praescriptione haereticorum*. Tertullian asserts that philosophers are the patriarchs of heresy.¹¹ He also asserts that philosophy would “blackmail”¹² the truth: “siquidem et ab apostolo iam tunc philosophia concussio ueritatis prouidebatur.”¹³

Tertullian sarcastically notes that Christian doctrine suffers because it comes from Judea, not Greece, and was spread by fishermen instead of sophists.¹⁴ The exordium concludes at the end of Chapter 3, with a mention of his earlier work against Hermogenes on the origin of the soul. Tertullian now wishes to move on to other questions.

Narratio and Propositio

The *narratio* explains the nature and background of the case that Tertullian will make. Tertullian summarizes what he hopes to accomplish next in the first line of Chapter 4: “Post definitionem census quaestionem status patitur. Consequens enim est, ut ex dei flatu animam professi initium et disputaremus”.¹⁵ If the soul comes from the breath of God, it has a beginning. Plato, on the other hand, would have it be unborn and unmade, that is, fully eternal.¹⁶

¹¹ *De anima* 3:1.

¹² Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, definition of *concussio*, definition 2, p. 406. Tertullian also uses the word in *Ad Scap.* 4, which is the citation for this definition.

¹³ *De anima* 3:1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:3.

¹⁵ *De anima* 4:1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Plato's idea is a problem for Tertullian, because its eternality would put the soul on par with God. Tertullian is here practicing a technique called "innoculation", in which the most potentially damaging piece of evidence against the author's case is brought forward early, and dealt with expeditiously. Tertullian deals with this problem, and strikes his first real blow at Plato, by bringing forward a number of Stoic philosophers who assert the soul's corporality. He cites, specifically, Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus and Lucretius.¹⁷

The following arguments are given: the corporality of the soul is shown by the fact that death results when the soul leaves the body [Zeno]; family likenesses include characteristics of both soul and body [Cleanthes]; only a body can touch and be touched [Lucretius]; when the body deserts the soul, the body dies [Chrysippus]¹⁸.

The *narratio* uses only pagan sources to refute Plato, and to prepare the ground for Tertullian's thesis, which is presented in one succinct sentence at the end of Chapter 5: "Therefore, the soul is body, since, if it were not corporeal, it could not desert the body".¹⁹

¹⁷ *De anima* 5:1-6.

¹⁸ *De anima* 5:6.

¹⁹ *De anima* 5:6: "Igitur corpus anima, quae nisi corporalis corpus non derelinquet."

Confirmatio: Origin, Nature and Faculties of the Soul

The discussion Tertullian's *confirmatio* in *De anima* will demonstrate his use of a "tripod" to support his arguments: philosophy, Scripture, and medicine. He will not allow any of his assertions to be supported only by Scripture, but uses it as a secondary support. This technique allows Tertullian to address both pagan and heretical objections in terms that pagans and heretics can accept.

Chapters 6-10: Contra Platonem

The first five chapters of *De anima's confirmatio* take issue with Plato and the Platonists on a number of points concerning the corporeal nature of the soul. Tertullian's arguments are primarily logical and medical, though he does include one supporting reference from Scripture. Tertullian makes the following points in Chapters 6-10:

- 1) The Platonists assert that every body must be either animate or inanimate. Inanimate bodies receive motion from something else; animate ones cause motion.²⁰ Since the soul neither receives nor causes motion, it cannot be a body. Tertullian's counter-argument is that the soul causes the feet to walk, the hands to touch, the eyes to see. How then can it not be a body? "Vnde uacuae rei solida propellere?"²¹ In addition, there is medical evidence (from Soranus, a late 1st century physician) that the soul is actually refreshed when the body eats.²²
- 2) Scripture, specifically Luke 16:23-24, is used as evidence for the body's corporality. This example uses the story of Dives and Lazarus to illustrate physicality of the soul.²³
- 3) Chapter 8 details other medical arguments for the corporality of the soul, using Soranus as source.
- 4) Plato maintains that, if the soul had a "figure" or "likeness" (*effigies*), it would be compound and therefore soluble, and therefore not immortal. Tertullian contradicts Plato based, first, on the divine revelation given to a Montanist sister.²⁴

²⁰ *De anima* 6:1.

²¹ *De anima* 6:3.

²² *De anima* 6:6.

²³ *De anima* 7:2.

²⁴ *De anima* 9:4.

He goes on to develop the idea that the soul was formed in Adam as the breath of God suffused Adam's body and made the soul fill the body and take on Adam's shape. Thus, a person has two faces for one body, inner and outer.²⁵ Tertullian then asserts that the purpose of this likeness is recognition.²⁶

- 5) Soul is uniform substance, as Plato asserts. Spirit and soul are the same.²⁷ "Ipsum est enim quid, per quod est quid".²⁸

Chapters 11-16: Taxonomy of the Soul

Tertullian now turns to the structure of the soul. He demonstrates that spirit is not separate from the soul, but is a faculty or operation of it.²⁹ Similarly, the mind (*νοῦς*) is also a faculty of the soul.³⁰ It is not distinct from the soul.³¹ Since the mind is the soul's instrument, it is the soul that is supreme.³²

While various philosophers would divide the soul into its components, Tertullian maintains that the only possibility is a logical division into functions, rather than a physical division into parts. Tertullian uses a (musical) organ, said to have been created by Archimedes, as a metaphor to explain this point.³³

Tertullian then posits a *ἡγεμονικόν*, a supreme director, for the soul³⁴. He provides three sets of supporting evidence: the agreement of (numerous) philosophers; Scripture; and the opinion of learned medical doctors.³⁵

²⁵ *De anima* 9:8: "Hic erit homo interior, alius exterior, dupliciter unus".

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *De anima* 10:9.

²⁸ *Ibid.* "The thing itself is that through which it is". This quotation, though elegantly simple in Latin, is exceedingly difficult to translate into idiomatic English!

²⁹ *De anima* 11.

³⁰ *De anima* 12.

³¹ *De anima* 12:6.

³² *De anima* 13:3.

³³ *De anima* 14:4.

³⁴ *De anima* 15:1

Chapter 16 includes a discussion of the rational and irrational elements in the soul. This logical division was suggested by Plato.³⁶ Tertullian, however, elaborates: the rational element is the soul's natural state, and comes from God. The irrational came later, as an accretion whose origin was the Devil and which was the result of sin. All sin is irrational.³⁷

The rational part of the soul has two parts "θυμικόν" ("indignatium") and "ἐπιθυμικόν" ("concupiscentium"). Since Christ had a soul like ours, it did contain these two parts. The first part consisted, in the case of Christ's soul, in His anger at the scribes and Pharisees. The second consisted of His desire to eat the Passover meal with his disciples.³⁸

As in the previous section of his *confirmatio*, Tertullian uses Scripture as support when he can, but leans mainly on philosophy and medicine to prove his points.

³⁵ *De anima* 15.

³⁶ *De anima* 16:1.

³⁷ *De anima* 16:2: "igitur a diabolo inrationale, a quo et delictum, extraneum a deo, a quo est inrationale alienum."

³⁸ *De anima* 16:4.

Chapters 17 and 18: Heretical Objections

Plato points out ways that soul is deceived by the senses, an idea that was picked up by the Platonists (Tertullian's term for the neo-Platonists) and, from them, by the Gnostic heretics. In the *Timaeus*, Plato declares that the operation of the senses is irrational and is conditioned by our opinions.³⁹ He uses mirages (e.g., the bent oar when seen under water) as a proof.

For once, Tertullian is able to call on the Epicureans for help. The senses are not at fault, it is some condition exterior to them that causes the senses to react as they do. The senses are operating correctly – it is their inputs that are bad.⁴⁰ Tertullian tells us that the reason he has brought this issue up is to refute Marcion, who would make Jesus into a phantom.⁴¹

In Chapter 18, Tertullian discusses the Forms of Plato in order to deal with the separation of senses and intellectual perceptions propounded by the Gnostics and Valentinians. Forms are those invisible, ideal, entities that are the patterns and causes of the objects of nature that our senses perceive.⁴²

³⁹ For example, *Timaeus* 28C and 51A

⁴⁰ "Garbage in, garbage out" as computer programmers say. The discussion referred to is in *De anima* 17:6, and is summarized as *Nam ut in aqua remus inflexus uel infractus appareat, aqua in causa est; denique extra aquam integer uisui remus.*"

⁴¹ *De anima* 17:14.

⁴² *De anima* 18:3.

From this concept of Forms, says Tertullian, come the heresies of the Gnostics and Valentinians. These heretics separate senses from intellectual perceptions. Senses can be deceived, intellect cannot. Tertullian, on the contrary argues that the soul and senses cannot be separated. If corporeal things are perceived by the soul, then the mind is a sensuous faculty and not just intellect: "Denique a quo sentiuntur corporalia? Si ab animo, ergo iam et sensualis est animus, non tantum intellectualis, nam dum intellegit, sentit, quia si non intellegit, nec sentit."⁴³

⁴³ *De anima* 18:8.

Chapters 19-21: Development of the Soul

Chapter 19 is concerned with when the intellect first appears in a human being. Aristotle's example of the tree is used. Aristotle, according to Tertullian, demonstrates that a tree can have vitality without knowledge, thus something can exist that has vitality without a soul.⁴⁴ The reason that this idea is threatening to Tertullian's thesis is that it might be used to show that there is a time, for instance childhood, when the child has a soul but not a mind.⁴⁵

Tertullian turns the tables on Aristotle and authors who agree with him, using the tree example. He observes that, in contradiction to Aristotle, any plant, no matter how young, already knows how to grow. Ivy plants, from the very beginning, know how to hang on to something as they grow. Infants, in fact, are able to recognize their mother, the nurse, their own cradle from the very beginning. "Vnde" asks Tertullian, "illi iudicium nouitatis et moris, si non sapit?"⁴⁶ "Whence comes to him this discernment of new things and of customary ones, if he does not have knowledge?"

⁴⁴ *De anima* 19:2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *De anima* 19:9.

From this evidence, Tertullian deduces that all the properties of the soul are present in it from the very beginning, and grow along with it. The soul is uniform as a seed, but develops characteristics as it grows that are caused by its environment.⁴⁷ He buttresses his claim with the Stoic Seneca, and evidence from Plato, Sallust and others.⁴⁸ Tertullian comments that Christians hold that there is an influence on the soul's development by God and the devil, but that these ideas have been treated in their own, separate, work.⁴⁹

In Chapter 21, Tertullian returns to the attack on Valentinians, who held that the soul's character was immutable since "a good tree cannot bear bad fruit; a bad tree cannot bear good fruit" (Luke 6:43). Tertullian's counter argument is that a bad tree can, indeed, have a good branch grafted on to it, and thus bear good fruit. The power of the grace of God is more potent than nature.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *De anima* 20:2.

⁴⁸ *De anima* 20:1-3.

⁴⁹ *De anima* 20:5.

⁵⁰ *De anima* 21:6.

In this section of the *confirmatio*, Tertullian tries to prove that a human being is always in possession of an intelligent soul, that souls develop as humans grow, and that the character of a soul can change as a result of the exercise of free will. He proves the first two points by means of reason and of the authority of pagan thinkers. The final point, on free will, is primarily a matter of dispute with the heretics. To counter them Tertullian uses the only gospel in the canon of Scripture that is accepted by both Catholic and Marcionic heretic.

Chapter 22: Summary of the Confirmatio

Tertullian has laid out a case for the soul's corporality using the resources of philosophy, Scripture, and medicine. He has established the following propositions about the origin, nature and faculties of the soul:

- The soul comes from the breath of God
- The soul is immortal, but not eternal
- Soul possesses a body and has a form
- The soul is a simple, non-compound, substance
- Soul has an intelligence in its own nature
- It develops its power in various ways
- Soul has free will
- It is subject to changes through accident
- can be changed through the operation of its faculties
- rational and supreme
- contains spirit of prophesy

Plato and Platonists have been the primary opponents engaged by the *confirmatio*. The reason for this choice of opponents will emerge in the next section of *De anima*.

Refutatio

Barnes states⁵¹ that it would be natural to follow the summary what Tertullian has proved with a peroration. He attributes the fact that Tertullian continues for another 36 chapters to a perception of fragility in Tertullian's argument thus far.⁵² Barnes calls what follows, that is, Chapters 23-57, an "amplificatio".

Barnes' logic is suspect for four reasons. First, these chapters constitute the majority of the work. They do not appear to be an after-thought. Second, the topics discussed in them are mainly objections that heretics might advance against Tertullian's thesis. This choice of topics contrasts with the topics of the *confirmatio*, as we have seen, which are focused on pagan philosophy in general and on Plato in particular. Third, where Platonic ideas are discussed (for example, anamnesis and metempsychosis), Tertullian will frame the problems in terms of the roots of heresy. Fourth, in Chapters 23-57 Tertullian will use, primarily, philosophy and medicine as tools in his arguments, since the heretics would not accept his Scriptural canon, and since he does not believe that heretics have any right to Scripture.

⁵¹ Barnes, p. 207.

⁵² Ibid.

All these factors lead to the conclusion that the primary intended audience of *De anima* is heretic, not pagan, and what has been discussed in the *confirmatio* is simply preparation for the ideas he will now introduce. For these reasons, Chapters 23-57 are better termed a *refutatio* whose purpose is to refute objections that his true opponents, the heretics, might make. This large section is the true heart of *De anima*.

Chapters 23-24: Introductory Attack on Anamnesis

In Chapter 23, Tertullian begins the *refutatio* by refuting the idea of anamnesis, which is Plato's conception of how people learn. Tertullian needs to deal with this issue because many heretics either deny creation of humanity by God, and/or state that the soul descends from the (better) spiritual world into the material, and the originator of these heresies is Plato: "Doleo bona fide Platonem omnium haereticorum condimentarium factum."⁵³

It is Plato who imagines the creation of humans by inferior gods⁵⁴. Plato, in the *Phaedo*, also develops the notion of the transmigration of souls ("metempsychosis") from spiritual to physical worlds, and back again. These theories entail acceptance of the idea of 'μαθήσις ἀναμνήσεως'. Tertullian proposes to defeat the heretics by disproving anamnesis.⁵⁵

⁵³ *De anima* 23:5.

⁵⁴ *Timaeus* 69C; 42E-43A.

⁵⁵ *De anima* 23:6.

The problem with Plato's idea is that anamnesis is internally inconsistent. Plato holds the soul to be unborn, immortal, incorruptable and impassible. However, he allows it to forget the world of Forms when it is born, which would require passibility.⁵⁶ Moreover, how does it occur that the knowledge from the intellectual faculties (which are supposedly the higher ones) can fail in a person, while the instinctual faculties never do so?⁵⁷ Finally, asks Tertullian, why is it that, of all the people who have been in the world, it was only Plato who was able both to forget and to recollect the Forms?⁵⁸

Chapters 25-27: Origin of the Soul and Attack On Metempsychosis

Tertullian returns to explanation of how all souls are derived from one, and when and how they are produced. He is trying to show that the soul exists in the human embryo, and adduces the experience of human mothers to support his view.⁵⁹ They can attest to the existence of life in the womb.⁶⁰ Even Plato (who usually maintains that the soul enters the body when the infant draws its first breath) offers the view in the sixth chapter of the *Laws* that the soul comes from the seed.⁶¹

⁵⁶ *De anima* 24:3.

⁵⁷ *De anima* 24:7.

⁵⁸ *De anima* 24:11: "Plato scilicet solus in tanta gentium silva, in tanto sapientium prato, idearum et oblitus et recordatus est"

⁵⁹ *De anima* 25:2.

⁶⁰ *De anima* 25:3.

⁶¹ *De anima* 25:9.

The danger with Plato's idea of metempsychosis is that it contradicts the need for resurrection. Integral to the concept of metempsychosis is the idea that the soul enters the body at birth. This danger that metempsychosis poses is so great that Tertullian continues his argument in Chapter 26, where he offers a number of Scriptural references to support his point of view. Again, as usual when debating heretics, his New Testament references come from Luke.

Chapter 27 concludes this section of the *refutatio* with an argument for the simultaneous origin of body and soul, and idea that would exclude metempsychosis. Tertullian offers three arguments: philosophical⁶², medical⁶³ and scriptural⁶⁴.

Chapters 28-35: Additional Refutations of Metempsychosis

Tertullian tackles the views of various philosophers and heretics concerning metempsychosis: Pythagoras, Empedocles, Simon Magus and Carpocrates.

The attack on Pythagoras includes both *ad hominem* and philosophical arguments. Chapter 28 defines his view as "reciprocal transmigration", where souls recycle endlessly between the worlds of living and dead.⁶⁵

⁶² *De anima* 27:1-2.

⁶³ *De anima* 27:6.

⁶⁴ *De anima* 27:9.

⁶⁵ *De anima* 28:1.

Chapter 28 builds the case that Pythagoras is a liar, since he staged a fake trip to the Underworld. Chapter 29 offers a logical counter-argument to Pythagoras. Since the living have to come before dead, in the natural order of things, then "Igitur si ab initio vivi non ex mortuis, cur postea ex mortuis?"⁶⁶

Chapters 30 and 31 continue the logical refutation of Pythagoras. If this reciprocal transmigration were true, the number who exit and the number who return would remain constant⁶⁷, neither shrinking nor growing. However, history shows that the population of the world has in fact grown.⁶⁸ A couple other logical problems are mentioned in Chapter 31, principally that, if people depart this life at various ages, why is it that they return at the same age, that is, as infants.⁶⁹

Empedocles is the next philosopher to be considered. He is ridiculed for having dreamed that he was a god. Then Tertullian develops the real attack against him: Empedocles thought that people might transmigrate into animals, and animals into people. Tertullian develops the argument that this idea would require animals to change their essential natures, from one pole (e.g., water animals) to another (e.g., to land animals)⁷⁰. In addition, there is the issue of size: could an elephant, if it returned as a man, fit inside his skin?

⁶⁶ *De anima* 29:2: "If from the beginning the living do not come from the dead, then how do they do so afterward?"

⁶⁷ *De anima* 30:1: "Nam neque plures aut pauciores exissent quam redirent."

⁶⁸ *De anima* 30:2-3.

⁶⁹ *De anima* 31:2.

⁷⁰ *De anima* 32:6

Chapter 33 continues the attack on Empedocles, using sarcasm to mock the fate of those who, as punishment, must come back as animals whose qualities they cannot enjoy (for example, a poet would not care to return as a peacock, which, though handsome, has a repellent voice)⁷¹. The real issue with transmigration, however, is introduced at the end of Chapter 33: the judicial sentence for behavior during life is not permanent.⁷²

Chapters 34-35 contain attacks on two heretics, Simon Magus and Carpocrates, for their views on transmigration. The attack on Simon Magus is an extended *ad hominem*, branding him as fornicator and presenting a horrible example of the transmigration of a prostitute named Helen from Tyre who went through several metempsychoses to wind up as Helen of Troy. Carpocrates is another heretic who was both a magician and fornicator, though lacking the transmigrating Helen, and the attack on him moves forward accordingly. This Carpocrates thought human souls would transmigrate until sins had been expiated: "Itaque metempsychosin necessarie imminere, si non in primo quoque vitae huius com meatu omnibus inlicitis satisfiat (scilicet facinora tributa sunt uitae!)"⁷³

⁷¹ *De anima* 33:8.

⁷² *De anima* 33:10.

⁷³ *De anima* 35:1.

Chapters 36-41: Properties of the Soul

These chapters summarize the major elements of Tertullian's conception of the soul. The summary is placed at this point in *De anima* because the remaining part of the *refutatio* will cover the fate of the soul, rather than the soul's characteristics.

Chapters 36 and 37 recapitulates and summarizes when the soul is placed in humans and when the sexual determinate of the embryo takes place. Tertullian has established that the soul placed in humans with the seed. The soul is uniform from the very beginning and sexual selection takes place simultaneously with conception. The result is that one cannot tell whether seed or soul is the cause of the sex of the embryo. The embryo becomes human at conception: "Ex quo igitur fetus in utero homo, a quo forma completa est."⁷⁴

Chapter 38 outlines the growth of the soul. The soul grows at the same rate and goes through the same stages as does the body. The reason that the soul has desires, for example, for food, for drink and for sexual activity, is that the body is the temporary abode of the soul, and the soul will naturally want to maintain and improve its home⁷⁵.

The topic of Chapter 39 is that the Evil Spirit has marred the purity of the souls from birth. Evidence of this comes from the prevalence and persistence of pagan customs around childbirth.⁷⁶ Tertullian argues that evil spirits are invited into the soul of the infant through the doorway that is opened by use of pagan customs.

⁷⁴ *De anima* 37:2.

⁷⁵ *De anima* 38:5.

⁷⁶ *De anima* 39:2.

In the case of mixed marriages (a Christian and a pagan), the infant does have a hope of salvation, but baptism is required for holiness. John 2:3 is cited as proof: “ ‘nisi quis nascetur ex aqua et spiritu, non inibit in regnum dei’, id est, non erit sanctus.”⁷⁷

In Chapter 40 Tertullian addresses the question of evil and whether its origin is in the body or soul. Evil is committed by means of the body, not because of the body: “Nam etsi caro peccatrix, secundum quam incedere prohibemur, cuius opera damnantur concupiscentis adversus spiritum, ob quam carnales notantur, non tamen suo nomine cara infamis.”⁷⁸ Since the flesh doesn't get credit for good deeds done at the direction of the soul, therefore it would be improper to give it the blame for bad deeds.

Tertullian discusses original sin rather briefly in Chapter 41: “Malum igitur animae, praeter quod ex obventu spiritus nequam superstruitur, ex originis vitio antecedit, naturale quodammodo.”⁷⁹ However, because the soul comes from God, its goodness cannot be completely extinguished. “Propterea nulla anima sine crimine, quia nulla sine boni semine.”⁸⁰ The soul can be saved if it receives the second birth.⁸¹

⁷⁷ *De anima* 39:4.

⁷⁸ *De anima* 40:2: “Even if the spirit were the sinner, on account of which we are forbidden to go about with her, whose works are condemned for lusting against the spirit, on account of which they are called carnal, nevertheless it has not [incurred] the name of sin.”

⁷⁹ *De anima* 41:1.

⁸⁰ *De anima* 41:3.

⁸¹ *De anima* 41:4.

Chapters 42-49: Discussion of Sleep

Tertullian will turn to a discussion of death now, but he will first discuss sleep because of the apparent similarities. He rejects, of course, idea of Epicurus that sleep, because it lacks sensation, is nothing to human beings (“‘quod sensu caret, nihil ad nos’”).⁸² His reasoning is that, since we must suffer death it cannot be nothing to us. Moreover, we must talk about death just as we would posthumus life and other “provinces of the soul”⁸³, including sleep, the mirror of death.

In the opening paragraphs of Chapter 43, Tertullian reviews, briefly, the views of a number of philosophers on the subject of sleep. He offers his own opinion on their views, which is that he has never slept in such a way that he can confirm anything of what they say.⁸⁴ His view of the soul's activity during sleep is that, given its immortality, sleep cannot be the separation of the spirit from the body.⁸⁵ Since, as the Stoics say, the soul is always in motion,⁸⁶ sleep must be a function of the body only: a temporary suspension of the activities of the senses. It is not the dissolution or lessening of the senses (*resolutionem sensualis uigoris*)⁸⁷.

⁸² *De anima* 42:1.

⁸³ *De anima* 42:3.

⁸⁴ *De anima* 43:2: “Ego me nunquam ita dormisse praesumo, ut ex his aliquid agnoscam.”

⁸⁵ *De anima* 43:4: “Perinde deminutionem animalis spiritus aut indigentiam spiritus aut segregationem consati spiritus immortalitas animae non sinit credi.”

⁸⁶ *De anima* 43:5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Continuing his discussion, Tertullian asserts that the sleep/wake cycle is an image of the death/resurrection sequence. This is the nature and the reason for sleep, and why it is the mirror of death. If we regard it so, we initiate faith, we make hope grow, we learn how to die and how to live, we learn how to keep watch, all while we sleep.⁸⁸

Chapter 44 includes some possible evidence to contract his thesis that the soul does not leave the body during sleep. Tertullian first examines the story of Hermitimus, who slept so deeply he was thought to have died, and, as a result was cremated by his enemies. Tertullian attributes these events to a disease⁸⁹ or to Divine intervention⁹⁰. The second piece of evidence that Tertullian deals with is the story in Suetonius that claims that Nero never dreamed. Tertullian counters this with the assertion that Suetonius also reports that Nero was, in fact, able to dream late in his life.⁹¹

⁸⁸ *De anima* 43:12: "Ita cum euigilauerit corpus, redditum officiis eius resurrectionem mortuorum tibi affirmat. Haec erit somni et ratio naturalis et natura rationalis. Etiam per imaginem mortis fidem initiaris, spem meditaris, discis mori et uiuere, discis uigilare, dum dormis."

⁸⁹ *De anima* 44:2.

⁹⁰ *De anima* 44:3.

⁹¹ *De anima* 44:2.

Chapters 45 through 49 discuss dreams. Tertullian asserts that dreams show that the soul's motion is perpetual, even while dreaming. These facts demonstrate the soul's immortality.⁹² Since the soul is moving, even in a dream, and since the body's limbs are not available, the soul uses its own limbs: : "Igitur cum quies corporibus euenit, quarum solacium proprium est, uacans illa a solacio alieno non quiescit et, si caret opera membrorum corporalium, suis utitur."⁹³

The question of dreams' oracular qualities is considered next. Tertullian distinguishes two types of oracular dreams. The Stoic view is endorsed – God gives us some dreams to enable our own natural, oracular ability : "Sed et Stoici deum malunt prouidentissimum humanae institutioni inter cetera praesidia diuinatricum artium."⁹⁴ However, other kinds of oracular dreams may come from demons.⁹⁵

After a digression regarding ways to improve ones' dreaming⁹⁶, Tertullian reasserts his belief that no one does not dream. The ability to dream is inherent in the natural constitution of the soul: "Dum ne animae aliqua natura credatur immunis somniorum."⁹⁷

⁹² *De anima* 45:1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *De anima* 46:11.

⁹⁵ *De anima* 47:4

⁹⁶ The subject of Chapter 48 of *De anima*.

⁹⁷ *De anima* 49:3.

Chapters 50-57: Death

Despite what Epicurus says, Tertullian declares that death is natural and inevitable. The general opinion of humanity is that it is the debt of nature : “Publica totius generis humani sententia mortem naturae debitum pronuntiamus.”⁹⁸ The heretic Menander (not the comic poet of the same name) claims that his baptism will prevent death, but this is absurd.⁹⁹ To refute Menander, a number of examples of “killing waters” (as opposed to healing waters) are introduced.¹⁰⁰ Tertullian allows that Enoch and Elijah were “translated” but this means that their death was only postponed. “Translatus est Enoch et Helias nec mors eorum reperta est, dilata scilicet.”¹⁰¹

The thesis of Chapter 51 is that death entirely separates the soul from the body: “Opus autem mortis in medio est, discretio corporis animaeque.”¹⁰² This chapter is interesting, because it is constructed as a short oration.

⁹⁸ *De anima* 50:2

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *De anima* 50:5.

¹⁰² *De anima* 51:1.

Tertullian introduces a short *refutatio* to this *propositio*, when he considers whether there have really been cases where a soul, or part of a soul, remained with the body after death. He examines a number of cases and finds that there are other plausible, physical, explanations for the apparent retention of the soul after death.¹⁰³ In summary, because the soul is immortal it is also indivisible. Death, too, is indivisible and operates on the entire soul.¹⁰⁴

Two counter-examples of Christians who were dead but seemed to move afterwards are introduced. However, Tertullian considers these to be in the category of “signs and portents” rather than to show some activity of the soul after death.¹⁰⁵

The conclusion of this chapter – a short *peroratio* – is that death is a complete entity that completely removes soul from body. It cannot mix with life, any more than day and night can mix: “Mors, si non semel tota est, non est; si quid animae remanserit, uita est; non magis uitae miscebitur mors quam diei et nox.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *De anima* 51:2ff.

¹⁰⁴ *De anima* 51:5.

¹⁰⁵ *De anima* 51:6.

¹⁰⁶ *De anima* 51:8.

Chapter 52 is also structured in terms of an oration. The case that Tertullian makes is that death, all death, is a consequence of the first sin. Most humans see two kinds of death: natural (from natural causes), and unnatural, from violence.¹⁰⁷ The first is in accord with nature and the second, contrary to nature. This first part of the chapter forms a short *exordium* and *narratio*.

Tertullian, however, advances the *propositio* that death is the result of a fault and this fault is in no way natural: “Qui autem primordia hominis nouimus, audenter determinamus mortem non ex natura secutam hominem, sed ex culpa, ne ipsa quidem naturali”¹⁰⁸

His *confirmatio* makes the following points to prove his *propositio*. First, if humanity had been created with the intention that we die, one could say that death was natural. “Nam si homo in mortem directo institutus fuisset, tunc demum mors naturae adscriberetur.”¹⁰⁹ However, humans were not intended to die since death comes from our own choice. If one did not sin, one would not die. Therefore, death cannot be natural, since it comes from our own will rather than from necessity.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *De anima* 52:1.

¹⁰⁸ *De anima* 52:2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Next comes an *amplificatio*, in which Tertullian elaborates the unnaturalness of death. Death, Tertullian argues, overturns the natural union by separating soul and body.¹¹¹

The *peroratio* concludes by comparing death, even when tranquil, to a shipwreck that occurs when the navigation of the soul is removed: “Nihilo refert integram abire corporis nauem an dissipatam, dum animae nauigatio euertatut.”¹¹²

Chapter 53 stresses the indivisibility of the soul, even in the process of dying. Tertullian states that, no matter whether death is slow or quick, the soul is withdrawn from the body all at once. No part of the soul leaves until all of it leaves. “Non omnis autem pars statim et abscisa est, quia postera est, nec quia exiqua est, statim et ipsa peritura est.”¹¹³

Chapters 54 and 55 discuss the soul's destination. Various philosophers posit various destinations for the soul after it leaves the body, but, in general, the philosophers believe that the souls of the wise ascend to the ether (or to the moon), while the souls of the unwise descend to Hades.¹¹⁴ The Christian view is that Hades is in the depths of the earth: “Nobis inferi...[sunt] in fossa terrae et in alto uastitas et in ipsis uisceribus eius abstrusa profunditas”¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ *De anima* 52:3f.

¹¹² *De anima* 52:4.

¹¹³ *De anima* 53:4.

¹¹⁴ *De anima* 54:1-4.

¹¹⁵ *De anima* 55:1.

Christ, in his humanity, descended into Hades as a dead man, so that the prophets and patriarchs might partake of Himself, before He ascended to the right hand of the Father.¹¹⁶ The souls of most Christians, despite what certain heretics think,¹¹⁷ will not ascend until the world ends and the kingdoms of the heavens will be unlocked: “Cum transactione enim mundi reserabuntur regna caelorum.”¹¹⁸ (*De anima* 55:3). Paradise contains only the souls of the martyrs. Your only key to paradise is your blood: “Tota paradisi clavis tuus sanguis est.”¹¹⁹

In the penultimate chapter of the *refutatio*, Tertullian considers two questions: when does the soul depart for Hades, and what kind of body will we have in the Resurrection? He contends that it would be unfair for the soul to suffer because of the slowness of the living to bury the body.¹²⁰ In addition, Tertullian refutes the notion that the souls of those who die prematurely must wander the earth until the number of years have passed that is equal to the number of years that they would have lived. He points out that one cannot age without a body: “Aetatem enim non potest capere sine corpore, quia per corpora operantur aetates.”¹²¹

¹¹⁶ *De anima* 55:2.

¹¹⁷ *De anima* 55:3.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ *De anima* 55:5.

¹²⁰ *De anima* 56:3.

¹²¹ *De anima* 56:5.

Since we will receive our bodies back at the resurrection, our souls will receive back these bodies in the same age and mode that they had before.¹²² The question of those who have died violent deaths is taken up next. They, too, will pass an exile in Hades, in one of its two regions. The bad will reside in the bad section, the good, in the good section.¹²³

In the final chapter of the *refutatio*, Tertullian closes by taking a look at the “appearances” on earth of those who have died. He flatly states that any magic that claims to be able to bring souls back from Hades is phony: “Sic et in illa alia specie magiae, quae iam quiescentes animas euellere ab inferis creditur et conspectui exhibere, non alia fallaciae uis est”¹²⁴ Hades cannot be opened, nor can souls leave it to return to earth, as Luke 16:26 shows.¹²⁵ Finally, in a true resurrection, the solid, provable and touchable reality of the souls in the body will compel one to recognize the fraudulence of any apparition of a dead person.¹²⁶

¹²² *De anima* 56:5f.

¹²³ *De anima* 56:8.

¹²⁴ *De anima* 57:6.

¹²⁵ *De anima* 57:11.

¹²⁶ *De anima* 57:12.

Peroratio

The concluding chapter of *De anima* treats the status and fates of souls waiting in Hades for the final judgment through a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor.¹²⁷ The theme in this series of questions is that souls *should* receive a foretaste of their final reward or punishment. The soul cannot, by nature, remain static, so must stay in motion in Hades. In addition, it would be quite unfair for the evil to fare well in Hades, while the good worry about their ultimate fate.¹²⁸ The soul, moreover, is capable of sinning without the aid of the body, as Christ Himself pointed out in Matthew 5:28.¹²⁹ Therefore, it does not have to wait to be reunited with the body for punishment to begin.¹³⁰ This point, Tertullian notes, has been stressed by the Paraclete.¹³¹

¹²⁷ An example of *contrapositio*, as noted in *Barnes* p. 208.

¹²⁸ *De anima* 58:3.

¹²⁹ *De anima* 58:6.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *De anima* 58:8: "Hunc etiam paracletus frequentissime commendavit."

To conclude the treatise, Tertullian makes two related points. First, “necessariae curiositati satisfacimus”¹³², that is, “we have satisfied the necessary curiosity”. This curiosity, as discussed in *De Praescriptione haereticum*, is that which stops seeking after it has found.¹³³ Second, and finally, that curiosity that is extravagant and idle will still lack information.¹³⁴ This self-willed curiosity is Tertullian's idea of the motivation of heretics. The closing slap against heretics reinforces the impression that the real target for this treatise is the heretic. The destruction of the claims of philosophers in the *confirmatio* of *De anima* is intended to cut down the intellectual scaffolding that supports heresy.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ See the previous discussion of *De Praes. haer.* Chapter 11.

¹³⁴ *De anima* 58:8.

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