

Henrik Lagerlund
Editor

STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY OF MIND 5

Forming the Mind

*Essays on the Internal Senses and the
Mind/Body Problem from Avicenna
to the Medical Enlightenment*



Springer

FORMING THE MIND

STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

Volume 5

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and the Mind/Body Problem from Avicenna
to the Medical Enlightenment

Edited by

HENRIK LAGERLUND

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Contributors	vii
Preface	ix
1. Introduction: The Mind/Body Problem and Late Medieval Conceptions of the Soul <i>Henrik Lagerlund</i>	1
2. Memory and Recollection in Ibn Sînâ's and Ibn Rushd's Philosophical Texts Translated into Latin in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: A Perspective on the Doctrine of the Internal Senses in Arabic Psychological Science <i>Carla Di Martino</i>	17
3. Imagination and Experience in the Sensory Soul and Beyond: Richard Rufus, Roger Bacon and Their Contemporaries <i>Rega Wood</i>	27
4. The Soul as an Entity: Dante, Aquinas, and Olivi <i>Mikko Yrjönsuuri</i>	59
5. Self-Knowledge and Cognitive Ascent: Thomas Aquinas and Peter Olivi on the <i>KK-Thesis</i> <i>Christopher J. Martin</i>	93
6. The Invention of Singular Thought <i>Calvin G. Normore</i>	109
7. John Buridan on the Immateriality of the Intellect <i>Jack Zupko</i>	129

8.	How Matter Becomes Mind: Late-Medieval Theories of Emergence <i>Olaf Pluta</i>	149
9.	Passions and Old Men in Renaissance Gerontology <i>Timo Joutsivuo</i>	169
10.	Why Isn't the Mind-Body Problem Medieval? <i>Peter King</i>	187
11.	Matter, Mind, and Hylomorphism in Ibn Gabirol and Spinoza <i>Tamar Rudavsky</i>	207
12.	Cajetan and Suarez on Agent Sense: Metaphysics and Epistemology in Late Aristotelian Thought <i>Cees Leijenhorst</i>	237
13.	Is Descartes' Body a Mode of Mind? <i>Deborah Brown</i>	263
14.	Mind and Extension (Descartes, Hobbes, More) <i>Robert Pasnau</i>	283
15.	Emotional Pathologies and Reason in French Medical Enlightenment <i>Timo Kaitaro</i>	311
	Bibliography	327
	Index	343

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PREFACE

In the beginning of the autumn of 2002, I arranged together with Olaf Pluta a conference in Uppsala with the same title as this book. The conference was motivated first of all by the general thesis that medieval and early modern philosophy (that is, philosophy between 1100 and 1700) should be seen as a continuous tradition and not as two separate periods. We then wanted to apply this thesis to the soul and its relation to and function in a body and see how the discussion had developed in the tradition. We did, however, not want to be too narrow and only look at the Western philosophical tradition. We therefore also invited scholars working on Arabic and Hebrew philosophy in this period, and also scholars working on the medical tradition. In general we manage to create a very good atmosphere of cross-fertilization between these groups of scholars that do not often get a chance to talk to each other. In this book, I now publish a selection of reworked papers from this conference. I hope that the reader will get the sense of enthusiasm and importance of this project that I felt both during the conference and in finalizing this book.

I would first of all like to thank Olaf Pluta for helping me organize the conference. I am furthermore indebted to the Department of Philosophy at Uppsala University and the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Natural Philosophy at Radboud University, Nijmegen, for their help in organizing and finalizing the conference. The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (grant nr. 245-20-001), the Swedish Research Council and the Wenner-Gren Foundation also generously supported me with funds for which I am very grateful.

Henrik Lagerlund, London, ON, 2006.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE MIND/BODY PROBLEM AND LATE MEDIEVAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE SOUL

Henrik Lagerlund

1.1.

Contemporary philosophy of mind or philosophical psychology traces its origin almost exclusively to René Descartes. Almost all textbooks in philosophy of mind start with a discussion of Descartes. A legitimate question is, of course: Why? The answer is complicated, but one reason is that contemporary philosophy of mind is almost exclusively concerned with the so called mind/body problem, i.e., the problem how meaning, rationality, and conscious experience are related to a physical world, and they think Descartes was first to formulate this problem.

In a lot of ways the problem I just described, as the mind/body problem, was not *the* problem Descartes formulated, but it is, of course, still true that there is a problem or perhaps a set of related problems of how mind and body are related for Descartes. This set of related problems is what I will call the mind/body problem and in the course of this introduction I will try to show that this set of problems, or at least some of the problems in this set, can be traced back to the introduction and Latinization of Arabic thought and Aristotelian philosophy in the twelfth century. It was with the translation of Avicenna's *De anima* and the subsequent translation and discussion of Aristotle's *De anima* and Averroes' commentaries that the discussion began that continues today.¹

¹ See Lagerlund (2007) for further discussions of the importance of Avicenna for subsequent philosophical psychology.

The mind/body problem that was a concern in the Middle Ages and in early modern times is, however, as indicated not the same problem that occupy contemporary philosophers. Today we want to explain how phenomena like consciousness and intentionality are possible in a material (or physical) world. The problem that faced medieval philosophers and Descartes was rather the opposite, that is, how can matter at all have an effect on the mental (non-material) and how can such a noble thing as a mind be united to a material body. The reason this was problematic was because material things and minds (or souls) was thought to be far apart on the great chain of being. Matter was considered to be lower on this chain than the mind or the soul. The mind/body or soul/body problem for medieval thinkers was thus foremost a metaphysical problem and to a much lesser extent an epistemological and a semantical problem. This is not to say that they were not concerned with epistemological and semantical problems—on the contrary—but the mind/body problem was not such a problem.

It is often unclear in discussions of the history of the mind/body problem what the problem actually is or rather was. The reason for this is, I think, that the problem can be spelled out in different ways and also that there are, as already indicated, in fact several mind/body problems. One problem is the so-called interaction problem, that is, how can such different things (or substances) as the mind and the body have an efficient causal effect on each other. Another problem is the unification problem, that is, how can the mind and the body, which can exist apart from each other, be united into one single thing; a human being. A third way of stating the problem has to do with the existence of sensations or sense ideas in the mind, which means that the problem is really how to explain in what way there can be sensations in a mind without a body. A fourth mind/body problem, which is quite neglected and which the present book does not deal with at all, but which is very important, is how final and efficient causality can be combined. How do we reconcile the material and animal world, which is governed by efficient causality, with the mental and divine world, which is governed by final causality.

This problem it seems to me, as the other three mentioned, grows out of the later Middle Ages. It starts primarily in the early fourteenth century when thinkers like William Ockham and John Buridan start to flirt with a mechanized view of the material world. They explicitly argue that efficient causality is all that is needed to explain movement and change in nature, and hence they limit final causality to immaterial object like minds, angels and God. From their argumentation a mind/body problem follows, namely how is human action and free will, which is governed by final causality, incorporated into a world, which otherwise is solely explicable by efficient

causality. This problem can be traced from the early fourteenth century into early modern times and is a major concern for Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz.

The essays in this book do not all deal with the mind/body problem but they all in one way or another treat problems associated with the mind or the soul and its relation to and functions in a body. They give samples from a long tradition starting with Avicenna and continuing up to and past Descartes. This incredibly rich tradition has been far too little discussed and its importance for modern philosophy of mind and the tradition following Descartes has not been appreciated enough. This book tries to fill in some of these gaps.²

In this introduction, I will give a brief account of the conceptions of the soul in the Middle Ages and up to Descartes. Given the similarity in conceptions of mind or soul, it is clear that the same problems associated with these conceptions will appear for the medieval thinkers as well. I will end this introduction with a short summary of the papers collected in this book.

1.2.

The word for 'mind' used by Descartes in the *Meditations* is the Latin 'mens' and the French 'esprit'. In other works he also uses 'anima' or 'ame', and seems to mean the same thing. The Latin tradition that Descartes depends on uses both these words. 'Anima' is of course the main word used and it is usually translated with 'soul'. According to the standard Aristotelian divisions, it is divided into the vegetative, sensitive and intellective. These are either functions, powers or parts of one soul, or they are divisions of different souls in one or several beings. For example, plants have vegetative souls, animals have one soul that is both vegetative and sensitive or two souls one of which is vegetative and the other sensitive, and humans have one soul with have all three powers or three souls (some thought humans have two souls one that is vegetative and sensitive and another that is intellective). The Latin word 'mens' was almost always reserved for the intellective soul or the intellective part of the soul.

² Wright and Potter (2000) present a collection of articles on the history of the mind/body problem from Antiquity to the Enlightenment, but they have basically skipped the whole Middle Ages, which is unfortunate. The other collection of articles on the history of the mind/body problem is Crane and Patterson (2000), but it only contains one article on the whole Middle Ages.

All mental activity or all content of the mind, that is, all ideas, are conscious processes for Descartes, and his use of ‘mens’ or ‘esprit’ therefore correspond rather well to what most medieval philosophers called the intellective soul or for that matter ‘mens’. The processes covered by the vegetative and the sensitive souls Descartes pushed into the body—although the passions discussed in *The Passions of the Soul* are hard to classify and a matter of controversy.³

For Aristotle and a long Aristotelian tradition the soul is the principle of life. All living things have a soul. The definition of the soul given in Aristotle’s *De anima* is ‘the form of a natural body which potentially has life’ (II.1, 412a). The soul is hence the form of a body. One of the reasons Descartes wanted to use the term ‘mind’ instead of ‘soul’ was that he wanted to reject the view of the soul as a principle of life. Souls are not essential to living things, since only humans have souls or minds, according to Descartes.

While rejecting a certain kind of Aristotelianism, Descartes is embracing a notion of the soul that traditionally has been associated with Plato and Augustine. For Augustine the mind or soul is not primarily a principle of life, but rather a thinking thing or entity. As such it is incorporeal, inextended and indivisible. It has become a common place in the contemporary commentary literature that Descartes is indebted to Augustine for his conception of the mind.⁴

Terminologically Augustine is very close to Descartes as well. Augustine uses both ‘anima’ and ‘mens’ to refer to the soul and the mind, but sometimes he also uses the masculine word ‘animus’ to refer to the rational capacities of the soul. He seems not to draw a sharp distinction between these three different terms. The term ‘animus’ was used in the later Middle Ages as well, but it had as ‘mens’ not a wide spread usage, and when used it always referred to the rational part of the soul.

Stemming from respectively Plato and Aristotle two conflicting conceptions of the soul thus made its way into the Middle Ages, both with very respectable authorities standing behind them, that is, Augustine on the one hand and Aristotle himself on the other. Even though these conceptions of the soul are clearly separated by the tradition they were not so clearly separated by the later medieval tradition. The scholastic tradition tended to mix these conceptions of the soul and sometimes emphasize one more than the other, but they never clearly separated them from each other. One of

³ See Alanen (2003), Ch. 6.

⁴ See for example Menn (1998) and Matthews (2000).

the main reasons for this was Avicenna. He sought in dealing with the soul to combine the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, which fused these traditions together in a way that was hard to separate.

In the part of the *Shifâ'* which came to be viewed as a commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* during a short period of the later Middle Ages, Avicenna draws a distinction between the study of the soul in itself, which belongs to metaphysics, and the study of the soul as the principle of animation, which belongs to natural philosophy.⁵ The same soul can thus be taken in these two ways, that is, it is both a self-subsisting entity as Plato, Augustine and Descartes argue and it is a principle of life as Aristotle argues. These two aspects of the soul pull in different direction, namely according to the first aspect the soul is an independent thing and according to the second the soul is essentially united to a body that it animates. Can the soul consistently have both of them? I have argued that it cannot and it is this that give rise to two of the classical problems often referred to as the problems of dualism, namely the unification and interaction problems of soul/mind and body.⁶

All of this is complicated further by demands on late medieval philosophers to account for the immortality of the human soul. According to the well-known Christian dogma of immortality, the soul lives on after the body has died. This strongly suggests that the soul must be able to be taken by itself as a self-subsisting entity.

Despite the tendency to conflate the two traditions outlined above they can still be traced historically in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Augustinian tradition was influential among foremost Franciscan thinkers, and although they were certainly not anti-Aristotelian they tended to emphasize the soul's self-subsistence, and hence they emphasize the Augustinian conception of the soul. The Aristotelian tradition was through Aquinas predominant among Dominican thinkers.

Most major medieval thinkers seem, however, to have held that the soul is a substantial form of a body. This is not Aristotle's terminology in *De anima* but it was the interpretation presented by Averroes,⁷ and for that reason it became official Aristotelian terminology in the later Middle Ages. Thinkers entrenched in the Augustinian tradition like John Peter Olivi, John Duns Scotus and William Ockham used the same terminology.

⁵ For the references see Lagerlund (2004). Many of the points made in this introduction can be found in the same article.

⁶ See Lagerlund (2004).

⁷ See Averroes Cordubensis, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, II, 5, 134–135.