

Robert Vinkesteijn: *Philosophical Perspectives on Galen of Pergamum. Four Case-Studies on Human Nature and the Relation Between Body and Soul*. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2022 (*Philosophia Antiqua* 166). VIII, 357 p. € 138.03/\$ 155.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-52087-5.

This is a collection of four studies of Galen's natural philosophy, specifically his views about human nature and the relation between body and soul. It is a slightly revised version of a dissertation defended at Utrecht University in 2020. The first study ("The Cultivation of the Soul in a 'Physicalist' World: Ethical Philosophy in Galen's *QAM*", pp. 8–102) is an exegetical commentary on selected passages in Galen's opusculum *The Capacities of the Soul Follow the Mixtures of the Body* (*Quod animi mores corporis temperamenta sequantur*, *QAM*). It focuses on Galen's notorious (and notoriously puzzling) notion of the soul. Even though Galen often claims ignorance about the substance of the soul, in *QAM* he seems to identify the soul (or at least its lower parts) with mixtures of elementary qualities in the homoeomerous parts of the body. Robert Vinkesteijn defends the traditional view (questioned by some modern scholars) that Galen expresses his own opinion about the soul in *QAM*. Moreover, he argues that the soul-mixture theory applies to the rational part as well; and that it is consistent with things Galen says about this issue elsewhere, as well as with his physiology and ethics. In particular, Vinkesteijn insists that Galen's soul-mixture theory does not compromise his virtue ethics; and he proposes an interpretation of Galen's practical ethics in terms of mixtures. The second study ("Galen on the Nature of Man", pp. 103–158) deals with Galen's commentary on the Hippocratic *On the Nature of Man* and focuses on his theory of the elements and the dual conception of nature as the immanent and transcendent cause of the formation of human body. Pointing out the ambiguity of Galen's conception of nature, Vinkesteijn does not attempt to resolve it, his main aim being to underscore the continuity between Galen's theory of the elements and his hylomorphic view of the soul. The third study ("Soul, Mixture, and Galen's *Timaeus*", pp. 159–229) shows how Galen's hylomorphism impacts his interpretation of the *Timaeus*, as witnessed in the fragments of his *Medical Statements in Plato's Timaeus* (preserved in Arabic) and in the so-called Larrain fragments of Galen's commentary on the *Timaeus*, whose authenticity has been powerfully defended by

Aileen Das.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the fourth study (“Galen on Black Bile and Melancholy”, pp. 230–337) discusses one notorious case of the influence of a bodily humour on the soul. After an overview of Galen’s intellectual background in the Hippocratic Corpus, the Peripatetic tradition, and Rufus of Ephesus, the study extracts and systematizes Galen’s views of the black bile and melancholy from a wide selection of texts.

With characteristic Galenic modesty, the blurb on the cover advertizes the book as “ground-breaking”. This is a bit of an exaggeration. But the four studies present a coherent, well-documented and, with some exceptions (discussed below), persuasive account of Galen’s theory of the soul. The central thesis, defended at great length in the first study, is that the soul-mixture theory outlined in QAM represents Galen’s actual view, sometimes misleadingly labelled as “materialist”. This was a standard interpretation of Galen’s position from Late Antiquity to the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Modern scholars have suspected that it is at odds with other passages where Galen describes body as the instrument of soul or those where he professes ignorance about the substance of the soul. To overcome these apparent inconsistencies, some proposed a developmental hypothesis; others tried to explain them in terms of diverse rhetorical goals.<sup>3</sup> However, as Pierluigi Donini pointed out, the soul-mixture theory is not incompatible with the view of body as the instrument of soul: the instrumental role in this relation is limited to the functionally organized wholes called “organs”, whereas the soul is a peculiar mixture of the homoeomerous parts, from which these organs are built.<sup>4</sup> Jim Hankinson gave a unitary account of Galen’s ontology of psychic capacities (based on QAM) in several articles.<sup>5</sup> The revival of

- 1 A. R. Das: Reevaluating the Authenticity of the Fragments from Galen’s On the Medical Statements in Plato’s *Timaeus* (Scorialensis graec.  $\Phi$ -III-11, ff. 123r–126v). In: ZPE 192, 2014, pp. 93–103.
- 2 See J. Devinant: *Les Troubles psychiques selon Galien. Étude d’un système de pensée*. Paris 2020 (Études anciennes 159), pp. 23–33.
- 3 See Devinant (note 2), pp. 37–40, for an overview of the discussion. The main representatives of the first approach are Paul Moraux and Luis García Ballester; of the second, Peter N. Singer.
- 4 P. Donini: Psychology. In: R. J. Hankinson (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Galen*. Cambridge/New York 2008 (Cambridge Companions to Philosophy), pp. 184–209, pp. 184–185 and p. 203, n. 7.
- 5 See esp. R. J. Hankinson: Body and Soul in Galen. In: R. A. H. King (ed.): *Common to Body and Soul. Philosophical Approaches to Explaining Living Behaviour* in

Galenic studies after 2010, associated with the founding of the Berlin research group for the study of ancient medicine and of the “Cambridge Galen Translations” series (whose first volume includes Galen’s psychological writings) brought some of these old questions back into the spotlight.<sup>6</sup> The substance of the soul and the causal role of mixtures was one of the issues often brought up in Philip van der Eijk’s seminars in Berlin and among Galenic scholars more generally.<sup>7</sup> This explains the appearance of several publications dealing with these topics from a similar perspective around the same time. In 2017, this reviewer presented an argument to the effect that Galen’s physiology compels him to conceive of each part of the soul as a peculiar mixture of elementary qualities in the material substrate of the organ in which it is located; and proposed a hypothesis of why Galen is nevertheless agnostic about the substance of the reasoning capacity.<sup>8</sup> In 2019, three contributions to the debate came out: Patricia Marechal’s study on Galen’s “constitutive materialism”, arguing that Galen basically endorses a version of the attunement theory of the soul; Maria Luisa Garofalo’s excellent piece about ethical implications of the soul-mixture theory; and Vinkesteyjn’s own extract from his dissertation.<sup>9</sup> Another recent contribution, which defends the unity

Greco-Roman Antiquity. Berlin/New York 2006, pp. 232–258; id.: Galen on the Ontology of Powers. In: BJHP 22, 2014, pp. 951–973; and id.: Partitioning the Soul: Galen on the Anatomy of the Psychic Functions and Mental Illness. In: K. Corcilius/D. Perler (eds.): Partitioning the Soul. Debates from Plato to Leibniz. Berlin/Boston 2014 (Topoi. Berlin Studies of the Ancient World 22), pp. 85–106.

- 6 See P. N. Singer (ed.): Galen, Psychological Writings. *Avoiding Distress, Character Traits, The Diagnosis and Treatment of the Affections and Errors Peculiar to Each Person’s Soul, The Capacities of the Soul Depend on the Mixtures of the Body*. Translated with Introduction and Notes by V. Nutton, D. Davies and P. N. Singer. Cambridge 2013 (Cambridge Galen Translations), which includes the translation of QAM with detailed introduction and comments.
- 7 Mixtures are the central topic of the second Cambridge Galen Translations volume; see P. N. Singer/P. J. van der Eijk (eds.): Galen, Works on Human Nature. Vol. 1: *Mixtures (De Temperamentis)*. Translated with Introduction and Notes. Cambridge/New York 2018 (Cambridge Galen Translations).
- 8 M. Havrda: Body and Cosmos in Galen’s Account of the Soul. In: Phronesis 62, 2017, pp. 69–89.
- 9 See P. Marechal: Galen’s Constitutive Materialism. In: AncPhil 39, 2019, pp. 191–209; M. L. Garofalo: The Theory of Mixtures and its Ethical Implications: Role and Responsibility of the Galenic Physician. In: M. Bonazzi/P. Forcignanò/A. Ulacco (eds.): Thinking, Knowing, Acting. Epistemology in Plato and Ancient Platonism. Leiden/Boston 2019 (Brill’s Plato Studies Series 3), pp. 279–299; R. Vinkesteyjn:

of Galen's psychology, is Julien Devinant's monograph "Les Troubles psychiques selon Galien".<sup>10</sup>

What follows is a critical review focusing on points where I found myself in disagreement with Vinkesteijn's argument. Almost all of these points appear in the first study, which, to this reader at least, is also the most interesting and adventurous part of the book (although it would have benefitted from more editorial intervention, especially in terms of length). The next two studies are fine pieces of exegetical work. Partly based on material forthcoming in the "Cambridge Galen Translations" series (Jim Hankinson's in Study II and Aileen Das and Pauline Koetschet's in Study III), they usefully expand the textual basis for discussion of the central theme. I found the comments on the Larrain fragments particularly valuable. Somewhat different from the rest of the book is the final study, an engaging and imaginative essay on melancholy, which opens up the intriguing question of the origin of a detrimental humour in the providentially constructed body.

On a more polemical note, even though many of Vinkesteijn's conclusions are convincing, some issues remain unresolved. Vinkesteijn is not entirely consistent in his use of the word 'nature'. In the first study, he identifies nature with the demiurge, also described by Galen as  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  and praised (especially in *The Use of Parts*) for the functional organization of human body. Vinkesteijn contrasts 'nature' in this sense against the elementary qualities, which are also called  $\delta\eta\mu\iota\omicron\upsilon\rho\gamma\omicron\iota$ , because by acting on one another in the bodies whose qualities they are, they create new properties arising from their (or the bodies') mixtures. These properties include natural and psychic capacities, which 'follow' peculiar mixtures in the homoeomerous parts and are manifested as activities of these parts (primarily) and of the organs composed of them (secondarily). Now Vinkesteijn argues that, given the teleological framework of Galen's physiology, the mutual interaction of the primary

Mixing Body and Soul: Galen on the Substance of Soul in *QAM* and *De propriis placitis*. In: *Phronesis* 65, 2019, pp. 224–246.

- 10 See esp. Devinant (note 2), pp. 41–52. It is a pity that Vinkesteijn could not properly incorporate these recent studies into the published version of his dissertation. He is aware of all them, with the exception of Garofalo (note 9). But he does not engage in discussion with them regarding his central thesis; nor does he refer to them in support of his own position. Marechal (note 8) is listed in the bibliography but never cited. On p. 24, n. 36, there is a brief discussion of a "paradoxical" view imputed to Havrda (note 8), but there is no engagement with arguments actually presented in the paper.

qualities generating all these things must have an intelligent cause, for otherwise it would be “random” (p. 43). But the intelligent cause is the demiurge, and so there are two kinds of efficient causes: primary (the demiurge) and secondary (the primary qualities). Vinkesteyn explains the relation between them analogously to the relation between the ruling part of the soul (the source of volitional movement) and muscles: in walking, the ruling part moves the muscles which in turn move the bones. The ruling part, then, is the primary cause of the movement, but muscles are the secondary cause, and, in relation to the bones, they have the role of a demiurge. In the same way, Vinkesteyn argues, nature is the primary cause of the mixtures (and the capacities arising from them), whereas the qualities are the secondary cause, being the instruments of nature (pp. 41–48).

It is almost certainly true that Galen does not conceive of the activities of the primary qualities as ‘random’.<sup>11</sup> And he does describe mixtures as instruments in the hands of the formative capacity of nature.<sup>12</sup> However, it is hard to explain how the demiurge could be the *efficient* cause of the activities of the primary qualities, just as the ruling part of the soul is the efficient cause of the motion of muscles. In Galen’s theory, the muscles are moved by means of the psychic pneuma and the nerves, through which the power to move is transmitted from the brain. But how is the power to act transmitted from the demiurge to the elements or to the seed in the process of the formation of the body? Vinkesteyn offers no explanation. The same problem arises in the second study, where the word ‘nature’ is used in a broader sense, which, apart from the demiurge, also includes the inner source of movement. Here, Vinkesteyn invokes the puzzle (raised by van der Eijk<sup>13</sup>) regarding the double causation of the body – one from mixtures, and the other from “some more divine principle” (temp. 2,6, 79,24–25 Helmreich = 1,636 K) –

11 This view is incorrectly attributed to Havrda (note 8; see also note 10). The word ‘random’ *vel sim.* never occurs in the paper; moreover, it is acknowledged that the process of the emergence of natural capacities from mixtures “can be depicted from the teleological perspective as an elaboration of the material for organogenesis” (Havrda [note 8], p. 81, n. 38).

12 See esp. temp. 2,6 (79,26–29 Helmreich = 1,636 K), quoted by Vinkesteyn on p. 44; see also Havrda (note 8), pp. 79–80.

13 P. van der Eijk: Galen on the Nature of Human Beings. In: P. Adamson/R. Hansberger/J. Wilberding (eds.): *Philosophical Themes in Galen*. London 2014 (Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies Supplement 114), pp. 89–134.

and, failing to find a satisfactory solution, he concludes that it “should, perhaps, remain unresolved” (pp. 142–143).

Now, the dilemma can be resolved when we distinguish two kinds of explanation – bottom-up and top-down – as Peter N. Singer has done.<sup>14</sup> And further, when we interpret the bottom-up explanation in terms of material and efficient causes, and the top-down in terms of the final cause. For Galen, the top-down explanation starts with the demiurge and reaches down as far as things can be explained from a goal, even to the level of the elementary powers.<sup>15</sup> The providential intelligence of the demiurge is manifested clearly (‘demonstratively’, as Galen believes) in the functional arrangement of bodily organs and their parts (although scorpions and other unworthy animals are more difficult to explain in this way than others).<sup>16</sup> And insofar as the substances produced by the elementary qualities are understood as the material for the generation of organs, it reaches down to these substances and the process of their generation.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the bottom-up explanation, which starts from the elementary qualities and their mixtures, has a limited range. In animal bodies, it reaches as far as the production of the homoeomerous parts and their capacities. When Galen says that the shaping of the organic parts, i.e., the composition of functional wholes from the homoeomerous parts, is due to a “more divine principle”, he probably means that this result exceeds the explanatory power of the material and efficient causes.

This might also explain why Galen is reluctant to make firm judgement about the substance of the soul. The question of the origin of the soul has no bearing on this. The soul could well be made by the demiurge, and still be nothing but a mixture of qualities. In fact, according to Galen, this is the case with the lower parts of the soul and with natural capacities in general. The reason why he is hesitant about the ruling part is often interpreted in terms of the distinction between plausible and scientifically proven state-

14 P. N. Singer: Levels of Explanation in Galen. In: CQ 47, 1997, pp. 525–542, pp. 536–540; see also van der Eijk (note 13).

15 This is suggested e.g. by temp. 1,3 (34,10 Helmreich = 1,563 K), quoted by Vinkesteijn on p. 17, n. 21.

16 Foet. form. 6,32 (104,26–106,2 Nickel).

17 See e.g. sem. 1,10 (98,1–102,16 De Lacy).

ments, and Vinkesteijn too follows this path (p. 73).<sup>18</sup> But why is there no scientific proof about the substance of the ruling part? Possibly because its activities, like those exhibited in the functional arrangement of organs, exceed the explanatory range of material and efficient causes; the reason why they do so, apparently, is the goal-directed character of these activities. Whatever causal explanations of this phenomenon there might be (and Galen considers a few options, esp. in UP 17 and foet. form.), they go beyond the limits of scientific demonstration.<sup>19</sup>

This point also has a bearing on the interpretation of Galen's ethics. Ethical ramifications of the soul-mixture theory are usually understood in terms of dietetics and lifestyle and their impact on mental health.<sup>20</sup> Vinkesteijn goes a bit further when he interprets the whole of Galen's ethics as focused on influencing the mixtures. The result is interesting but not very flattering to Galen. Galen agrees with the ancients that our goal is to become like a god (pp. 85–86); in Vinkesteijn's interpretation, this is an injunction to become as dry as possible in our brains, for this is how the stars are disposed (see esp. pp. 58–66 and pp. 97–99). The whole of education, including the study of the arts, is subordinated to this goal (pp. 92–93). Since the origin of this injunction is in our brain's peculiar mixture, the formation of character and the pursuit of knowledge is a transformation of self by itself, where both the subject and the object of this 'circular motion' is our brain's mixture (pp. 95–96). The resulting image is a rather surprising version of ancient ethics, where self-obsessed asceticism is not redeemed by any glimpse of transcendence – whether social, cosmic or otherwise. It is true that, according to Vinkesteijn, our brain is constructed by the demiurge, and its mixture (indirectly) is also of his making; perhaps, then, the notion of the dryness of the stars, and the very drive for dryness, otherwise inexplicable, is of divine origin. But that does not mitigate the extreme reductionism of this self-enclosed ethical perspective, not to speak of its unintuitive notion of the goal.

It could be objected, however, that Galen clearly distinguishes between medical and philosophical perspectives on ethical issues and delimits the

18 See e.g. Hankinson: *Body* (note 5), p. 252; Donini (note 4), p. 186; Marechal (note 9); Garofalo (note 9), pp. 281–282; and esp. Devinant (note 2), pp. 53–64.

19 See Hankinson: *Body* (note 5), pp. 250–255; Havrda (note 8).

20 See esp. Garofalo (note 9).

competence of doctors in this regard.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not his reflections on the physiological conditions of sound rational activity can be generalized as statements about the goal of life is worth further inquiry. Finally, given Vinkesteyn's view of the active role of the demiurge in the sublunary world, it is unclear why his role regarding the reasoning faculty must be limited to its creation. As a matter of fact, Galen never explains the causal role of the demiurge in the formation of bodies or in anything else. But, as mentioned above, one possible reason for his reticence regarding the substance of certain capacities may be that their activities cannot be, in his view, satisfactorily explained without recourse to theology.

Finally, a textual note. In an oft-discussed passage of the third chapter of QAM (37,26–38,1 von Müller = 4,774–775 K), Galen considers the option that the reasoning part of the soul is a mixture too. There is a textual difficulty in this passage, whose solution has an impact on the interpretation of the argument. At the beginning of the chapter, Galen attributes to Plato a division of three forms of soul (τρία τῆς ψυχῆς εἶδη) and the location of these forms in the liver, the heart, and the brain, respectively. According to Galen, Plato appears to be convinced that “of these forms and parts of the whole soul the rational one is immortal”, whereas he (Galen) cannot maintain that it is so nor that it is not. He then turns to “the forms of soul” in the liver and in the heart, of which he says that “both he [i.e. Plato] and I agree that they perish in death”. A short argument follows, whose aim is to show that, if we accept Aristotle's view of the soul as the form of body, we will reach the conclusion that the substance of the soul is a mixture. At this point, Galen returns to Plato and the reasoning part and says something like this:

εἰ μὲν οὖν τὸ λογιζόμενον εἶδος τῆς ψυχῆς ἐστὶ θνητὸν ἔσται καὶ αὐτὸ κρᾶσις τις ἐγκεφάλου<sup>22</sup>

The syntactic structure of the sentence is unclear without punctuation. Iwan von Müller<sup>23</sup> follows the Aldina edition and places comma after ἐστὶ. This creates a conditional whose antecedent postulates that the reasoning part is

21 See Garofalo (note 9), pp. 289–290.

22 The printed text is from Bazou's edition, without punctuation, in a form that (according to Bazou's apparatus) corresponds to all codices, except for one small correction according to an Arabic version (ἐστὶ instead of ἢ or ἥ).

23 I. von Müller (ed.): Claudii Galeni Pergameni Scripta minora. Vol. 2. Leipzig 1891 (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), pp. 32–79.



a form of soul, and the consequent infers its mortality: “So, if the reasoning part is a form of soul, it is mortal.” However, the rest of the sentence is incomplete and, for this reason, von Müller separates it as a new clause, adding *καὶ γάρ* before *καὶ αὐτὸ* (“For this, too, is a certain mixture in the brain”). In contrast, Athena Bazou<sup>24</sup> puts comma after *θνητόν* and leaves the rest intact. Her conditional, then, says the following: “So, if the reasoning form of soul is mortal, it too will be a certain mixture of the brain.” This reading is accepted by Singer<sup>25</sup> and followed by Vinkesteyn, who analyses Galen’s argument on pp. 37–39 and 49–50.<sup>26</sup>

Vinkesteijn interprets the argument as dealing with two horns of a dilemma: either *τὸ λογιζόμενον* is mortal, or it is not. From the first horn, then, Galen would infer that *τὸ λογιζόμενον* too is a particular mixture. The other option, namely that the soul is immortal, is put to doubt shortly thereafter (lines 38,4–38,13 von Müller). It seems strange, however, that Galen would start an argument against Plato by postulating the mortality of the rational part, as this is precisely the point at issue. Having established that the two lower parts, insofar as they are forms of body, are mixtures, Galen considers the impact of this interpretation on the question posed at the beginning of the chapter, namely, whether *τὸ λογιζόμενον* is immortal or not. The issue in this discussion is not whether it is a mixture or something else. Moreover, it does not follow from the rational part’s being mortal that it is a mixture. Bazou’s reading is also odd syntactically, as it puts a copula in the apodosis in an inexplicably emphatic position.

It seems better, then, to construct the argument along the lines suggested by von Müller: having explained that the soul, as understood by Aristotle, is a mixture, Galen turns to the reasoning part and argues that if it is a form of soul, then it is mortal, because it is a mixture. Rather than separating the rest of the sentence, however, the text could be healed by a simple addition of *ὅν* (whose omission after *-ου* could be explained as haplography). Thus:

24 A. Bazou (ed.): *Γαληνοῦ Ὅτι ταῖς τοῦ σώματος κράσεσιν αἱ τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεις ἐπονται*. Athens 2011.

25 Singer: Galen, *Psychological Writings* (note 6).

26 Vinkesteyn quotes the passage twice (pp. 37–38 and p. 50); each time, the quotation is somewhat sloppy; although Vinkesteyn claims to reproduce Bazou’s text, he never actually does so, combining von Müller’s and Bazou’s versions. Moreover, there is a missing article in the first quotation and mistakes in accents in both.

εἰ μὲν οὖν τὸ λογιζόμενον εἶδος τῆς ψυχῆς ἐστί, θνητὸν ἔσται καὶ αὐτό, κράσις τις ἐγκεφάλου <ὄν>.

If the rational part is a form of soul, then it is mortal too, being a mixture of the brain.

These dissenting comments and suggestions do not diminish the merits of this rich, competent, and well-written book. Apart from the clarity of exposition and the unifying view that permeates an unusually broad spectrum of sources, the chief virtue of this work lies in its courage to ask difficult questions about the consistency of Galen's thought and to propose tentative answers to them. Here is a useful contribution to the scholarly debate that, incidentally, turns the reader's mind to problems of enduring philosophical interest.

---

Matyáš Havrda, The Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague  
Institute of Philosophy  
Research Professor in Classical Studies  
havrda@flu.cas.cz

**[www.plekos.de](http://www.plekos.de)**

Empfohlene Zitierweise

Matyáš Havrda: Rezension zu: Robert Vinkesteyn: *Philosophical Perspectives on Galen of Pergamum. Four Case-Studies on Human Nature and the Relation Between Body and Soul*. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2022 (*Philosophia Antiqua* 166). In: *Plekos* 25, 2023, S. 479–488 (URL: <https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2023/r-vinkesteijn.pdf>).

Lizenz: Creative Commons BY-NC-ND

---