ORIGEN, PLATO, AND CONSCIENCE (*SYNDERESIS*) IN JEROME'S EZEKIEL COMMENTARY

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Due especially to the pioneering work of Lottin,[1] philosophers and theologians interested in the medieval discussion of the human conscience are today well aware that the Scholastic debate was framed principally in relation to two words, *conscientia* and *synderesis*. In the now classic formulation of the distinction between those two terms by Thomas Aquinas, *synderesis* is understood as the special *habitus* of the practical intellect whereby human beings know the basic principles of morality, whereas *conscientia* is the act whereby the practical reasoning powers of a human being apply the fundamental principles to the particular matter at hand.[2] It is also generally acknowledged by scholars today that the argument about the relationship between *conscientia* and *synderesis* began many years prior to Thomas's work, that the medieval debate was originally spurred by the introduction of the strange term *synderesis* into the conversation, and that the term entered the discussion by means of an enigmatic passage in Jerome's *Commentary on Ezekiel*.[3] Finally, most scholars acknowledge that the appearance of *synderesis* in the medieval manuscripts of Jerome's commentary is in all likelihood a corruption of the Greek word *syneidēsis*, which is the standard correlate in Greek Patristic literature for the Latin *conscientia*.[4]

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[1] D. Odon Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Louvain, 1942–60), 2:103–349. Some of the more important texts in the medieval debate have been translated into English and published by Timothy C. Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1980).

[2] *De veritate*, qq. 16 and 17. The matter is treated less thoroughly in the *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, aa. 12–13; I–II, q. 94, a. 1 ad 2; I–II q. 47, a. 6, ad 1 and ad 3.

[3] On these matters, see especially Michael B. Crowe, "The Term *Synderesis* and the Scholastics," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 23 (1956): 151–64, 228–45; Jacques de Blic, S. J., "Syndérèse ou conscience?" *Revue d'ascètique et de mystique* 25 (1949): 146–57. Also Åke Petzäll, "La syndérèse: De l'Aigle d'Ézéchiel à la conscience morale par le Commentaire de Saint Jérôme," *Theoria* (Lund–Copenhagen) 20 (1954): 64–77.

[4] The question about whether *syneidēsis* or *synderesis* is the correct reading was a disputed question in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It seems fair to say that the predominant scholarly opinion eventually concluded that *synderesis* is a corrupted reading. Crowe gives a summary of the reasons for this judgment in "The Term *Synderesis* and the Scholastics," 153–55. A more complete account is provided by Blic. A brief overview of the debate is provided by Oscar James Brown, *Natural Rectitude and Divine Law in Aquinas: An Approach to an Integral Interpretation of the Thomistic Doctrine of Law* (Toronto, 1981), 175–77. Nevertheless, Potts argues that *synderesis* or *synteresis* does occur, though

What has not been satisfactorily explained, however, is the meaning of Jerome's passage itself. That the passage in the *Commentary on Ezekiel* was the prompt for subsequent reflection is clear, but what did the author of that passage originally intend? To be sure, some scholars have recognized that Jerome's remarks were probably influenced by Origen, and Jerome tells us himself that his passage reports the views of some commentators who follow Plato, but these intimations are vague. This essay intends to show that it is possible to identify the sources of the passage in Jerome's work with much more precision and detail than has ever been attempted heretofore. The interpretation of Ezekiel that Jerome reports can be traced to specific passages in Plato's dialogues, while the crucial statements Jerome relates about conscience can be demonstrated to rely upon Origen. The interpretation recorded by Jerome turns out to be extremely interesting in itself as well as valuable for the glimpse it gives us into the early encounter between philosophy and the Christian faith.

Platonic Parallels to Ezekiel's Vision

At the beginning of the book of Ezekiel, the prophet reports a remarkable vision in which he had seen four strange creatures, each with four faces. The New American Bible translation renders Ezekiel's report of the faces of the creatures in this way: "Their faces were like this: each of the four had the face of a man, but on the right side was the face of a lion, and on the left side the face of an ox, and finally each had the face of an eagle" (1:10). Needless to say, explaining what Ezekiel saw is both difficult and tempting. Jerome, the most learned Christian biblical scholar of his time, himself followed the interpretation that the four faces, which reappear in Rev. 4:6–7, refer symbolically to the four gospels. At one point early in his massive *Commentary on Ezekiel*, however, he finds it appropriate to mention some of the other interpretations of the meaning of the four faces of which he is aware, including interpretations by those "who follow the foolish wisdom of philosophers."[5] The most widespread of these philosophical interpretations, he says, is the Platonic:

> And most, following Plato, assign the rational, irascible, and concupiscible parts of the soul — which he calls the *logikon*, the *thumikon*, and the *epithumētikon* — to the human, the lion, and the calf. Reason and reflection and mind and deliberation, all of which are the same virtue as wisdom, they

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rarely, in late Greek, and that such a reading for Jerome is therefore not impossible. See *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy*, 10–11.

[5] "Alii vero, qui philosophorum stultam sequuntur sapientiam. . . ." (*In Hiezechielem*, ed. Francisci Glorie, CCL 75 [Turnhout, 1964], 11, lines 206–7). Throughout this essay, unattributed translations are the author's own.

> place in the citadel of the brain. But savageness, anger, and violence, situated in the gall bladder, they place in the lion. Next, lust, wantonness, and the desire for all of the pleasures they place in the liver, that is in the calf, who cleaves to the works of the earth.[6]

From the Greek terms preserved by Jerome, one can see that these interpreters who were following Plato must be applying to Ezekiel the famous tripartite distinction between the "reasoning," the "spirited," and the "desiring" parts of the soul discussed by Socrates in book 4 of the *Republic*.[7] One wonders, though, why the "Platonic" interpretation of the faces of the animals assigns the respective parts of the soul to these particular faces. Why is the human face referred to the rational part, the lion to the spirited or irascible part, and the calf to the desiring or concupiscible part? Are these designations simply arbitrary? Jerome does not give us the answers to such questions, nor does subsequent scholarship, but the Platonists of whom Jerome speaks surely have in mind the "image of the soul in speech" that Socrates proposes to Glaucon toward the end of book 9 of the *Republic*:

> "What sort of image?" he [Glaucon] said.
> "One of those natures such as the tales say used to come into being in olden times — the Chimaera, Scylla, Cerberus, and certain others, a throng of them, which are said to have been many *ideas* grown naturally together in one."
> "Yes," he said, "they do tell of such things."
> "Well, then, mold a single *idea* of a many-colored, many-headed beast that has a ring of heads of tame and savage beasts and can change them and make all of them grow from itself."
> "That's a job for a clever molder," he said. "But, nevertheless, since speech is more easily molded than wax and the like, consider it as molded."
> "Now, then, mold another single idea for a lion, and a single one for a human being. Let the first be by far the greatest, and the second, second in size."
> "That's easier," he said, "and the molding is done."

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[6] "Plerique, iuxta Platonem, rationale animae et irascentiuum et concupiscentiuum, quod ille λογικὸν et θυμικὸν et ἐπιθυμητικὸν vocat, ad hominem et leonem ac vitulum referunt: rationem et cogitationem et mentem et consilium eandem virtutem atque sapientiam in cerebri arce ponentes, feritatem vero et iracundiam atque violentiam in leone, quae consistit in felle, porro libidinem, luxuriam et omnium voluptatum cupidinem in iecore, id est in vitulo, qui terrae operibus haereat; . . ." (*In Hiezechielem*, CCL 75, 11–12, lines 209–17).

[7] It should be noted that Plato himself seems to consider the distinction to be only provisional. At 435d, and again at 504b–d, Socrates speaks of a "longer road" that would provide a more adequate treatment of the soul. At 443a he hints at the possibility that there are more than three elements in the soul.

> "Well, then, join them — they are three — in one, so that in some way they grow naturally together with each other."
> "They are joined," he said.
> "Then mold about them on the outside an image of one — that of the human being — so that to the man who's not able to see what's inside, but sees only the outer shell, it looks like one animal, a human being."[8]

Socrates goes on to explain that, in his image, the ring of heads corresponds to the desiring part of the soul, the lion to the spirited part, and the small, inner human being to the rational part. He then explains to Glaucon that what is best and most just for a human being is therefore to tame the ring of heads by forming an alliance between the lion and the inner human being, or between the spirited and the rational parts of the soul.

Clearly, Jerome's Platonists have identified Ezekiel's human face and lionlike face with the human being and the lion described by Socrates. They would then presumably have been left with the problem of showing how Ezekiel's calf corresponds to Socrates' many-headed monster. This might seem to be a difficult task, and the only clue that Jerome gives us for understanding the matter is that the calf is appropriate for the Platonists because it "cleaves to the works of the earth."[9] Earlier in book 9 of the *Republic*, however, just prior to his articulation of the image of the soul quoted above, Socrates speaks of the life of the many who are dominated by the desiring part of the soul as a life appropriate to cattle or fatted beasts, who always look down with their heads bent to the earth (586a–b). Plato's Socrates also refers to the cattle or oxen whom the many follow in pursuing a life of pleasure at the end of the *Philebus* (67b). Apparently, then, the Platonists of whom Jerome speaks had suitable texts with which to match Ezekiel's calf to the desiring or concupiscible part of the soul. Like Socrates in the *Republic*, Ezekiel has molded an image in speech, and the animals used by Socrates to portray the soul correspond rather closely to the animal faces used by Ezekiel. This correspondence of the respective animals must have struck the Platonists as too close to be a coincidence.[10]

Thus far, then, the interpretation of the followers of Plato who were reading Ezekiel can be summarized with the following chart:

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[8] Trans. Allan Bloom, 2d ed. (New York, 1991), 588b–e.

[9] "terrae operibus haereat" (*In Hiezechielem*, CCL 75, 12, line 217).

[10] For the Platonists' assignation of the various bodily organs to the particular parts of the soul, one must look not to the *Republic* but to the *Timaeus*, where Timaeus — not Socrates — attaches passions to bodily organs (cf. 70a ff.). Presumably the Platonists did not need Ezekiel to connect these two texts of Plato.

the soul's "parts"	*Ezekiel's animal*	*Plato's animal*
rational	human being	inner human
irascible or spirited	lion	lion
desiring or concupiscible	ox or calf	cattle or oxen[11]

The Platonists' reading is left, of course, with a huge and obvious problem, for Ezekiel saw four faces but Plato says that the soul has three parts. What about the eagle? Continuing his report of the Platonic interpretation, Jerome says:

> And they place the fourth part, which the Greeks call *syneidēsis*, above and beyond these three.[12] This is the spark of conscience (*scintilla conscientiae*), which, even in the breast of Cain after he was ejected from paradise, is not extinguished, and by which, even when conquered by pleasures or by rage, deceived by the very similitude of reason, we realize that we sin. This fourth part they assign particularly to the eagle, which does not mix with the other three but corrects them when they err. In the Scriptures, we read that it is sometimes called the "spirit," which "intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings" (Rom. 8:26). The Scriptures also say, "No one knows what pertains to a man, except the spirit that is within him" (1 Cor. 2:11). Paul, writing of this spirit to the Thessalonians, beseeches them to preserve it whole and entire, along with the soul and the body (1 Thess. 5:23). Nevertheless, we perceive that this very conscience falls among some and loses its place, as it is written in the Proverbs: "The impious man, when he reaches the depths of sin, does not care" (Prov. 18:3). Such people do not have modesty or shame with respect to their faults, and they deserve to hear, "You have the face of a harlot, not knowing to blush" (Jer. 3:3). And so God rules this four-horse team in the manner of a charioteer, and he reins in one

[11] At *Republic*, 586a–b, Plato uses βοσκήματα (cattle, or fatted beasts generally); at *Philebus* 67b he refers to the βόες (cattle or oxen). At *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095b 20, Aristotle refers to life of the many as a βίος βοσκημάτων (a life of cattle). The Septuagint at Ezekiel 1:10 uses μόσχος (calf). Jerome used *bos* (ox, bull, or cow) for the Vulgate's rendering of Ezekiel, prior to composing his *Commentary on Ezekiel*. Yet, in the *Commentary* Jerome repeatedly refers to the *vitulus* (calf). In the passage in the Revelation (4:7) in which the animals reappear, the Vulgate translates the Greek μόσχος as *vitulus*.

[12] The various translations of the vision of Ezekiel are ambiguous in verse 11. The verse refers to something being "above" other elements of the vision. Modern English translations (e.g., *The New American Bible*, *The New Revised Standard Version*, and so forth) seem to take this to refer to two of the multiple wings of each of the four creatures that have the four faces, but some of the older translations seem to leave open the possibility that what is above is the eagle and its wings. This ambiguity may well be behind the "Platonic" interpretation's placing of the eagle above the other animals. Jerome's Vulgate renders verses 10–11 thus: "similtudo autem vultus eorum facies hominis et facies leonis a dextris ipsorum quattuor facies autem bovis a sinistris ipsorum quattuor et facies aquilae ipsorum quattuor et facies *eorum* et pinnae *eorum* extentae desuper. . ." The antecedents of the two italicized uses of "eorum" could perhaps be ambiguous.

running with disordered steps and makes it docile and compels it by his own command to obey.[13]

To begin where Jerome's account ends, it is clear that the horses and the charioteer in the Platonic interpretation refer to the famous image of the soul and its moral life given by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (246a–48b; 253c–57a). In this elaborate story, the soul is likened to a charioteer with two horses, one of which willingly heeds the command of the charioteer and one of which tends not to. If the horse is willing to follow the lead of reason and intellect dominates, the soul prospers and grows wings and becomes philosophical; if the unruly horse dominates, the soul falls into ruin. Why do the Platonists bring in this passage from the *Phaedrus* in interpreting Ezekiel's vision? The account of the prophet's vision refers repeatedly to something like a chariot, to the wheels upon which the mysterious beings move (1:15–21). Surely the Platonists have connected the wheels Ezekiel describes with the chariot in the *Phaedrus*. In the interpretation recounted by Jerome, however, there are four "horses" in the chariot team (the rational, irascible, and concupisible powers, along with *syneidēsis*), rather than the two horses (representing, apparently, a love for the true good and a love for the material good) in Plato's dialogue. Moreover, in the Platonists' account recorded by Jerome, Ezekiel's God has replaced Socrates' reason or understanding or *dianoia* as the charioteer for the soul.

The lengthiest part of the interpretation Jerome describes is concerned with the eagle. Will it be possible to find a text of Plato corresponding to this, just as it was possible to find texts corresponding to the other three animal faces and the chariot? Reconstructing the Platonists' interpretation of the eagle from Jerome's account is more difficult than reconstructing their understanding of the other images, yet it is the part most crucial for the history of Christian understanding of conscience. Jerome relates that the

[13] ". . . quartumque ponunt quae super haec et extra haec tria est, quam Graeci vocant συνείδησιν — quae scintilla conscientiae in Cain quoque pectore, postquam eiectus est de paradiso, non extinguitur, et, victi voluptatibus vel furore, ipsaque interdum rationis decepti similitudine, nos peccare sentimus — , quam proprie aquilae deputant, non se miscentem tribus sed tria errantia corrigentem, quam in scripturis interdum vocari legimus spiritum, qui *interpellat pro nobis gemitibus ineffabilibus* (Rom. 8:26). *Nemo enim scit ea quae hominis sunt, nisi spiritus qui in eo est* (1 Cor. 2:11), quem et Paulus ad Thessalonicenses scribens cum anima et corpore servari integrum deprecatur (1 Thess. 5:23). Et tamen hanc quoque ipsam conscientiam, iuxta illud quod in Proverbiis scriptum est: *Impius cum venerit in profundum peccatorum, contemnit* (Prov. 18:3), cernimus praecipitari apud quosdam, et suum locum amittere, qui ne pudorem quidem et verecundiam habent in delictis et merentur audire: *Facies meretricis facta est tibi, nescis erubescere* (Jer. 3:3). Hanc igitur quadrigam in aurigae modum Deus regit et incompositis currentem gradibus refrenat docilemque facit et suo parere cogit imperio" (*In Hiezechielem*, CCL 75, 12, lines. 217–36).

Platonists ascribe the eagle to what the Greeks call *syneidēsis*, but this is not a word that Plato uses. Therefore, Jerome says that the "Platonic" interpretation appeals not to Plato but to Paul in associating *syneidēsis* with "spiritus." According to the passage quoted above, on the basis of 1 Cor. 2:11 ("Who among men knows what pertains to a man, except the spirit of a man within him?"), this spirit is said by the Platonists to be not the Holy Spirit but a human spirit, a spirit that is in an individual human being. On the basis of 1 Thess. 5:23 (". . . and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"), this spirit that is within an individual human being is said to belong to a tripartition of human nature that includes soul and body in addition to spirit.

Plato's anthropology included a distinction between body and soul, and a subdivision of the soul into the three parts represented by the lion, the calf, and the human being. The problem for the Platonic interpretation of Ezekiel's vision, then, is what to do with the spirit. How will it be possible to relate what is said about spirit in Corinthians and in the tripartition of Thessalonians to the tripartition derived from the *Republic*? Only if this question is answered will it be possible for the Platonic interpretation to explain why the eagle of Ezekiel's vision represents the spirit of conscience.

The Correspondence Between Origen and the "Platonic" Interpretation of the Eagle

Patristic literature is replete with occurrences of both *syneidēsis* and *conscientia*, as the remarkable panoplies of citations collected by Delhaye and by Stelzenberger demonstrate amply,[14] but the application of *syneidēsis* to the vision of Ezekiel is unique to the interpretation recorded by Jerome. The interpretation that Jerome attributes to the Platonists, however, does contain striking and distinctive parallels to the thought of Origen.

Origen's anthropology subsumed the Platonic tripartition of the soul from the *Republic* under the tripartite distinction of body, soul, and spirit that Paul gives in 1 Thess. 5:23.[15] Plato, of course, had spoken of the distinction between body and soul, but Paul adds the category of spirit, and Origen

[14] See Philippe Delhaye, *The Christian Conscience*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (New York, 1968), 69–99; originally published as *La conscience morale du chrétien* (Tournai, 1964); and Johannes Stelzenberger, *Syneidesis, Conscientia, Gewissen: Studie zum Bedeutungswandel eines moraltheologischen Begriffes* (Paderborn, 1963), 43–63. Consulting the entry for συνείδησις in Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon* (G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* [Oxford, 1961]) proves the point also.

[15] This paragraph and the following one rely heavily on Henri Couzel, S. J., "L'anthropologie d'Origène dans la perspective du combat spirituel," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 31 (1955): 364–85, and *Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian*, trans. A. S. Worrall (San Francisco, 1989), 87–98. See also Henri Crouzel, S. J., *Théologie de l'image*

emphasizes that the Scriptures often refer to a spirit that is not the Holy Spirit, but a spirit within an individual human being. Among Origen's favorite texts for establishing this point is the very one cited in Jerome's account, from 1 Cor. 2:11 ("Who among men knows what pertains to a man, except the spirit of a man within him?"). Given the influence of the common distinction between body and soul, one might expect Origen to collapse spirit and soul in Paul's tripartition into one, but in Origen's view the Scriptures carefully preserve the distinction between soul and spirit:

> I have noticed a distinction between soul (ψυχή) and spirit (πνεῦμα) in all Scripture. I observe that the soul is something intermediate and capable of both virtue and evil, but the spirit of man that is in him (1 Cor. 2:11) is incapable of receiving things that are inferior, for the best things are said to be fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:22–23), and not, as one might think, of the Holy Spirit, but of the human spirit.[16]

The Platonic distinction between body and soul, then, is expanded in Origen's anthropology; in addition to body (*soma* or *sarx*) and soul (*psychē*), there is also *pneuma* or spirit.

Origen also argues that there are tensions within the soul, for it is drawn both toward its spirit and toward its body:

> We frequently find in the Scriptures, and we have often discussed this topic, that man may be said to be spirit (*spiritus*), body (*corpus*), and soul (*anima*). And when it is said, "The flesh desires contrary to the spirit, and the spirit desires contrary to the flesh" (Gal. 5:17), the soul is undoubtedly placed in the middle. Either it gives assent to the desires of the spirit or it is inclined toward the lusts of the flesh. If it joins itself to the flesh it becomes one body with it in its lust and sinful desires; but if it should associate itself with the spirit it shall be one spirit with it.[17]

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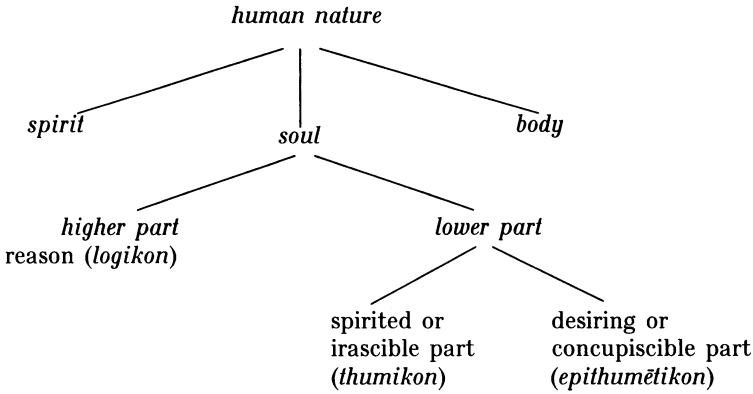
de Dieu chez Origène (Paris, 1956); and Jacques Dupuis, *"L'esprit de l'homme": étude sur l'anthropologie religieuse d'Origène* (Paris and Bruges, 1967).

[16] ". . . τηρήσας ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γραφῇ διαφορὰν ψυχῆς καὶ πνεύματος καὶ μέσον μέν τι θεωρῶν εἶναι τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ἐπιδεχομένην ἀρετὴν καὶ κακίαν, ἀνεπίδεκτον δὲ τῶν χειρόνων τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ· τὰ γὰρ κάλλιστα καρποὶ λέγονται εἶναι τοῦ πνεύματος, οὐχ ὡς ἂν οιηθείν τις, τοῦ ἁγίου, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου" (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*, ed. Erwin Preuschen, *Origines Werke*, GCS 4 [Leipzig, 1903], 32.218. English translation is by Ronald E. Heine (*Origen: Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, The Fathers of the Church, 89 [Washington, D. C., 1993], 383). Thomas P. Scheck lists a number of other passages in Origen's work in which the same point is made; see his translation of Origen's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Books 1–5*, The Fathers of the Church, 103 (Washington, D. C., 2001), 94 n. 294.

[17] "Frequenter in scipturis inuenimus et a nobis saepe dissertum est quod homo spiritus et corpus et anima esse dicatur. Uerum cum dicitur quia caro concupiscit aduersum spiritum spiritus autem aduersus carnem, media procul dubio ponitur anima quae uel desideriis spiritus adquiescat uel ad carnis concupiscentias inclinetur; et si quidem se iunxerit carni unum cum ea corpus in libidine et concupiscentiis eius efficitur, si uero se sociauerit spiri-

These opposing inclinations working on the soul lead Origen to distinguish between a higher and a lower part of the soul. The higher part, termed *nous*, *logikon*, or *hegemonikon*, is rational. This is where free choice is located. The lower part includes the spirited and desiring parts of the soul, the *thumikon* and the *epithumētikon*. This tripartite distinction, of course, is Plato's distinction from the *Republic*, but it is now subsumed under the new tripartition from Thessalonians, so that in Origen's anthropology the soul that pursues spirit, which is itself a divine gift to the soul and a created participation of the Holy Spirit, will become spiritual, whereas the soul that follows its lower part in pursuing body or matter will become bestial — like the lion and the calf.[18]

Origen's basic understanding of the divisions of human nature, then, can be diagrammed with the following chart:[19]



It is clear, then, that there is a general correspondence between Origen's anthropology and the Platonic interpretation of Ezekiel's vision recorded by Jerome, for one can see how the four faces of the vision can be correlated to Origen's understanding of the relationship between the tripartite soul of Plato's *Republic* and the tripartite anthropology of Paul's letters. Spirit, the eagle of conscience, is above the other three faces, which represent the tri-

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tui, unus cum ea spiritus erit" (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Latin translation of Rufinus, ed. Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes: kritische Ausgabe der Übersetzung Rufins*, Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel, 16 [Freiburg im Breisgau, 1990], 1.18.5. English translation by Scheck, *Commentary*, 94. This passage is enumerated as 1.21 in Hammond Bammel's divisions.)

[18] Indeed, Origen is famous for his theological interpretation of animals; see Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*, 197–206.

[19] This chart relies on the one provided by Crouzel, "L'Anthropologie d'Origène," 366.

partition of the soul. Is it possible, though, to move from a general correspondence to show more direct lines of influence? In other words, can one explain how Jerome came to know of this interpretation of Ezekiel? Can one assert that he knew that at least portions of it belonged to Origen?

Linking Origen to Jerome's Text

Jerome had himself translated Origen's *Homilies on Ezekiel* prior to writing his own *Commentary on Ezekiel*.[20] In these *Homilies*, Origen asks whether Ezekiel's vision of the animal faces includes, in addition to the tripartite division of the soul that is discussed by others, a fourth entity. He answers in the affirmative, but he does not directly identify this fourth entity with *syneidēsis*. Rather, he refers to it as "a spirit who keeps watch in order to help." This spirit is "the spirit of a man" and this spirit "keeping watch over the soul" is signified by the eagle.[21] Origen thus makes in the *Homilies* at least three points reminiscent of the interpretation reported by Jerome in his Ezekiel *Commentary*: first, the tripartition of the soul has been discussed by others (perhaps these "others" include Plato himself); second, the fourth entity in the vision is to be identified with spirit rather than soul; and third, 1 Cor. 2:11 shows that this spirit is a human spirit. Jerome's account in his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, however, includes many additional elements not mentioned in his translation of Origen's *Homilies*. Most important for our

[20] Jerome's *Commentary on Ezekiel* dates from the latter period of his life, when he was at Bethlehem. His work on it was interrupted repeatedly by refugees fleeing Rome after Alaric's attack in 410, and he is thought to have finished it about 414. Since our passage is toward the beginning of the work, it should be dated early within that time frame. Jerome's translation of the *Homilies* of Origen on Ezekiel is usually assigned to Jerome's time in Constantinople, after his friend Vincentius urged him to this task in about 381. At any rate, Jerome clearly says in *De viris illustribus* 135 that he has already completed the task of translating these *Homilies* of Origen on Ezekiel, and the *De viris illustribus* was composed prior to the *Commentary on Ezekiel*. See, e.g., Ferdinand Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme: sa vie et sa oeuvre*, Specilegium sacrum Lovaniense: Etudes et documents, 1 (Louvain and Paris, 1922), 1:69; Angelo di Berardino, ed., *Patrology*, trans. Placid Solari, O. S. B. (Westminster, Md., 1988), 4:229; J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London, 1975; repr. Peabody, Mass., 1998), 76, 306; and Marcel Borret, S. J., "Introduction" to his edition of *Origène: Homélies sur Ézéchiel*, Sources Chrétiennes (SC), 352 (Paris, 1989), 19.

[21] Origen, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 1.16: "spiritus qui praesidet ad auxiliandum"; "spiritus praesidens animae." For the most part, these *Homilies* survive only in the Latin translation of Jerome. A few Greek fragments also survive in collections of excerpts, however, and these speak of the eagle as "ἡ βοηθοῦσα δύναμις, τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ" (1 Cor. 2:11), and "τὸ βοηθοῦν τῇ ψυχῇ". See SC 352, 94 (Jerome's translation only); GCS 33, 339–40 (Jerome's translation with some of the Greek fragments); PL 25, 706–7 (Jerome's translation only); PG 13, 681b–c (Jerome's translation with surviving Greek fragments published as footnotes).

purposes is that the brief passage in the *Homilies* does not ascribe the word *syneidēsis* to the eagle or the spirit.[22]

The *Homilies* of Origen, then, cannot be Jerome's only source for the "Platonic" interpretation of Ezekiel. Perhaps it is not even his primary one, for in Eusebius's list of the works of Origen, there appears a *Commentary on Ezekiel* that runs to twenty-five books;[23] Jerome himself refers in a letter to this *Commentary*, although he says that it extends to twenty-nine books.[24] This large commentary is unfortunately not extant; our appetite for its exegesis of Ezekiel's vision is whetted by Origen's remark in the *Contra Celsum* that he will not appeal in that work to the visions of Ezekiel or Isaiah because they are too profound to discuss with someone like Celsus:

> I could quote the statements about the seraphim, as they are called by the Hebrews, described by Isaiah as hiding the face and the feet of God, and about what are called *cherubim, which Ezekiel portrayed, and of their shapes, as it were, and of the way in which God is said to be carried upon the cherubim.* But, as these things are expressed in *a very obscure form* because of the unworthy and irreligious who are not able to understand the deep meaning and sacredness of the doctrine of God, I have not thought it right to discuss these matters in this book.[25]

It is tempting, to be sure, to speculate that in his lost *Commentary on Ezekiel* Origen provided a more complete account of his views on Ezekiel's vision than he did in the *Homilies* and that Jerome is summarizing this longer account in his report in his own *Commentary*.

Intriguing in this regard is a small *Significatio in Ezechielem* that has circulated under the name of Gregory Nazianzen and also of Evagrius Ponticus but that has plausibly been viewed as a collection of excerpts from Origen on Ezekiel.[26] This short text provides few details, but it does forthrightly

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[22] More to the point, neither does the passage from the *Homilies* use in this context the word *conscientia*, which Jerome could be expected to use in his Latin translation (see previous note).

[23] *History of the Church* 6.32.

[24] *Ep. 33, to Paula*, 4, CSEL 54 (Vienna, 1996).

[25] "Ἐδυνάμην δὲ παραθέσθαι τὰ περὶ τῶν παρ' Ἑβραίοις καλουμένων σεραφίμ, ἀναγεγραμμένων ἐν τῷ Ἡσαΐᾳ, καλυπτόντων τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ τοὺς πόδας τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ τὰ περὶ τῶν ὀνομαζομένων χερουβιμ, ἃ διέγραψεν ὁ Ἰεζεκιήλ, καὶ τῶν ὡσανεὶ σχημάτων αὐτῶν, καὶ τίνα τρόπον ὀχεῖσθαι λέγεται ἐπὶ τῶν χερουβὶμ ὁ θεός· ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ πάνυ κεκρυμμένως εἴρηται διὰ τοὺς ἀναξίους καὶ ἀσέμνους, μὴ δυναμένους παρακολουθῆσαι μεγαλονοίᾳ καὶ σεμνότητι θεολογίας, οὐχ ἡγκησάμην πρέπον εἶναι ἐν τῷ συγγράμματι τούτῳ περὶ αὐτῶν διαλεχθῆναι" (*Origène: Contre Celse*, 3 [Livres 5 et 6], ed. Marcel Borret, S.J., SC 147 [Paris, 1969], 6.18. English translation by Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* [Cambridge, 1965]). Emphasis mine.

[26] See the *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* (Turnhout, 1974), 2:199, which cites Th. Sinko, *De traditione orationum Gregorii Nazianzeni: Pars I* (Krakow, 1917), 160–67. Also see, Hein-

identify the eagle in Ezekiel's vision with *syneidēsis* and indeed ties *syneidēsis* to 1 Cor. 2:11: "We say the human being is the *logikon*, the lion is the *thumikon*, the calf is the *epithumētikon*, the eagle is the *syneidēsis*, located above the others; this is the spirit said by Paul to be 'of a man'. . . ."[27] Since, as was noted, the *Homilies* do not speak of *syneidēsis* in conjunction with the eagle, one wonders if perhaps the compiler of this *Significatio* had seen Origen's now lost *Commentary*, or at least knew a tradition of excerpts based upon it. This is a hypothetical reconstruction of a lost text, however, and what is really needed in order to show convincingly that Jerome is recording Origen's interpretation of *syneidēsis* is a text in which Origen clearly links *syneidēsis* or *conscientia* with *pneuma* or *spiritus*.

Such a text is provided in Origen's interpretation of Rom. 2:14–15, the famous "natural law" passage in Paul's letter. In treating the phrase "conscience gives testimony" in verse 15 in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Origen gives a relatively extended account that reads in part:

> [I]t appears necessary to discuss what the Apostle is referring to by "conscience," whether it is something substantially different from the heart or the soul. For it is said elsewhere of the conscience that it condemns and is not condemned, and that it judges man but is itself not judged. As John says, "if our conscience does not condemn us, we have confidence before God" (1 John 3:21).[28] And again Paul himself says in another passage, "this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience" (2 Cor. 1:12). And so I perceive here such great freedom that indeed it is constantly rejoicing and exulting in good works but is never convicted of evil deeds. Instead it rebukes and convicts the soul to which it cleaves. In my opinion the conscience is identical with the spirit, which the Apostle says is with the soul as we have taught above. The conscience functions like a pedagogue to the soul, a guide and companion, as it were, so that it might admonish it concerning better things or correct and convict it of faults. It is of the conscience that the Apostle can say, "For no one among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man that is in him" (1 Cor. 2:11). And that is the spirit of the conscience (*conscien-*

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rich Appel, *Die Lehre der Scholastiker von der Synteresis* (Rostock, 1891), 3–5; and Blic, "Syndérèse ou conscience?" 151–52.

[27] "Νομίζομεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἶναι τὸ λογικόν· τὸν λέοντα, τὸ θυμικόν· τὸν μόσχον, τὸ ἐπιτθυμητικόν· τὸν ἀετὸν, τὴν συνείδησιν ἐπικειμένην τοῖς λοιποῖς, ὅ ἐστι πνεῦμα παρὰ Παύλου λεγόμενον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου· . . ." (PG 36, 665a).

[28] The text of *The Greek New Testament*, ed. Kurt Aland, et al. (4th ed. [Stuttgart, 1994]), uses "heart" or καρδία" at 1 John 3:21, not "conscience" or συνείδησις, and does not give the latter even as a variant. Perhaps Origen is here running together in his mind "heart" and "conscience" and is not consulting the text directly; if so, he gives us the answer to the question about the relationship between "heart" and "conscience" that he raises at the beginning of the passage quoted here. Scheck points out that Origen also uses "conscience" in his citation of 1 John 3:21 in his *Homilies on Jeremiah* 16.3; see his translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans*, 133 n. 239.

tiae spiritus), concerning which he says, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit" (Rom. 8:16).[29]

This seems sufficient to establish that the Platonic interpretation of Ezekiel recorded by Jerome preserves the view of *syneidēsis* of Origen, for this passage specifically links the spirit of a human being of 1 Cor. 2:11 with the Apostle's term *conscientia* or *syneidēsis* and it describes conscience as possessing a great independence from the soul it instructs or rebukes. Perhaps Jerome is reporting an interpretation contained in Origen's now lost *Commentary on Ezekiel*, or — less likely in my view — perhaps he is reporting an interpretation based on an amalgamation of Origen's texts such as the *Homilies on Ezekiel* and the *Commentary on Romans* just quoted. At any rate, though, the description of conscience preserved in Jerome's account belongs to Origen's anthropology. Jerome does not expressly attribute the position he reports to Origen, to be sure, but rather harshly includes him among "those who follow the foolish wisdom of the philosophers." Presumably this is explained by the fact that, although Jerome had been an ardent admirer of Origen during the earlier part of his life, by the time he came to compose his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, he had been converted to the anti-Origenist side in the so-called "first Origenist controversy" and had also broken decisively with his former friend Rufinus, who still supported Origen.

Two Further Questions

I have argued that much of the interpretation of Ezekiel's vision recounted by Jerome can be traced *ultimately* to Plato's dialogues, but that the understanding of the eagle of *syneidēsis* can be traced *immediately* to Origen's exegesis of Paul. Two further questions arise, however, which, if

[29] "Unde necessarium uidetur discutere quid istud sit quod conscientiam apostolus uocat; utrumne alia sit aliqua substantia quam cor uel anima. Haec enim conscientia et alibi dicitur quia reprehendat non reprehendatur et judicet hominem non ipsa iudicetur sicut ait Ioannes: 'si conscientia inquit nostra non reprehendat nos fiduciam habemus ad Deum (1 John 3:21).' Et iterum ipse Paulus alibi dicit: 'quia gloriatio nostra haec est testimonium conscientiae nostrae (2 Cor. 1:12).' Quia ergo tantam ejus uideo libertatem quae in bonis quidem gestis gaudeat semper et exsultet, in malis uero non arguatur sed ipsam animam cui cohaeret reprehendat et arguat, arbitror quod ipse sit spiritus qui ab apostolo esse cum anima dicitur, secundum quod in superioribus edocuimus, uelut paedagogus ei quidam sociatus et rector ut eam uel de melioribus moneat, uel de culpis castiget et arguat; de qua et dicat apostolus: 'quia nemo scit hominum quae sunt hominis nisi spiritus hominis qui in ipso est (1 Cor. 2:11);' et ipse sit conscientiae spiritus de quo dicit: 'ipse spiritus testimonium reddit spiritui nostro (Rom. 8:16)'" (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 2.9.3–4; in the translation of Rufinus, English trans. by Scheck. This passage is enumerated as 2.7 in the Latin edition of Hammond Bammel; n. 17 above.)

answerable, could even further pinpoint Jerome's sources for the "Platonic" interpretation that he recounts.

The first question is this: if indeed Origen was the source of the interpretation of Ezekiel's eagle reported by Jerome, might not Origen also be the source of the rest of the interpretation? It was argued above that the first three faces and the chariot can be traced to passages in Plato's dialogues, but someone subsequent to Plato had to connect the Platonic texts to Ezekiel, and perhaps that someone was Origen himself, in which case he would be the *immediate* source of the whole of Jerome's "Platonic" interpretation. This suggestion is not implausible, for the earliest surviving text that expressly and unambiguously connects the Platonic tripartition with Ezekiel's vision is Origen's *Homilies*.

Several considerations force us to be cautious about such an assertion, however. The primary text that would incline one to think that it was *not* Origen who linked the anthropology of the *Republic* to the vision of Ezekiel is to be found in *On First Principles*, where Origen indeed reports the tripartite division of the soul but ascribes it to "certain Greek philosophers" and says that he does not find it "to be strongly confirmed by the authority of divine scripture."[30] Second, it should be noted that in the brief passage in the *Homilies* in which the animals of Ezekiel are related to Plato's tripartition, Origen does not seem to take a strong position on the relationship between the three animals and the three parts of the soul, but says that the matter has been discussed by others.[31] Perhaps Origen means in this passage only to say that the tripartition of the soul has been discussed by others, in which case he might simply be referring to Plato or Platonists. It is not impossible, though, but that he means that the *connection* between Ezekiel and the tripartite soul has been discussed by others, in which case Origen might not be the sole source of Jerome's Platonic interpretation. Third, there is a text in Tertullian's *De anima* — a text that would probably be older than Origen's work — which clearly refers to the Platonic tripartition and may obliquely refer to a connection between that tripartition and Ezekiel.[32] Tertullian says that Plato divided the soul into its desiring, spirited, and rational aspects, and he associates flies with the first, the lion with the second, and God with the third. David N. Bell speculates that perhaps there is a confusion between Tertullian's Latin word for flies, *musca*, and the Greek word for calf or young ox, *moschos*, in which case Tertullian's text

[30] Origen, *On First Principles* 3.4.1: "non valde confirmari ex divinae scripturae auctoritate pervideo" (ed. Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, *Origène: Traité des principes*, 3 [Livres 3 et 4], SC 268 [Paris, 1980]). English trans. G. W. Butterworth, *Origen: On First Principles* (New York, 1966), 231.

[31] *Homilies* 1.16: ". . . de qua etiam aliorum opinionibus disputatum est."

[32] Tertullian, *De anima* 16.3 (CCL 2, 803, 20–25; CSEL 20, 322, 7–12; PL 2, 715a).

might preserve an echo of a pre-Origenist correlation between Plato's tripartition and Ezekiel's animals.[33] Fourth, there are passages in the *De virginitate* and *De Abraham* of Ambrose which clearly connect Plato's tripartition and Ezekiel's vision but include elements not mentioned in Origen, or at least not mentioned in the surviving texts of Origen on Ezekiel.[34] Ambrose associates the interpretation he reports with "Greeks" and with philosophers rather than directly with Origen, and instead of Jerome's *syneidēsis* he speaks of *dioratikon*, which would mean something like "the discerning principle" or "the clear-sighted power."[35] Given that there are some important differences between the interpretation that Ambrose reports and the surviving texts of Origen, a non-Origenist source for Ambrose's passage cannot be definitively ruled out.

Taken together, these four pieces of evidence point to the *likelihood* that the interpretation associating the Platonic tripartition of the soul with the first three faces of Ezekiel's vision does not have Origen as its source. Still, one must admit that this evidence is too scant and too ambiguous to permit us simply to assert that it is impossible that it was Origen who first associated Plato and Ezekiel.

If the first of the further questions that need to be asked is whether Origen could be the source of the first part of Jerome's interpretation, the second question is whether Plato might not be the ultimate source of the second part of Jerome's interpretation, the part of the interpretation that discusses *syneidēsis*. Since it is possible to find the source of the Platonic interpretation of the first three faces in Plato's dialogues themselves, it might be unsatisfying to some if the interpretation of the fourth face is not also traced directly to Plato, but instead, as has been suggested above, to Origen's exegesis of Paul.

Plato does not use the word *syneidēsis*, however, and Origen is quite clear in the passage from his Romans commentary quoted above that his doctrine of spirit or conscience is based on Scripture rather than philosophy.[36] Nevertheless, it must be conceded that in addition to a long tradition of biblical

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[33] David N. Bell, "The Tripartite Soul and the Image of God in the Latin Tradition," *Recherche théologie ancienne et médiévale* 47 (1980): 23 n. 40.

[34] Ambrose, *De virginitate* 18.112–14 (PL 16, 295a–96a), *De Abraham* 2.8.54 (CSEL 32/1, 607, 9–16, PL 14, 480a–b).

[35] Both διορατικὸν and συνείδησις have as their roots, however, words pertaining to sight, and both are used in Origen's writings. Ambrose does not assign each of the parts of the tripartition to a particular bodily organ, as does the interpretation discussed by Jerome; however, Ambrose does apply a cardinal virtue to each of the parts and in this way *resembles* Plato in book 4 of the *Republic*.

[36] Crouzel suggests that Origen's concept has its ultimate origin in the Hebrew word *ruach* rather than in Plato, see *Origen*, 88; see also, however, the comprehensive account of both Christian and non-Christian discussions of spirit in late antiquity provided by

Platonism in Alexandria, represented preeminently by Philo, Clement, and Origen, there was also a famous tradition of nonbiblical Platonism in the city, represented famously by Plotinus, and that the Plotinian teaching of a *nous* that transcends *psychē* and through which an individual has an attachment to the One is well-known.[37] Nonbiblical Platonists were writing about entities that transcended the *psychē* even before Plotinus, however, as can be seen, for example, in the remarkable dialogue of Plutarch, *On the Daimōn of Socrates*. There Timarchus tells an extraordinary story in which it is recounted that, above and beyond the *psychē* there exists what the many call *nous*, but which is in fact each person's *daimōn*. This *daimōn* helps lead the soul in a straight path when the passions tend to jerk it in wrong directions, and it is the source of the remorse and shame the soul feels at its misdeeds.[38] Socrates, of course, was the first of the "Platonic" teachers to speak of his *daimōn*, and it is therefore not unthinkable but that Socrates' description of his personal *daimōn* in Plato's dialogues could constitute an indirect source for Jerome's description of *syneidēsis*.[39]

Such similarities between Platonic texts and Origen's teaching on conscience are very imprecise and nebulous, however; the most that can be said is that perhaps Plato or Platonism indirectly influenced Origen's understanding of Paul's teaching on conscience. One cannot draw a direct line from the eagle of *syneidēsis* in Jerome's report to the Platonic dialogues in the same way that one can draw direct lines connecting the other three animals to the *Republic*.

Conclusion

It is fair to say that Jerome's preservation of the Platonic interpretation of the first three faces of Ezekiel's vision — clever as that interpretation was — had relatively little influence on later Christian thought. Jerome's preservation of Origen's theory of conscience, however, has had a deep and long-lasting influence on subsequent Christian reflection, for Origen bequeathed to Christianity a sophisticated anthropology in which the Pauline conscience

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Gérard Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma: Du Stoïcisme à S. Augustin* (Paris, 1945).

[37] It was the opinion of Eusebius (*History of the Church* 6.19) that Ammonius Saccas, the teacher of Plotinus, had also once been the teacher of Origen.

[38] E.g., 588e, 592b. Socrates professes to marvel at Timarchus's story.

[39] See, however, the cautionary remarks of Ernest L. Fortin in "The Political Implications of Augustine's Theory of Conscience," *Augustinian Studies* 1 (1970): 133–52; repr. in *Ernest L. Fortin: Collected Essays*, ed. J. Brian Benestad (Lanham, Md., 1996) 2:75–78. In Plato, Socrates' *daimôn* is discussed especially at *Theages* 128d–31a; also *Ap.* 31d, 40a–c, *Euthphr.* 3b, *Resp.* 496c, *Tht.* 151a, *Phdr.* 242b–c, *Euthydemus* 272e.

is elevated far beyond soul and achieves an extraordinary independence from soul, however Platonic and tripartite the latter may or may not be.

It was with this Origenist notion of a conscience transcending soul that the medieval Scholastics studied by Lottin would have to contend, and the medieval Aristotelians did not find it particularly easy to force Origen's idea into their Peripatetic anthropology. The medieval efforts, moreover, would be complicated by two problems. First, as noted at the beginning of this essay, the text of Jerome that the medievals possessed came to read *synderesis* instead of *syneidēsis*. This seemed to them to imply a distinction between *synderesis* and *conscientia*, even though they recognized that the former was somehow related closely to the latter in the passage from Jerome. This confusion forced the Scholastics into a myriad of subtle distinctions and reflections about the general problem of conscience. Second, in a blunder of remarkable proportions, the fact that in this passage Jerome was reporting not his own view but that of those who follow the "foolish wisdom of the philosophers" was overlooked, presumably because the passage from Jerome had been incorporated into the *glossae* without the warning that preceded it in the original *Commentary*. The masters were thus left with the mistaken impression that the interpretation recorded by Jerome was held by Jerome himself,[40] and he was now frequently enlisted in support of the very teaching that he had criticized. It is no small irony that Jerome, a great and sometimes vehement critic of Origen, passed on to the medieval period an account of his adversary's theory of conscience under the authority of his own illustrious name.

Whatever its subsequent influence, though, the interpretation recorded by Jerome is also important in its own right because of the glimpse it gives us into one prevalent strand of early Christian thought. There are, of course, many questions that one would like to ask of these commentators who follow Plato, not the least of which is whether they genuinely held that Ezekiel's animals were meant to be understood by means of Plato's, or whether they simply wanted a way to present Platonic insights under the guise of Christian piety. In any case, the interpretation of the Platonists should make us ponder again the astonishing experiment with philosophy undertaken by the daring thinkers of the Patristic era.

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[40] Some of the manuscripts of the early masters even mistakenly ascribe the position not to Jerome but to Gregory the Great. See Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, 2:140 n. 1.