

The Netherlands Institute at Athens



International Symposium

**Nature and Human Nature in Ancient Greek Philosophy
and its reception**



3 October 2023

The Netherlands Institute at Athens

Organized by:

Dr. Melina G. Mouzala, University of Patras

Emmy Makri, The Netherlands Institute at Athens

Session 1

- 10.00-10.15 Prof. Dr Ann Brysbaert, Netherlands Institute at Athens and Dr Melina Mouzala, University of Patras
Welcome
- 10.15-10.40 Claudia Marsico, University of Buenos Aires
Phaedo of Elis, physiognomy, and human nature in Plato's *Phaedo*
- 10.40-10.50 Discussion
- 10.50-11.15 Teun Tieleman, University of Utrecht
Galen on Human Nature: Individual and Cosmos
- 11.15-11.25 Discussion
- 11.25-11.45 Coffee break
- 11.45-12.10 Alain Lernould, Université de Lille
Universal Nature and Human Nature in the Platonic Tradition
- 12.10-12.20 Discussion
- 12.20-12.45 Alexandra Michalewski, CNRF
The individual soul and its relation to divine principles according to Plotinus
- 12.45-12.55 Discussion
- 12.55-13.15 General discussion
- 13.15-15.00 Lunch break

Session 2

- 15.00-15.25 István Bodnár, Central European University
Alexander of Aphrodisias' discussion of nature in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*
- 15.25-15.35 Discussion

- 15.35-16.00 Frans de Haas, Leiden University
Alexander of Aphrodisias on cosmic order
- 16.00-16.10 Discussion
- 16.10-16.35 Melina G. Mouzala, University of Patras
Alexander of Aphrodisias, Simplicius and Philoponus on Nature and Soul as Principles and Causes of Natural Things
- 16.35-16.45 Discussion
- 16.45-17.00 General Discussion
- 17.00-17.15 Coffee break

Session 3

- 17.15-17.40 Fr. Loudovikos, Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens
17.40-17.50 Discussion
- 17.50-18.15 Nikos G. Charalabopoulos, University of Patras
Natural Imagery in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*
- 18.15- 18.25 Discussion
- 18.25-18.50 Elias Tempelis, Hellenic Naval Academy
The iatrophilosopher Thomas Mandakassis (1709-1796) and the reception of ancient medicine in his work *De similibus similium deficientium medicina*
- 18.50-19.00 Discussion
- 19.00-19.15 General discussion
- End of the Symposium & Dinner

ABSTRACTS

Phaedo of Elis, physiognomy, and human nature in Plato's *Phaedo*

Phaedo of Elis was chosen by Plato as the spokesman of the last teachings of Socrates in the manner of an intellectual testament. At the same time, it was the beginning of the theoretical diaspora that occurred after the master's death. The power of this instance overshadowed Phaedo's presence to the point of reducing him to the beautiful young man broken by grief whose hair Socrates strokes in *Phaedo*, 89b-c. Hence, he is a colorful but secondary character in the picture about the death of the totemic father of philosophy. However, a more careful examination brings a second reading to the surface, largely changing the original image. In this presentation, I will review the discussions among the Socratics about anthropology to infer why Plato may have chosen Phaedo as the central character of the dialogue with his name. On that basis, I will reconstruct his theories on human nature and the soul as outlined in the *Zopyrus* since they explore physiognomy to access the soul from the body's features. Finally, I will analyze the similarities of these theses with contemporary theories to trace the horizon of these reflections on nature.

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Galen on Human Nature: Individual and Cosmos

The doctor-philosopher Galen of Pergamon (129-ca. 216 CE) regarded humans as intermediate creatures, with an animal and a divine side. This was a more common view associated with ancient Platonism in particular. But as in other cases, it was conditioned by Galen's experience as a doctor. Thus he analyzed human nature in terms of the mixture of elements or elementary qualities, with consequences both for therapy and for enhancement and perfecting. This also entails that human nature, its health and illness are subjected to the same physical principles that obtain in the natural world or cosmos. As individual humans we are part of a greater whole. I will therefore address the question how exactly Galen conceived of the relation of individual and universal nature. This opens a religious, or theological, perspective integral to Galen's project of developing a philosophical medicine or medical philosophy: the doctor as a servant of God and medicine as an extension of God's creative and sustaining activity.

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Universal Nature and Human Nature in the Platonic Tradition

The ontological triad Intellect-Soul-Nature is reflected as in a mirror in the human being, in which we find the same tripartition intellect-soul-nature. The idea that there is, or not, a substantial difference between the intellect in us and the transcendent Intellect, or between the divine souls (especially the cosmic soul) and the human soul, is well documented in ancient philosophical literature. The present paper aims to throw some light on what differentiates, according to ancient philosophers, particularly the Platonists, the universal Nature from the particular human nature.

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The individual soul and its relation to divine principles according to Plotinus

This paper aims at examining the relationship between the Plotinian soul and the supra-sensible principles. Firstly, focusing on the Porphyrian testimonies taken from the *_Vita Plotini_* and the treatise *_On_ _Principles and Matter_*, it will provide an analysis of how Plotinus, as opposed to Longinus, constructs a method of investigation which does not rely on the authority of the ancients. Longinus thus applies to Plato's interpretation standards of analysis which are not those that Platonists like Plotinus recognize as genuinely philosophical. According to Plotinus, only the conversion of the soul to its interiority can be considered to be the real starting point of a philosophical inquiry.

Secondly, the paper will investigate the epistemological and ethical consequences of the Plotinian definition of the soul as the last reality belonging to the intelligible realm, through a compared analysis of Enn. V.1 (10) and Enn. VI.7 (38).

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Alexander of Aphrodisias' discussion of nature in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*

My talk will address some key issues in Alexander's interpretation of Aristotle's account of nature as formulated in his **COMMENTARY ON THE PHYSICS**. Key among these is Alexander's take on the discussion of the different claims of matter and form to be the nature of an entity, and the connection of this interpretative approach to Aristotle's introduction of hylomorphic analysis in Book I. This connects to the second major topic of my talk, about the place and status of teleological considerations in Alexander's account. My talk will concentrate on Alexander's interpretative strategy in tackling the issues of **PHYSICS II**, setting these out also in the context of problems relating to celestial motions and their movers.

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Alexander of Aphrodisias on cosmic order

In Aristotle's works the order of the universe is the product of a number of causal powers, summarized in the maxim 'nature is the cause of order in everything' (*Physics* VIII.1, 252a12). The cooperation of these causes is in several ways analogous to their cooperation on a smaller scale, e.g. within living beings. Aristotle uses analogies with an army, a household (*Metaphysics* 1075a11-25), and a city state (*De motu animalium* 703a30-b2) to explain how a first cause of order exerts its influence throughout a whole. The influential Peripatetic philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias (c. 200 CE) used these and other texts to design a new, in his view more coherent version of Aristotle's cosmology and metaphysics that has dominated later thought on these topics. In this paper I shall set out Alexander's main innovations and examine the question whether they are indeed improvements upon Aristotle.

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Alexander of Aphrodisias, Simplicius and Philoponus on Nature and Soul as Principles and Causes of Natural Things

Simplicius, in his Commentary on Aristotle's *De caelo* quotes a fragment from Alexander of Aphrodisias' lost Commentary, in which Alexander appears to equate the nature and power (δύναμιν) of the divine celestial body with its soul. According to this excerpt, Alexander states that the nature of the divine body would reasonably appear also to be the power of its soul. Simplicius questions how do these views harmonize with Aristotle's writings, since Aristotle in his *Physics* defines nature in a different way than he defines soul in his *De anima*. Given that the soul too is a principle of movement and change in ensouled bodies according to both Plato and Aristotle, both Simplicius and Philoponus, in their comments on Aristotle's *Physics* II. 1-3, raise the question about the distinction between nature and soul considered as principles. In their attempt to find an answer to this question they both set out to explain what kind of principle or source of change nature is in Aristotle's natural philosophy, by comparing it with the soul.

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Natural Imagery in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*

It may come as no surprise that the physical world is a rarity in the literary output attributed to St Dionysius Areopagite. Neither the exposition of the orders of angels nor the taxonomy of human beings in the body of the Church seem, at first sight, the natural textual habitat for extensive mentioning of the variety of (in)animate nature. At the same time, this infrequency provides each such reference with a significance of its own. Whether it be an explanation for the use of theriomorphic similes for the manifestations of God (*CH* 2.4.5), the creation of plants (*Ep.* 9.1), or the activities of the soul (*CH* 2.3.4), the author seems to work with a certain number of conceptual premises – including the notion of *sympatheia* and the homology between human psychic microcosm and the cosmic order.

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The iatrophilosopher Thomas Mandakassis (1709-1796) and the reception of ancient medicine in his work *De similibus similium deficientium medicina*

The representative of the modern Greek Enlightenment Thomas Mandakassis (Kastoria 1709 – Leipzig 1796) was a student of Eugenios Voulgaris and a remarkable patriot, who lived many years in Germany, where he composed works on medicine, philosophy, theology and education. In his doctoral thesis in medicine (*Ὁμοια τῶν ἐλλειπόντων ὁμοίων ἰάματα / De similibus similium deficientium medicina*, Leipzig 1757), which was composed in both Greek and Latin, he underlined that his own aim was to offer to his compatriots all benefits of knowledge and science, so that they could delight their souls and benefit their bodies. Thus, scientific knowledge was believed to allow the logical, immaterial and immortal human soul to experience happiness, which, in its absolute form, characterizes God. From this point of view, Mandakassis praised both the ancient Greeks and his contemporary Europeans for their love for scientific knowledge and its benefits. In Mandakassis' thesis there are 28 references to 9 works of the Hippocratic corpus, 17 citations to 10 works of Galen and also few citations to Plato, Aristotle, Aëtius and Paul of Aegina. Mandakassis' thesis was supervised by the German physician and naturalist Johann Ernst Hebenstreit (1703-1757), whose own writings were based on the works of ancient Greek physicians. Thus, it could be supposed that Hebenstreit recommended the particular topic to Mandakassis and allowed him to use his library.

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