"Where Soul Meets Body: Narsai's Depiction of the Soul-Body Relationship in Context" J. Edward Walters, Rochester College

Introduction

Speculation on the nature of the soul and the precise parameters of the soul-body relationship occupied no small amount of the late-antique literary landscape. In particular, Christian authors of late antiquity—likely motivated by intra-Christian arguments ranging from the resurrection of the dead to Christology—contributed significantly to this literary production, with specific works on the soul originating from Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Augustine, and Nemesius of Emesa. And this brief list only includes dedicated titles on the soul; it does not include the many authors who took up the topic of the soul as part of other works. The 'gnostic' corpus of Nag Hammadi, which includes texts like "Exegesis on the Soul," provides further evidence that Christian readers were interested in the soul as a nexus of philosophical and exegetical instruction. Moreover, Christians were not the only ones engaged in this debate, as neo-platonic philosophers like Porphyry of Tyre, Plotinus, and Iamblichus of Apamea wrote significant treatises that shaped the contours of the soul-body debate in late antiquity.

The sprawling nature of these questions in late antiquity is not surprising given their deep roots in the Greek philosophical tradition. Plato's *Phaedo*, *Timaeus*, and *Phaedrus* along with Aristotle's *De Anima* were widely read, and commentaries of these works circulated in the curriculum of philosophical instruction. ¹⁰ By the time a distinctly Christian intellectual tradition emerged (late

¹ De anima (PL 2.681-798); edition: *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De anima*, ed. by J. H. Waszink (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1947); ET: "A Treatise on the Soul," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. III, trans. by Peter Holmes, ed. by A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and C Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885).

² De anima et resurrectione (PG 46.11-160); edition: S. Gregorii Nysseni De anima et resurrectione cum sorore sua Macrina dialogus, ed. by J. G. Krabinger (Leipzig, 1837); ET: St. Gregory of Nyssa: On the Soul and the Resurrection, trans. by Catharine P. Roth, Popular Patristics Series 12 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992).

³ Ad Tatianum De anima (PG 10.1137-1146). The authorship of this work is dubious, but it is attributed to Gregory; ET: "On the Topic of the Soul," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VI, trans. by S. D. F. Salmond, ed. by A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and C Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886).

⁴ De anima et eius origine; edition: Sancti Aureli Augustini De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum ad Marcellinum libri tres; De spiritu et littera liber unus; De natura et gratia liber unus; De natura et origine animae libri quattuor; Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum libri quattuor, ed. by K. F. Urba and J. Zycha, CSEL 50 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1913), 303-419; ET: Answer to the Pelagians I, ed. by J. E. Rotelle and trans. by R. J. Teske, WSA 1.23 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 465-561.

⁵ De natura hominis; edition: Nemesius Emesensus De natura Hominis, Graece et Latine, ed. by Christian Frederic Matthaei (Halae/Magdeburg: Gebauer, 1802); ET: Nemesius On the Nature of Man, trans. by R. W. Sharples and P. J. van der Eijk, Translated Texts for Historians (Oxford: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

⁶ NHC II, 6; edition: "The Expository Treatise on the Soul," ed. by Bentley Layton, in *The Coptic Gnostic Library: Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7, Vol. 2*, ed. by Bentley Layton, Nag Hammadi Studies XX (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 144-168; ET: "Exegesis on the Soul," trans. by Madeleine Scopello and Marin Meyer in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed. by Marvin Meyer (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008), 223-234.

⁷ Porphyry's primary work dealing with the soul is *On Abstinence*; ET: *On Abstinence from Killing animals*, trans. by Gillian Clark (London: Duckworth, 2000).

⁸ Plotinus' discussion of the soul is spread throughout the *Enneads*; edition and ET: *Plotinus*, 7 volumes, ed. and trans. by A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1968-88).

⁹ De anima; edition and ET: Iamblichus' De Anima, ed. by John F. Finamore and John M. Dillon, Philosophia Antiqua 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

¹⁰ The most well-known of these commentaries is Alexander of Aphrodisas' commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*: *Alexander of Aphrodisias*: On the Soul, trans. by Victor Caston, Ancient Commentators on Aristotle (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012); for a collection of other commentators on the *anima* tradition, see Richard Sorabji, ed., *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-600 AD: A Sourcebook, Vol. 1: Psychology (with Ethics and Religion)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

2nd/early 3rd century), debates on the soul had moved well beyond a simple Platonic/Aristotelian divide, as Epicureans, Stoics, and middle- and neo-platonists refined their positions dialectically. Beyond philosophical treatises, the medical writings of Galen also proved to be significant in the history of the soul-body problem in late antiquity, which further demonstrates the pervasiveness of this issue in the thought of ancient authors.¹¹ Thus, any author of late antiquity who ventured to espouse on the soul immediately stepped into a deep quagmire of sources, polemics, and debates.¹²

This no less true of authors who wrote in Syriac than in Greek and Latin. By the time Narsai of Nisibis began his homiletical career in the mid-fifth century, there were already competing traditions about the soul in the nascent Syriac literary corpus. The so-called "Hymn of the Soul" (or "Hymn of the Pearl'') circulated as part of the Acts of Thomas in Syriac, 13 Memra 28 of the Book of Steps addresses the topic of the body-soul relationship, 14 and a significant portion of Demonstration 6 ("On the Bnay Qyama") from the Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage is dedicated to the soul-body relationship. 15 Moreover, although Ephrem the Syrian did not compose any works specifically on the topic of the soul, it is a frequent subject in his hymns, particularly in the cycle known as the Hymns on Paradise. 16 Narsai's contemporary, Jacob of Serugh, also addressed the topic of the soul in some of his writings.¹⁷ Other than Ephrem—who was clearly directly influential on Narsai's thought—it is not certain that Narsai was familiar with any of these previous or contemporary works dealing with the soul; but regardless of his awareness of them, Narsai's thoughts on the soul emerge against a backdrop of these pre-existing literary traditions. Like any other author in late antiquity, Narsai's treatment of the soul is embodied within a particular time and place; thus, like any philosopher of late antiquity knew, we cannot do justice to the content of Narsai's thought (the soul) without also attending to the context in which it emerges (the body).

Narsai's Memra "On the Soul"

¹¹ Galen addresses the matter of the soul in multiple works, but primarily we can point to his fragmentary *The Faculties of the Soul Follow the Mixture of the Body (QAM)* [also known as *The Soul's Dependence on the Body*]; edition: *Quod Animi Mores Corporis Temperamenta Sequantur*, ed. by I. Müller, Scripta Minora II (Leipzig, 1893); ET: P. N. Singer, *Galen: Selected Works: Translated with an Introduction and Notes* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹² Althoguh it is certainly not comprehensive and is written apologetically, Nemesius of Emesa provides an incredibly useful encyclopedic history of these sources and debates as he saw them.

¹³ Edition and ET: *The Hymn of the Soul contained in the Syriac Acts of St. Thomas*, ed. by A. A. Bevan, Texts and Studies V, 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897).

¹⁴ Edition and ET: *The Syriac Book of Steps 3*, ed. by Robert A. Kitchen and Martien F. G. Parmentier, TeCLA 12c (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014), 168-183.

¹⁵ Edition: Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes, ed. by J. Parisot, Patrologia Syriaca 1.1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894), 239-312; ET: The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage, trans. by Adam Lehto, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 27 (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2010), 169-198. I have argued elsewhere that the portion of Dem. 6 that deals with the topic of the soul (6.14-18) was originally an independent work that was edited together with a separate work on virginity when the corpus of the Demonstrations was created. See J. Edward Walters, "Reconsidering the Compositional Unity of Aphrahat's Demonstrations," in Aaron Michael Butts and Robin Darling Young, eds., Syriac Christian Culture: Beginnings to Renaissance (CUA Press, forthcoming).

¹⁶ Edition: Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und contra Julianum, ed. by Edmund Beck, CSCO 174-175, Syr. 78-79 (Louvain: Peeters, 1957); ET: Saint Ephrem. Hymns on Paradise, trans. by Sebastian P. Brock, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990).

¹⁷ S. P. Brock, "An Acrostic Poem on the Soul by Jacob of Sarug," *Sobornost* 23 (2001), 40-44. See also *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Chariot that the Prophet Ezekiel Saw*, trans. by Alexander Golitzin, ed. by Mary T. Hansbury, TeCLA 3 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016), 553-556.

Although the topic of the soul comes up somewhat frequently throughout Narsai's corpus, there is one memra in particular that forms the basis of the present study: Memra 66 "On the Soul." The full title of the work is "On the excellence of the soul and how she protects the body, which is her home." This full title provides a concise summary of the main topic Narsai addresses, namely: the soul's role in guiding and protecting the body. Utilizing classical metaphors (discussed in detail below), Narsai compares the soul to a sailor and a charioteer, steering the body to its goal. But for Narsai, the soul also struggles to protect the body from the dangers of bodily desires, leading the Christian ascetic's fight against the passions.

The memra itself is comprised of 282 couplets. The first ten couplets constitute an anaphora, with the first line of each couplet beginning with the word rest "The beginning of..." This anaphora serves as rhetorical introduction to the primary themes of the homily. The very first couplet sets this tone: "The beginning of wisdom, true wisdom, is fear of the creator / who, from nothing, created everything, visible and invisible." This theme is significant because, although the topic of this memra is the body-soul relationship, Narsai constantly reminds his hearers that speculation about the composition of human existence should lead to praise of the creator who formed and shaped everything. Indeed, in the very first line following the anaphora, Narsai declares, "Everyone owes a debt of love to the one who fashioned them." Even in Narsai's echo of biblical language here—"created everything, both visible and invisible" there is foreshadowing of the discussion of the visible body and invisible soul. Thus, with an opening anaphora to set the stage, Narsai invites his hearers to contemplate their relationship to the creator as created things.

Narsai's Depiction of the Soul and Soul-Body Relationship in Context

There are many ways one could organize a sketch of Narsai's views on the body and soul. This is especially true since the genre of Narsai's work is a metrical homily, not a philosophical or theological treatise. Narsai is not pursuing a single argument or moving logically from one point to the next. In poetic fashion, Narsai floats from one topic to another, and he frequently returns to a topic or an image multiple times without connecting the dots of every other topic he addresses between them. So, recognizing that these categories are arbitrary and somewhat foreign to the way that Narsai presents his views, I have nonetheless organized this sketch with the following schema: 1) the origin and generation of souls, 2) the qualities of the soul, 3) the soul's responsibility within the body, 4) the fate of the soul at death, and 5) the soul/body relationship as a microcosm for theological issues.

In order to take Narsai on his own terms rather than merely derivative of previous authors, I have tried to arrange this comparative analysis by letting Narsai's descriptions of the soul lead the inquiry. That is, I do not begin with other authors' treatments of the soul to see how Narsai compares and contrasts with them; rather, I begin with Narsai, allowing his concerns to set the stage for the comparison. Hopefully, this arrangement will allow readers to approach Narsai as an original thinker who was clearly aware of broader philosophical trends regarding the body-soul problem, but who also felt comfortable adapting classical imagery of the body-soul relationship for his own purposes.

¹⁸ The memra number here comes from the "Narsai Clavis" edited by Kristian S. Heal and maitained at: https://cpart.mi.byu.edu/home/narsai/memre/narsai-clavis/. In the Mingana edition of Narsai's works, this memra is listed as number thirty-nine (M.II.238-254).

¹⁹ Syr: بَكُ هَبُهُ وَهِ بَلِعَةً هَوْدِيقًا كَالَّهُ اللَّهُ اللَّلِي اللَّهُ اللَّا اللَّهُ اللِلْمُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ الْمُعِلِمُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللَّهُ

^{20 66.1-2;} M.II.238.4-5: يع يَجْمَ عَوْمَ اللهِ عَلَى اللهُ عَلَى اللهُ عَلَى اللهُ عَلَى اللهُ عَلَى اللهُ اللهُ اللهُ اللهُ عَلَى اللهُ اللهُ

شَوَتُهُ شَوْتُهُ بِنَتِ مِلْتِع لَعَجُوتُهِ عَلَيْهِ £166.21-22; M.II.238.17-18: مِنْهُ مُنْتِ مِلْتِع لَعَجُوتُهِ عَلَيْهِ

²² Cf. Col. 1:16, though it is worth noting that Narsai does not use the same wording as the Peshitta.

1. The Origin and Generation of Souls

Narsai's description of the origin of the soul is rooted in the exegesis of Gen. 2:7, "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (NRSV). Narsai makes the connection between God's breath in the creation of Adam and the origin of the soul twice in this memra. In the first example, Narsai is explicit about the connection between the breath and the spirit: "First the great fashioner forms a figure of limbs / and then breathes into to it the living spirit, and it becomes a soul." The second example is less explicit about God's breath becoming the soul, but even here the connection is fairly clear:

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ەوسىتىل ئېتىر كى ھىمۇرى د دھمۇرخىد.
دەرىرى ئېزى يوزى دۈلاردى مى دەھەر ئىمۇرى «
دىرىرى ئېزى يوزى دەلۇرى مى ئىمۇرى «
دەرىم خۇر دەلى ھە دەرەرىدى دەرىس ئىمۇرى «
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That is, when [God] gave the command that formed Adam, he formed the body and *breathed into his face the living spirit.*²⁴ The breath creates life in the body when it is formed, and life germinates immortality in its mortality.²⁵

Although Narsai does provide an extended exegetical discussion of Gen. 2:7, it is quite clear that he associates the origin of the soul with the breath of God.

In this exegetical conclusion, Narsai joins a chorus of early Christian and Jewish exegetes. Philo of Alexandria, for example, claims, "the soul originated from the Father and ruler of all, for that which [God] breathed into [humanity] was nothing other than Divine breath." Likewise, the author of 4 Ezra also makes this link: "[A]nd it [i.e. the dust/ground] gave to you Adam, a lifeless body. And yet, he was the work of your hands, so you breathed into him the breath of life (נסבל ביבל), and he came alive before you" (4 Ezra 3:5). The explicit link between the soul and the breath of God is also seen quite clearly in the Targum translations of Gen. 2:7. Targum Onqelos renders it thus: "And [God] breathed into [the nostrils] of his face the breath of life, and it became in Adam a spirit uttering speech." And Targum Ps.-Jonathan reads, "And [God] breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the breath became in the body of Adam a spirit capable of speech, to give light to the eyes and hearing to the ears." Finally, the midrashic interpretation of Gen. 2:7 in Bereshit Rabbah also makes this claim even more directly: "This [i.e. באפין באפין teaches that [God] set him up as a lifeless mass, reaching from earth to heaven and then infused a soul (נשמה) into him." These citations suggest that the explicit link between the soul and the breath of God was already well established in Jewish exegesis at an early period.

²³ فَوْتِد يُغِدُ كُوسَدِّم ذِكُ يُنَدِّد : مِن نَفِت تِم نَوْت بَمِن مِنْ مِنْ مِنْ لِعِيد عَنْدُ عَلَيْد كِيك عَلَم مُوْتِد يُغِدُ كُوسِدِ عَنْد يُكُ يُنَدِّد : مِن نَفِت تِم نَوْت تَمِي مُنِمِدُ مِثْنَ لِعَلِيد عَنْد كِي

²⁴ The latter part of this quote is a word for word citation of Gen. 2:7 according to the Peshitta.

²⁵ 66.173-176; M.II.242.24-243.2.

²⁶ Philo, On the Creation of the Cosmos, 18.134-135; cf. Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, 1.4.

²⁷ באפוהי והות באדם לרוח ממלל (Indian Externation Grossfeld, Targum Onkelos to Genesis (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing, 1982), 29; English translation from Bernard Grossfeld, The Targum Ongelos to Genesis, The Aramaic Bible 6 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 44.

²⁸ ונפה בנחירוהי נשמתא דחיי והוות נשמתא בגופא דאדם לרוח ממללא לאנהרות עינין ולמצחות אודנין. Aramaic text from E.G. Clarke, et al, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 1984), 2; English translation from Michael Maher, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis, The Aramaic Bible 1B (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 22.

²⁹ BerR 14.8; Midrash Rabbah: Genesis I, trans. by Rab. H. Freedman (New York: The Soncino Press, 1983), 116.

The exegetical link between God's breath and the origin of the human soul also appears in a variety of early Christian texts, ranging from Tertullian³⁰ and Irenaeus³¹ to "gnostic" texts.³² Likewise, a variety of Christian authors of late antiquity, in both Greek and Latin, also link the origin of the soul with the exegesis of Gen. 2:7, including Gregory Nazianzus,³³ Gregory of Nyssa,³⁴ John Chrysostom,³⁵ Ambrose,³⁶ and Augustine.³⁷ More immediate to Narsai's context, we may also consider Aphrahat, the Persian Sage, who draws a direct link between the human soul (sour province) and the breath of God.³⁸ Given the prominence of this exegesis in both Jewish and Christian sources, particularly in the Aramaic and Syriac traditions, it is not surprising that Narsai's views of the origin of the soul are so clearly tied to the language of Gen. 2:7.

Narsai's reading of Gen. 2:7 may also provide the foundation for his depiction of human composition as bipartite, comprised of body and soul. For Narsai, the soul and body are intimately intertwined, to the extent that neither is complete without the other:

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ورا شخفتها همودوفوه شريد لامعها «
قرائمه يبيا يد بهيا حها الاسالية فرائع «
شعامها الاسالية المرافع مرادا
بخديد بالاسالية المرافع ما شروته «
بالمها ترو ها لاسالية مراساته ما شروداها الاسالية المرافع المرافع
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For it is not possible for [the soul] to do anything without [the body] / just as [the body] is nothing without her.

The creator of everything constructed them as one person / Neither half of the person is complete without the other.

One half of the person is soul, to the extent that she is alive / and her activity does not exist apart from the body. 39

Narsai does not explicitly mention any other theory of human composition, but it is clear that he stakes a claim on bipartite composition. Here, too, Narsai appears to be in concert with the early Syriac tradition, which depicted humans as body and soul without a third component.⁴⁰

Nemesius of Emesa also provides a helpful reference point here. In his treatise on the soul, On the Nature of Man, Nemesius argues in favor of a bipartite human construction. An Nemesius' argument is useful because he provides examples of people who teach other theories. Namely, Nemesius credits Plotinus with distinguishing between soul ($\psi \nu \chi \eta$) and mind ($\nu \nu \nu \nu \nu$), which produces a tripartite division. Furthermore, Nemesius argues that Apollinaris of Laodicea follows Plotinus in

³⁰ On the Soul 3.4.

³¹ Adv. Haer 5.1.3.

³² E.g. Apocalypse of John (II.19.22-28), Hypostasis of the Archons (88.3-5), and Trimorphic Protennoia (45.28-29).

³³ On the Soul (PG 37:446-456), poem 1.1.8.

³⁴ On the Origin of Man; On the Creation of Man 28.1-29.1.

³⁵ Homilies on Genesis, 12.15 (PG 53:103); cf. Homilies on Genesis 13.9.

³⁶ On Isaac and the Soul 2.4.

³⁷ Two Books on Genesis against the Manichaeans 2.8.10.

³⁸ Dem. 6.14: "For in the first birth [humans] are born with a natural spirit (موسد عصيمه) which is created within a person and is not subject to deah, as it says, *The man became a living soul*," Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 192.

³⁹ Memra 66.487-492; M.II.251.19-23.

⁴⁰ Cf. Aphrahat, Dem. 6.14-19; see also *Book of Steps*, Memra 29.1: "According to the nature of his creation, a person is body and soul only," *The Syriac Book of Steps 3*, trans. Robert A. Kitchen and Martien F. G. Parmentier, TeCLA 12c (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014), 158. Note: both Aphrahat and the *Book of Steps* speaks of the spirit as something that indwells people from God, but it is clearly not a third component of human composition.

⁴¹ On the Nature of Man, I.1; this argument is, in fact, the starting place of Nemesius' treatment of the soul.

this regard, which then becomes the basis for his Christological claims regarding Christ's mind. The fact that Nemesius argues in favor of bipartite human composition as an explicitly anti-Apollinarian argument provides some extra context for Narsai's claims, given that Apollinaris' arguments regarding Christ's divinity were so contemptible among the Antiochene exegetes.

Narsai also employs the exegesis of Gen. 2:7 as the basis for his claims about the generation of souls following the initial creation of the soul in Adam. Narsai highlights the order of events in God's creation of humanity: "First, the Divine Will composed a body in the formation of humanity /and after a time, he formed a soul and deposited it within [the body]." This order, then, is re-enacted with every human being. First a body is created, and then it is imbued with a soul:

Her creation was after the body in the construction of Adam, and this same order continues every day in her and the body. First the great fashioner forms a figure of limbs, and then breathes into it the living spirit, and it becomes a soul. He wove a garment of flesh with a spiritual hand, and then laid it over the soul like purple garments. In the darkness he constructs the body and creates the soul, just as when he created creation and placed it in the darkness.

The greatness of his power is constantly proclaimed in our fashioning, within the formation of the body and soul, which happens every day.⁴³

Moreover, Narsai argues in favor of *creatio ex nihilo* for each and every soul: "Her nature comes into being from nothing / insofar as she is similar to angels and spiritual beings," and further: "The souls came into being from nothing; in the beginning, they came into being / and from nothing their existence arises in all generations." In other words, Narsai claims that every soul in every single human being is an act of *creatio ex nihilo*, which seems to preclude the possibility of pre-existent souls (although he does not say this explicitly).

Narsai distinguishes between the ongoing generation of bodies and souls thus: bodies can reproduce themselves; souls cannot. This is, in fact, by design. Narsai tells us that when God

[.] فَكِذْ: كَوْتَوْم هَذِيْتِ وَهِنْ تَجُونُ عَالَمُ : وَتَهُوْ وَتِنْ غِنْهُ وَتِنْ عَنْهُ وَعَنْهُ وَهُمَا عَا

⁴³ 66.147-154, 157-158; M.II.242.8-15.

[.] بع كه هذه تنه هذه هده هدند : حقد ي. يهمه تستخ دهيد ددوشت : 66.141-142; M.II.242.4-5

عب كم يونِه هنه قوشيد تفعيم بهون : معب كم يونِه فيه تفيه تحده منه تونيد :45 66.145-146; M.II.242.7-8

constructed the body, God placed within that body a seed with the purpose of reproducing other bodies, but the soul has no such seed:

نِي جَهِيْهِ هَيْم وَدَدْ مَهْمِيدَ نَهْمِيدَ؛ وهِيه دِفَدِدْ نَيْد فَكِدْ دَوْهِيد كَفَرْدُ: وهِيه دِفَدِدْ نَيْد فَكِدْد وَدْهِيد كَفَرْدَ: وهيه دِفَدِدْ نَيْد فَكِدْد وَدْهِيد كَفَرْدَ: وكه جُعِده نِي وَدَدْد وَدُهْد وَدُوْدِ كَفَرَدُدْ: وكه جُعِدُهُ نَيْد فَكِدْد وَهُويد

Like a foundation, he put a seed in the inner part of the body, and proceeded gradually [to build] him, like a building, unto completion. The matter became a seed for the body, and then it came into existence, and from that body sprouted [another] body that resembles the [first] body. As for the soul, there is no seed that produces another [soul], and it is not in her matter that her nature sprouts within [its] limbs.⁴⁶

And again elsewhere:

ﭘﻪﺭﺩﻩ ﻧﺪﻩ ﺳﯘﻡ ﻣﺮﺗﺪﻩ ﺧﯧﺪﯦﺪﻩﭘﺮﻩ ﺩﯨﻨﯘﻡ ﻳﻮﻳﺪﻩ ﺧﺨﻮﻣﻪ ﻳﻴﻴﺪﻩ ﺧﻐﺎﺗﺪﻩ ﺳﯘﻡ ﻧﻮﻳﺪﻩ ﺧﺨﻮﻣﺎ ﻳﻴﻴﺪﻩ ﺧﯜﺩﭘﺮﻩ ﻧﻮﻳﺪﻩ ﺳﯘﻡ ﻧﻮﭘﺮﻩ ﺧﺨﻮﻣﺎ ﻳﻴﻴﺪﻩ ﺧﺎﺩﭘﺮﻩ ﺗﻮﻳﻴﺪﻩ ﭘﻪﺭﻩ ﻣﺎﻟﻪ ﺳﯘﻡ ﺳﺎﻟﻪﺭﻩ ﺳﯩﺪﯨﺪﻩ ﭘ

We constantly see a great marvel in our fashioning, for a human sprouts forth in the image of a human from the inner seeds. We see the seed, which a human sows into the earth of a human, and although it is contemptible and despised, it turns into a glorious vessel.⁴⁷

Thus, Narsai's theory of the generation of the soul requires God's ongoing creative activity. Bodies can, of course, reproduce, but God alone can create a soul. Human reproduction, then, is an occasion to reflect on the wonder of human composition and God's elegant design of the human form: "The greatness of [God's] power is constantly proclaimed in our fashioning." For Narsai, then, this theory of the generation of souls is not mere philosophical speculation; it is a sign of God's care for humanity and God's activity in the world that should lead humans to glorify their creator.

Once again, Nemesius provides an important point of reference for Narsai. In this case, however, Nemesius disagrees with Narsai's conclusion. Nemesius rejects the idea that the body was created before the soul: "It would be a perversion of the truth, however, if one were to suppose that, because the soul was put into the body after the body had been framed, therefore the soul was created after the body. Moses does not say that the soul was created at that moment at which it was put in the body, nor would it be reasonable to suppose it." In other words, Nemesius rejects the exegesis upon which Narsai bases his claim. For Narsai, it is self-evident that the creation of the soul follows the creation of the body because that is the order in which they appear in the text. Nemesius, for his part, rejects this position on a priori grounds because he believes all souls were created as part of the prematerial creation. Moreover, Nemesius makes his argument within a polemical context against both Eunomius and Apollinaris. Nemesius critiques Eunomius for teaching that the creation of souls after bodies would imply God's ongoing creative activity in the world, which Nemesius rejects based on

⁴⁶ 66.133-138; M.II.241.24-242.2.

⁴⁷ 66.165-168; M.II. 242.19-22.

^{48 66:157;} M.II. 242.14-15: جُنُوهِ جَدِيْهِ مِلْتِهِ مِلْتِهِ مِيْدِهِ مِنْدِهِ مِنْدِيدِهِ مِنْدِيدِهِ مِنْدِهِ مِنْدِهِ مِنْدِهِ مِنْدِيدِهِ مِنْدِيدِهِ مِنْدِيدِهِ مِنْدِيدِهِ مِنْدِيدِهِ مِنْدِهِ مِنْدِيدِهِ مِنْدِهِ مِنْدِهِ مِنْدِيدِهِ مِنْدِي

⁴⁹ Nemesius, On the Nature of Man, 2.17; Telfer, Cyril and Nemesius, 282.

Gen. 2:2.⁵⁰ Thus, it appears that, at least in principle, Narsai and Eunomius shared a common belief regarding the ongoing generation of souls⁵¹—a position that Narsai's fellow Antiochene, Nemesius, explicitly rejects. Clearly, then, there was not necessarily a consensus position on this matter within the Antiochene tradition.

According to Gregory of Nyssa, Macrina provides an interesting middle ground on this topic: she argues against both pre-existent souls and the idea that souls are formed after the body. For Macrina, the soul must be created at the precise moment that the bodily embryo begins to form. ⁵² Thus, for Macrina, neither the body nor the soul can precede the other. Against Apollinaris, Nemesius levels the claim that he teaches that souls reproduce themselves, just as bodies do. ⁵³ Narsai also explicitly rejects this claim, and the fact that Nemesius attributes the idea to Apollinaris may explain why Narsai is so adamantly opposed to it. Indeed, we may justifiably assume that Narsai's insistence that souls do not reproduce by means of a "seed" the way that bodies do is possibly part of a broader anti-Apollinarian polemic.

It is also worth noting that Christians were not the only ones who disagreed with one another on the timing of the creation of the soul and when the soul enters the body. Iamblichus offers a succinct summary of the various philosophical explanations for when and how the soul enters the body. And, indeed, there is some overlap between the Christian and non-Christian debates on this matter; according to Iamblichus' account, non-Christian philosophers also debated whether the soul was generated by means of the seed in the act of reproduction.

2. The Qualities of the Soul

Having established Narsai's view with respect to the origin and generation of souls, we can now consider the qualities that he ascribes to the soul. There are three primary aspects of the soul's activity that stand out in this memra: control of bodily senses, the capacity for speech and reason, and creativity/artistry.

Through a series of evocative poetic images, Narsai depicts the ways that the soul controls the bodily senses. For example:

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ەھْقۇت يۆڭ يوڭ يەڭئى بىغىنى ھۆيە:
ئىڭ غىمۇر، ئەركىرەرب مۇنىڭ ھۆيە:
چە ھەۋرى ئىرىكىرەرب مۇنىڭ ھۆيە:
ئۆھەڭ تىگى تەھۇر، ئىتى ھۆيە كەندىر،
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Like a spring of flowing life, [God] placed [the soul] within the body, through her the dull senses are moistened, so that they produce fruit. Through the drinking of her rationality the body is composed,

⁵⁰ "But of souls arrive out of non-existence, then creation is still going on in defiance of the word of Moses, that 'God rested from all his works." Nemesius, On the Nature of Man, 2.17; Telfer, Cyril and Nemesius, 283-284.

⁵¹ This is not to say that Narsai knew he shared this position with Eunomius, but simply that they happen to have come to the same conclusion.

⁵² G. Nyssa, *On the Soul* 9: "For if we should grant that the soul lives in some particular condition before the body, we would necessarily have to allow that there is some force in those absurd invented doctrines which settle the souls in the bodies through evil. On the other hand, no one with good sense would imagine that the origin of souls is later and younger than the formation of bodies, since everyone knows that none of the soulless beings has in itself the power of movement and growth. But there is no disagreement or doubt that those which are being nourished in the womb have growth and spacial movement. So, the remaining alternative is to suppose that soul and body have one and the same beginning.

⁵³ "The opinion of Apollinarius, on the other hand, was that souls are born of souls, just as bodies are born of bodies, because the soul of the first man comes down, with the bodily succession, to all his offsrping. For Apollinarius denies either that souls pre-existed or that they are being created now." On the Nature of Man, II.17 (284).

⁵⁴ De anima 31-32.

and it sprouts up and gives the sound of praise to its fashioner.⁵⁵

The imagery here is rich: the soul is a fountain, and the body is a tree or plant that 'sprouts' from the water provided by the fountain. Moreover, aside from its life-giving quality, the water of this fountain also 'moistens' the 'dull senses' so that they are able to produce fruit. The end result—the fruit—of the soul's provision is the sound of praise to the creator. Throughout these lines, Narsai intentionally plays with sensory concepts (the sight of a fountain/tree, the taste of drinking from a fountain, the sound of praise) to illustrate the soul as the source of sensation.

Elsewhere Narsai again vividly depicts the soul's capacity for sensation and its function in governing the body's senses:

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Like a harp she engages the visible senses, and the finger of her skillfulness makes sound in word and in hearing. Like a flute transmits wind, it is given a mouth, and she sings through it the sound of a pleasant song. Through a hollow pipe she constantly sings pleasing sounds, and she brings joy to the life of the sorrowful through the joy of her life. Through her spirit of vitality, the dead one⁵⁷ gives praise with sweet sounds, and as if it were his own, it is proud that another has made it perceptible. It is like a pipe deprived of sound and vitality, but when the living soul sings in it, it acquires vitality.

Again, Narsai creatively employs sensory language, particularly of sound, to illustrate his point. Here Narsai invites his hearers to consider the soul as a skillful musician, first as a harp player, then a flutist. The image of the harp player envisions the soul controlling the senses by plucking strings—the strings of a harp do not move themselves to make sound, they must be played by an external force. Likewise, however, even though the soul controls the senses, the soul itself cannot make sounds without a bodily instrument. This interrelationship of the soul and body for sensation is seen clearly in the flute image: the soul sings through the mouth, and through the hollow pipe. Indeed, the body, apart from the soul is "deprived of sound and vitality." The body needs the song of the soul to live, and the soul needs the instrument of the body to sing.

In this imagery, Narsai clearly exhibits the Aristotelian view of the body/soul relationship with regard to the soul's dependence upon the body, which, by and large, became the *de facto* position for many philosophers of all "schools" after Aristotle. Whereas Plato had taught that the soul only relied on the body as a vehicle, Aristotle argued that the soul was the first actuality (ἐντελίχεια), which

⁵⁵ Memra 66.57-60; M.II.239.22-24.

⁵⁶ Memra 66.109-118; M.II.241.8-14.

⁵⁷ i.e. the body, which would be dead without the soul.

governed the capacity to engage in activity.⁵⁸ However, while the soul had this potential, it also needed a physical body to realize this actuality. That is to say: the soul maintained the capacity for sense perception, but it could not actualize this capacity without physical organs connected to a body. Thus, Narsai's depiction of the flute/flute player clearly relies on an assumption that the soul cannot act on its potentiality without the means of a body, and indeed this idea undergirds Narsai's thought elsewhere throughout the homily. Even more specifically, the flute imagery also calls to mind Aristotle's discussion of the larynx: "Hence, as we draw breath, the air enters: and so the impact upon the windpipe, as it is called, of the air breathed is voice, the cause of the impact being the soul which animates the vocal organs." Thus, clearly reliant upon the Aristotelian tradition, Narsai's imagery demands the interdependence of the soul and body.

The harp/lyre imagery of the soul originates in the dialogues of Socrates. According to Plato, a certain Simmias of Thebes pursued a line of questioning with Socrates in which he asserts that bodies, like harps, are "corporeal" (σωματοειδή) and "composite" (σύνθετα) whereas the soul, like the harmony (άρμονία), is "invisible" (ἀόρατον), "incorporeal" (ἀσώματον), and "divine" (θεῖόν). 60 Socrates rejects this argument, though, because—as Simmias notes—this would make the soul too dependent upon the existence of the body. In his commentary on De Anima, Alexander of Aphrodisias also rejects this analogy and dedicates a somewhat lengthy discussion to it. 61 In the Latin tradition, Ambrose of Milan also briefly takes up this topic and argues that the soul is not a harmony (harmonia). ⁶² Nemesius refers explicitly to the Platonic dialogue and agrees that the soul cannot be thought of as a harmony.⁶³ Nemesius' argument is that the soul is a "governor" (ἀρχικός) that rules the body, while a harmony does not govern. However, it is worth pointing out the distinction between Simmias' harmony argument and Narsai's metaphor: Narsai does not claim that the soul is a harmony; rather, in Narsai's image, the soul is the harp-player. This is made clear by his reference to the "finger" that makes the sound on the harp. In this regard, Narsai's use of the metaphor is similar to Plotinus, though the latter argues that the 'harmony' is specifically the emotional part of the soul. ⁶⁴ Thus, it seems that Narsai uses a common trope from soul-body philosophical literature but, like Plotinus, by shifting the metaphor to compare the soul to the musician rather than the tune, he avoids the soul-as-harmony error that many previous philosophers reject.

One of the most frequently occurring capacities that Narsai attributes to the soul is هكيكه or مهيكة, the 'capacity for speech/reason'. This is, of course, related to the issue of the senses. The body has the mouth (as we have just seen with the flute imagery), but only the soul has معينا which puts sounds through the mouth. For Narsai, this capacity for speech/reason is a sign that humans are created in God's image: "[As an] impression in his image, [God] bound within him his creative power / silence in his body, but also the capacity for speech in the formation of his soul." "65

In classical Greek psychology, the soul's capacity for reason/speech ($\lambda \delta \gamma \sigma \varsigma$) is one of the primary qualities that distinguishes human souls from the souls of other living beings—the distinction

⁵⁸ De anima II.1 (412a27).

⁵⁹ De Anima 8.11; Hicks, 89.

⁶⁰ Plato, Phaedo 85e-86a.

⁶¹ De anima 24.18-26.30.

⁶² On Isaac and the Soul 2.4 (PL 14.529-530).

⁶³ On the Natrure of Man, II.14.

⁶⁴ Enneads 3.6: "But the emotional part of the soul remains in the form of a tune (ἀρμονία). The causes of meovement are analogous to the player, and the parts which receive the shocks from emotion night bear an analogy to the strings." Translation from Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators*, Vol. 1, 183.

between rational souls and irrational souls.⁶⁶ Moreover, as we have already seen, the Aramaic Targum tradition explicitly links the creation of the soul in Gen. 2:7 with the capacity for speech. Nemesius, like Narsai, argues that the "rational" aspect of human existence, which distinguishes human nature from animals and plants, is proof that humans are created in God's image.⁶⁷

The same couplet from Narsai cited above also introduces another divine quality that God has granted to the soul: creativity or artistry. Throughout the memra, Narsai uses two words for the creative ability within the human soul: 168 As demonstrated in the previous citation, is an impression of God's own nature, but it is also a mystery that causes humans to inquire into their own nature, and there find God:

In its soul, [God] placed the great treasure of his creativity so that everything that is made might request from her [the soul] what is needed for their lives The human soul is a treasury of hidden things for in it, the infinite power of the creator is contained. Hidden secrets are concealed within the inquiry into her formation. and they cannot be explored except through the power of her creativity. ⁶⁹

So, by implanting God's own creative abilities within the soul, God grants to humans the ability to speculate about human nature as a means by which they might learn something about their creator. Narsai returns to this precise theme again later in the memra:

O painter, how wise is your creative power, that your greatness is revealed in humanity—the work of your hands! As on a tablet, you have depicted the world in body and soul, so that heaven and earth might seek you through its revelation.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Though later commentators on the classical tradition were by no means in agreement about this. Porphyry, in particular, should be noted because he argued that animals did have a rational soul because, regardless of whether humans can understand them, they can speak and communicate with their own kind; see Porphyry, *Abstinence*, 3.3.4; 3.4.4. Moreover, Porphyry also notes that some birds are even capable of mimicking human speech, which suggests a rational soul; *Abstinence*, 3.4.7.

⁶⁷ On the Nature of Man, 1.2-3. Indeed, while recognizing that animals do have varying levels of communication abilities, Nemesius argues that humans alone have "articulate speech" (ἔναρθρος διάλεκτος) attached to "thought" (διάνοια) and "reasoning" (λογισμός), On the Nature of Man, 1.3.

⁶⁸ Generally Narsai uses تفصمن when he refers to God's creative ability and معتممن when he refers to the artistic or creative ability of the soul. However, there is at least one occasion where he uses تفصمن in reference to the soul, so his usage of these terms is not a clear distinction of divine as opposed to human capacities.

^{69 66.39-44;} M.II.239.10-14.

⁷⁰ 66.353-356; M.II.247.22-248.1.

Here again we see the theme, as with acceptance, that God has given particular qualities or abilities to the soul that, in turn, make the created thing seek out its creator, in order that it might rightly give praise where praise is due.

3. The Soul's Responsibility Within the Body

In addition to its capacities and functions that the soul performs within the body, Narsai also provides extensive reflection on the soul's responsibility within the body. Again, like his treatment of the qualities of the soul, Narsai's description of the soul-body relationship relies heavily on creative images. For example, early in the memra Narsai uses nautical imagery:

By her speed [the body] crosses the sea as if upon land, and the weight of its body does not cause her to sink in the floods. Like an anchor she clings, the captain of its corporeality, keeping it from injuries, so that it is not harmed. Following her direction, it travels like a sailor in the starlight, and she navigates the path of [its] journey to a safe harbor.⁷¹

One interesting element of this metaphor is the creativity that Narsai employs to describe the function of the soul. Despite the fact that he maintains a constant image of nautical navigation over six lines, the body is clearly the boat, but the identification of the soul shifts throughout this chain of metaphors: it is speed, an anchor, a captain, and a navigator. It is all of these things at the same time, and it seems that Narsai employs this multiplicity of roles intentionally to show just how much the soul does for its vessel. By performing each of these roles, the soul navigates its boat toward a safe harbor.

The sailor-ship analogy of the soul's relationship to the body is at least as old as Aristotle, though Aristotle does not make significant use of it and in fact neither explicitly accepts nor rejects the analogy. In his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, Alexander of Aphrodisias discusses the sailor-ship metaphor multiple times in his commentary, and he explicitly rejects it. Plotinus also discusses the analogy, and although he finds it useful for illustrating that the soul and body are separable, he also clearly notes the inadequacy of the analogy.

In addition to the sailor-ship analogy, Narsai also compares the soul to a charioteer:

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نجوهوم ټُوخه دوبد وجنده هره مودهده:
وکه همهُ جَد دخنه و چکن دُدوبموه ه
نه وصوفخ دوبد وجنده کید در کوده:
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⁷¹ 66.77-82; M.II.240.11-15.

⁷² Aristotle mentions this analogy in *De Anima* II.1 (413a8), where he sets up the quesiton of whether the soul is the actuality of the body in the same way that a sailor is of the ship. For more on Aristotle's indecision on the analogy, see Thomas Olshewsky, "On the Relations of Soul to Body in Plato and Aristotle," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 14. 4 (1976), 400-402. For a more in-depth consideration of Aristotle's employment of this metaphor, see Theodore Tracy, "The Soul/Boatman Analogy in Aristotle's De anima," *Classical Philology* 77.2 (1982), 97-112. For a critique of Tracy's argument and further discussion, see A. P. Bos, *The Soul and Its Instrumental Body: A Reinterpretation of Aristotle's Philosophy of Living Nature* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 123-135.

 $[\]overline{^{73}}$ Alexander of Aphrodisias, On the Soul 14.4-5, 15.9-10, 20.26-21.21.

⁷⁴ Enneads 4.3.21.

Like horses, its senses are constrained by her authority, but it does not understand what is the cause of its constraint. Like a charioteer, her will drives on its body, and wherever she wills, the boat of its corporeality is directed. As if grasping reigns, she guides the path of its actions, and she directs it so that it does not stumble in [its] desires. A word from her restricts its mouth like a muzzle, and does not allow him to harm himself or his companions.⁷⁵

The idea behind the imagery here is more or less the same as the previous metaphor, but with the added component that it mentions the soul's control over the senses. This image also depicts the soul in a more active role, asserting her will over the body in order to steer and protect it.

The charioteer-chariot analogy has its origins in the Socratic dialogues of Plato's *Phaedrus*. However, despite the fact that Narsai uses this common metaphor, it is obvious that he employs it differently than Socrates. In Narsai's analogy, it is clear that the soul is the charioteer, the body is the chariot, and the horses are the bodily senses. By contrast, in the *Phaedrus*, the soul is, to some extent, the whole combination of charioteer, chariot, and horses; moreover, Socrates contends that the human soul is like a pair of unevenly yoked horses, one noble and well trained, and the other wild and difficult to control. Iamblichus briefly mentions both the sailor-ship and charioteer analogies as common ways of explaining the soul-body relationship, but he clearly finds both to be deficient. Again, it seems clear that Narsai is intentionally using and transforming a classical metaphor of body and soul for his own purposes.

Both of these metaphors, then, depict the soul in a protective role, guarding the body, guiding the body, and leading it through life. But elsewhere in the memra, there is an even more significant role that the soul plays: that of champion in the struggle against the passions. Again, as with the nautical metaphor, Narsai feels free to play with the imagery as he depicts the way that the soul engages against the passions with the body:

دموهه يُوجَدُه جُد موكيت وجُمَدِيْه * دُكِه يَحْدُمِه شِهِيَ خُرِكُه وَسِكِه مَمِعِيْهِ * دُكِه يَحْدُمُهُ شِهِيَة خُرِكِه وَكَمْمِيْةٍ * دُكِه يَحْدُمُهُ هَا خُرِكُهُ مِنْهُ وَكَمْمُونَهُ *

In love, she urgently exhorts her substance and her partner, that it not be deterred from the fight for truth. Like a watchman, she cries out to the senses and the thoughts, "Arise and prevail with good works!"⁷⁹

⁷⁵ 66.299-306; M.II.246.12-17.

⁷⁶ Phaedrus, 246a-257b.

⁷⁷ For an excellent discussion of the unruly horse, see Elizabeth Belfiore, "Dancing With the Gods: The Myth of the Chariot in Plato's *Phaedrus*," *The American Journal of Philology* 127.2 (2006), 185-217.

⁷⁸ De anima 33.

⁷⁹ 66.313-316; M.II.246.21-24.

In this image, the soul takes on the role of a coach in an athletic contest, shouting from the sideline or, perhaps even more suitable for this struggle, shouting from the corner of the boxing ring, encouraging and exhorting the athlete throughout the contest.

Elsewhere, Narsai provides an even more complex set of images for the soul's function in the struggle of the passions:

Through her power, [the body] contends against the enticements of its desires, and with her help, it defeats the sufferings of its mortality.

Through her, it is triumphant in the contest of the toils of justice, and she gives it the crown of victory on account of its endurance.

She teaches it to take up the spiritual combat, and she exhorts it, that it should not stumble before the enemy.

She holds the immortal crown of life in her mind, and she entices it [with the crown] like a child: "come and take!"

With it, she descends to all the struggles of desires, and like an athlete, she anoints its senses, so that they not be taken captive. 80

Once again, it is difficult to nail down the precise role that the soul plays throughout this athletic contest metaphor. In some lines, it sounds like a coach or training partner, whereas in others the soul is the force that provides the strength by which the body fights. Again, this malleability of the metaphor is likely intentional by Narsai: although it is the body that contends against bodily passions, it is the soul that does the real work: it motivates, protects, pushes, encourages, and empowers the body in which it dwells in order to help it prevail in the good fight.

4. The Fate of the Soul at Death

One of the most significant questions regarding the soul in antiquity and late antiquity is what happens to it at death, and, particularly for Christian authors, whether the soul is re-united with its corporeal companion. The first question to consider is what happens to the soul immediately upon death: does it remain with the body or depart? Narsai unequivocally argues for the latter:

^{80 66.377-386;} M.II.248.14-21.

Great travails also appear to her in the time of death, when they drive her out from within the body like a child. Like a robber, death enters the temple of her habitation, and plunders her from within her modest body. Stripped naked, the mistress of the body departs from her house, and like an exile, she leaves it for another place. Her mind bears great grief on the day of her departure, because she sees that death has hastily destroyed her habitation.⁸¹

So the soul clearly leaves the body, but where does it go? Narsai addresses this elsewhere:

خد هنائما حيوه مفهير فضرحفة ومجد ميرك فدفرها عداً أفاتيا مدوس رك جملاد وفروي ومحد ومحموا ما المحرود منافي منافي بحداً ومواهد والمحرود منافي منافي بحداً والمحرود ها منافي المحافية والمحرود با منافي المحافية المحرود با منافي المحافية والمحرود با منافي المحافية والمحرود با منافية المحافية والمحرود با منافية المحرود با منافي

One of the watchers comes down to her on the day of her departure, and leads her to where the creator has commanded.

Like a guide, a spirit guides the spiritual, until she enters the lodging place with her companion.

This angel, who preserved her in this present life, shows her where she will dwell until the resurrection.

All souls are commanded to dwell on earth, some of them in Eden and some of them in the place where they are sent. In the place of Eden dwell the souls of the lovers of truth, and those of the unrighteous [dwell] in places beyond it.

In paradise the righteous dwell in spirit, but not in body, while they eagerly await the construction of the exalted kingdom.

82

According to Narsai's description here, the soul has an angelic guide to lead her to an appointed place. Narsai makes it very clear that souls do not leave Earth; rather, they go to places to await the resurrection. The souls of the righteous go to Eden, to paradise. The souls of the unrighteous, by contrast, go to some unnamed destination beyond, or outside of paradise. As for what souls do in paradise, again Narsai gives an explicit answer:

^{81 66.391-398;} M.II.248.24-249.4.

^{82 66.417-428;} M.II.249.16-24.

All souls who endure sufferings enter into Eden, and there they rest as if upon a pleasant bed. As if in slumber, they rest from [their] actions there, and they do not make use of the power of speech that is in them. They indeed rest from the toil of good and bad, and they do not contend in the struggle of righteous labor. 83

Unfortunately, Narsai does not tell us anything about the souls who are not in Eden. He makes no further mention of them. He is clear, though, about what the souls of the righteous do: they *rest*. Indeed, they rest "as if in slumber." However, it is worth noting that he does not actually say that they sleep. Narsai then continues to describe this restful state:

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ورد فرنده درج فرود معند برد تسرود مردد مردد مردد و ورد و

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"It is not the case that the power that is in them has ceased from vitality, rather, it no longer has a bodily vessel to transmit words. It is not the case that the stream of discernment has been cut off and dried up, rather, it no longer has a bodily tree that needs irrigation."⁸⁴

That is, Narsai argues that souls do not lose their inherent qualities of sensation and capacity for speech; but, the soul is unable to perform these functions without the body. The soul does not lose its capacities, but in its incorporeal state it is incapacitated.

Regarding the fate of souls at death, perhaps the most useful points of comparison are Narsai's predecessors in Syriac literature, namely Aphrahat and Ephrem. Aphrahat is significant in this comparison because of the relative idiosyncrasy of his views on the matter. According to Aphrahat's argument in Dem. 6, when a person dies, the soul is buried with the body and sleeps, and the soul loses its capacity for sense-perception. Subsequently, on the day of the resurrection, both bodies and souls are resurrected together. Furthermore, in Dem. 8, Aphrahat expands on this topic, and although he refrains from claiming that the souls of the righteous will be rewarded or that the souls of the unrighteous will be punished in the time period awaiting the resurrection, he does claim that the sleep of the righteous souls will be peaceful while the sleep of the unrighteous souls will be restless. It is also worth noting here that Aphrahat's argument is closely paralleled by Macrina's teaching in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. Specifically, though Macrina does not say anything about sense-perception, she does argue that the soul remains with the body even though the body decomposes.

In Hymn 8 of the *Hymns on Paradise*, Ephrem offers a brief reflection on the fate of the soul as it awaits the resurrection. Here, Ephrem discusses the relationship of the bodily senses to the soul

^{83 66.463-468;} M.II.251.3-6.

^{84 66.468-472;} M.II.251.7-9.

⁸⁵ Dem. 6.14

⁸⁶ Dem. 8.19: "The upright lie down and their sleep is pleasant, throughout day and night. For they do not perceive the whole night to be long, but experience it as though it were a single moment. Then, when the morning comes, they wake up and rejoice. The sleep of the wicked, however, lies heavily upon them, like a man stricken with a strong, deep fever who tosses and turns on his bed, and who is disturbed throughout the long night. They fear the morning, when their master will condemn them."

⁸⁷ G. Nyssa, On the Soul, ch. 4.

in some detail, and indeed, he finds himself perplexed at thinking that a soul would enter paradise while lacking the ability of perception to enjoy it:

That blessed abode is in no way deficient, for that place is complete and perfected in every way, and the soul cannot enter there alone, for in such a state it is in everything deficient— in sensation and consciousness; but on the day of Resurrection the body, with all its senses, will enter in as well, once it has been made perfect.⁸⁸

Whereas Narsai argues that the souls of the righteous enter paradise and there await the resurrection, Ephrem cannot abide this scenario because it implies that souls can enter paradise without their bodies. Thus, he concludes that since souls cannot enter paradise without their bodies, the souls of the just and righteous dwell in "delightful mansions on the borders of Paradise."⁸⁹

In comparison with his predecessors, Narsai has both similarities and differences—though, certainly, he is closer to Ephrem than to Aphrahat. Contra Aphrahat, although Narsai says that souls rest, he does not say that the soul sleeps, and he explicitly argues that the soul does not lose its capacities. Narsai's argument is very close to Ephrem's, except for the clear disagreement on whether souls can enter paradise without their bodies.

5. The Soul/Body Relationship as a Microcosm for Theological Issues

The final component of Narsai's depiction of the soul-body relationship under examination here is his use of this analogy as a microcosm of theological issues. For example, Narsai explicitly states that the soul can show us something about the relationship among the persons of the Trinity:

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حبيو رڼيد محرون بخيد مينم ويوسره جينو
وهن يو نوميو حمون برکح ريدون مدون وي بخي
د بريخو بخريد ميويو عدد بدينمون
يوه حويوند عدد دايونده دده خدد بويود.
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The mysterious explanation of the name of the Divine Being is in her generation, And her formation represents threeness in word and power. Her likeness is similar in some respects to the explanation of persons: her nature (is like) the Father, her word (is like) the Son, and her life (is like) the Spirit. 90

The soul, then, as the component of humanity upon which God has impressed God's own image, reflects the triune nature of God's identity. Narsai does not appear to be engaging in a specific theological argument here, rather he is simply using his explication of the soul as a way to invite his audience to reflect on the mystery of the Trinity. While this example is explicit, there are other examples that are less obvious candidates for theological speculation. However, upon close contextual examination, it becomes clear that these claims are best understood against the backdrop of the Christological controversy.

First, it is likely not a coincidence that Narsai's insists upon the distinction of body and soul, and he specifically argues that they are not mixed. For example:

⁸⁸ Hymns on Paradise, 8.7; cf. 8.9; trans. Brock, Hymns on Paradise, 133-134.

⁸⁹ Hymns on Paradise, 8.11.

^{90 66.45-48;} M.II.239.13-15.

Her nature is within her, but her operation is outward in works, And although she is in it, it is distinct from her, and she is also [distinct] from it. The construction of her quality is not mixed through all of it, It is one, and she is one, without mixture.⁹¹

This language of distinct natures of the soul and body could easily be seen as a sly argument in favor of distinct natures in Christ. And the language that rejects mixture coheres well with Antiochene writings, which rejected any formula of Christ's nature that mixed or mingled divine and human natures, whether Apollinarian or Eutychian.

With respect to the language of "mixture" in the soul-body analogy as an argument about Christology, a comparison with other authors is quite useful. For example, in his work "On the Incarnation," Narsai's fellow Antiochene Theodoret asserts:

We do not say that the soul is mixed with the body, but rather that she is united and conjoined [with it], and dwells and works within [it]. Nobody would say that the soul is mortal or the body immortal without being entirely in foolish error. So while we distinguish each [nature], we acknowledge one living being composed out of these. We name each nature with separate names: the former 'soul', the latter 'body', yet the living being composed out of both we call by a different name, for we label that 'human'. Therefore, taking this also as an image of the oikonomia, let us avoid that blasphemy [of the confusion of natures], and abandoning [the term] 'mixture', let us apply consistently the terms of 'union' [henosis], 'conjunction' [synapheia] and 'togetherness' [koinonia], teaching the distinction of nature, and the unity of the person [prosopon]. ⁹³

There are several points of interest in this quotation, but the most notable is that his primary argument is that the body-soul relationship provides an analogy for the unmixed natures. That is, no one would be so foolish as to say that soul and body are mixed; so too then would it appear foolish to argue that the natures of Christ are mixed.

Likewise, Nemesius also offers helpful perspective regarding the language of mixture in the body-soul relationship. Taking up the problem of how the soul can be said to be in union with the body without resulting in the conclusion that the soul is perishable along with the body or that it merely stands in 'juxtaposition' to the body it inhabits (both of which he rejects—and he also explicitly rejects the mixture of wine and water as a suitable metaphor), Nemesius turns to Ammonias Saccas, the teacher of Plotinus for a solution: "[Ammonius] said that it is in the nature of intelligibles both to be capable of union with things adapted to receive them...and to remain unconfused with them while in union." Based on Ammonius' argument, Nemesius is able to conclude that "the soul suffers no change as a result of union with the body (οὐκ ἄρα ἀλλοιοῦται ἡ ψυχὴ ἐν τῆ ἑνώσει)," and even more explicitly, "the soul is united to the body, and, further, this union is without confusion" (καὶ ἥνωται τοίνον καὶ ἀσυγχύτως ἥνωται τῷ σώματι ἡ ψυχή). Then, just a few paragraphs later, Nemesius explicitly links this discussion of the union of soul and body without mixture to Christology: "The

^{91 66.213-216;} M.II.244.1-4.

⁹² PG 75.

⁹³ Theodoret, *De Incarnatione* 34 [32]; PG 75, 1472D-1473A; Quoted in Kupan, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 72-73. [Quotation slightly adapted.]

⁹⁴ On the Nature of Man III.20; Telfer, Cyril and Nemesius, 295. If Nemesius is referring to a specific work of Ammonius, that work has not survived.

⁹⁵ On the Nature of Man III.20; Telfer, Cyril and Nemesius, 295.

⁹⁶ On the Nature of Man III.21; Telfer, Cyril and Nemesius, 296.

above arguments would apply even more exactly to the union (ἑνώσει) of the divine Word with his humanity, for he continued thus in union without confusion" (ἀσυγχύτως). ⁹⁷ Thus, it is clear that Nemesius draws an explicit link between the unmixed union of body and soul with the unmixed union of divinity and humanity in Christ. And, in the process of his argument, he quotes both Ammonius Saccus and Porphyry as unwitting witnesses to the veracity of his claims. ⁹⁸

In the Latin West, Augustine also made explicit use of the body-soul analogy for representing the relationship of human and divine natures in the person of Christ. Interestingly, although Augustine is perfectly content to use language of "mixture" (*mixtura*), he also specifies how this mixture should be explained:

For just as the soul is united (*unitur*) to the body in one person so as to constitute man, in the same way God united to man in one person so as to constitute Christ. In the former person, there is a combination (*mixtura*) of soul and body; in the latter there is a combination of divine and human. Let my reader, however, guard against borrowing his idea of the combination from the properties of material bodies, by which two fluids when combined are so mixed that neither preserves its original character; although even among material bodies there are exceptions, such as light, which sustains no change when combined with the atmosphere. In the person of a human, therefore, there is a combination of soul and body; in the person of Christ there is a combination of the divine with human; for when the Word of God was united to a soul having a body, He took into union with Himself both the soul and the body.⁹⁹

Augustine frames this use of the body-soul analogy against people who resist this explanation of Christology. However, Augustine makes the case that the body-soul relationship is essential to understanding the union of divine and human in Christ. Indeed, Augustine argues that if humans can grasp that an immaterial soul can be joined to a material body, then it is much easier to believe that another incorporeal entity—the Word of God—can be joined to them.

Turning back to Narsai, elsewhere he returns to the distinctiveness of the body's nature and the soul's nature, and again we see grounds for a dyophysite Christology: "The passions of her nature and those of the bodily nature are distinct / yet because of love, behold, it is said that they are one person." By distinguishing between the passions of the body and those of the soul, it is possible that Narsai is laying the groundwork for a theory of the union of prosopa in Christ that would allow for the two natures to remain distinct yet intact as one person.

In this same quotation, it is also noteworthy that Narsai claims that the soul and body are one person "because of love." This language evokes the prosopic union, the Antiochene synapheia of the two persons in Christ, bound together not by nature, but by mutual love. Indeed, elsewhere in this

⁹⁷ On the Nature of Man III.22; Telfer, Cyril and Nemesius, 300. Nemesius does go on to differentiate somewhat the soul-body union from the human-divine union, but only to make it absolutely clear that "The Word mingles with body and soul, and yet remains throughout unmixed, unconfused, uncorrputed, untransformed, not sharing their passivity but only their activity, not perishing with them, nor changing as they change..." III.22; Telfer, Cyril and Nestorius, 301. In other words, Nemesius grants that the soul-body is not a perfect metaphor because the soul can be ruled by the body and the body can be ruled by the soul, yet he nevertheless maintains that the union envisioned by the soul-body relationship where two things co-exist without change to the intelligible thing is at least comparable to the human-divine union.

⁹⁸ We have already seen the reference to Ammonius; immediately after Nemesius makes this argument explicitly Christological, he quotes Porphyry, who argued that one thing can be assumed by another thing without resulting in any change; On the Nature of Man III.22; Telfer, Cyril and Nemesius, 301.

⁹⁹ Letter 137.11; translation slightly altered from J.G. Cunningham in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 1, ed. by Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.)

^{100 66.279-280;} M.II.245.23-25: ﴿ يَدُونُ وَهُمْ هِمُؤَمَّدُ لِهُ مُعْمَدُ اللَّهُ اللَّ

memra we see other language that is reminiscent of this bond: "In love she is bound together with [the body's] senses, as in a yoke." This language of the bond of love is evocative of both Theodore of Mopsuestia and especially Nestorius. In the *Bazaar of Heracleides*, Nestorius explicitly claims that the two natures of Christ, while remaining distinct *ousia*, are "united by love in the same prosopon."

Furthermore, Narsai goes to some length to convince his audience that the nature of the soul *always* has its capacities, from the womb to the tomb. That is, the abilities of the soul do not grow or expand, but the soul has the wisdom to only employ its abilities as the body can handle it. For example, consider the following:

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Its construction from the beginning when it was created is perfect, but the body does not make use of its perfection outwardly.

The word of her rationality is in her from the day that she came into being, but the course of her swiftness is restricted by the limbs.

She knows how to sing a pleasant song, but insofar as the bodily flute is weak, she is also weak.

She understands the order/arrangement to pluck the harp of her existence, but she is afraid of stretching the strings [too much], lest they should snap. She possesses the power of discernment in order to be confident, but the senses of the body do not respond to her [when] she plays beautifully. Wisely she keeps her treasure, except for silence, until the body grows and the child inherits its possessions.

. . .

With its growth, it rises to the level of its youthfulness, but with its old age, it decreases to the level of its weakness. 102

It is not immediately evident that Narsai's argument here is Christological in nature. However, in the Chalcedonian controversy, an exegetical dispute arose over the capacities of Jesus, specifically related to the interpretation of Luke 2:52 ("Jesus grew in age and wisdom"). For example, Diodore of Tarsus argues that this claim cannot be about God the Word because "he is God, a Perfect One begotten from the Perfect One." Diodore continues, "He, therefore, grew not, for his is not imperfect such that he would grow to that which is perfect, but that which grew in age and wisdom was the flesh. Neither did the divinity, after [the body] was formed or born, place immediately its entire wisdom in

عسوقة حبيته كبه مع قبع وبينه بي وبينة : 66.263; M.II.245.13

¹⁰² 66.231-240, 245-246; M.II.244.13-20; 245.1-2.

it, but rather little by little it gave [it] to the body."¹⁰³ Thus, the implication here is that Diodore attributes Jesus' growth to his human nature, not to his divine nature. Theodore of Mopsuestia also addresses the interpretation of Luke 2:52 in is *On the Incarnation*, and his treatment of the passage makes it clear that the Antiochenes forged their position on this verse in opposition to the Apollinarians and Eunomians. For Theodore, both of these positions fail to properly address the issue of Christ's having a rational soul (Apollinarians to contradict Jesus growing "in wisdom."¹⁰⁴

On the opposite side of the Christological spectrum, Philoxenos of Mabbug rejects an exegetical conclusion of this passage that separates the natures. In fact, Philoxenos attributes the Antiochene misunderstanding of this verse to the fact that human foolishness cannot comprehend the wisdom of God. Furthermore, Philoxenos also expands from his exegesis of Luke 2:52 directly into a polemic against Theodore, which testifies to the contested interpretation of this verse in the 5th/6th century Christological debates. With the polemical setting of this argument over Jesus' natures in mind, it is easy to see how Narsai's argument about the soul limiting its activities with respect to the body's abilities might actually be a Christological argument in disguise: namely, that just as the divine nature does not "grow" along with the human Jesus (i.e. the Antiochene interpretation of Luke 2:52), neither do the capacities of the soul grow with respect to the abilities of the body.

Finally, on three occasions, Narsai uses the word "passibility" or "capacity to suffer" (araaaaa), and his usage of this term with respect to the soul might be best interpreted as a cipher for the divine nature of Christ. Two of the occurrences of the word in particular are worth noting:

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وهنته بَعْدَه بَدِ كَهُ شَعْهُ صَمْحَهُ بَهُ بَجْتَهُ،
حسوقه هو شغِه بَعِر شِعْبُ فَعَر بَعْهُ عَمْدَهُ
وقع هو متنه بعر كل شعب فيكتوبه خ
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She hates his sufferings, even though she does not suffer in his passibility. In love, she suffers with her beloved, [but] not in [her] nature / for her nature is exalted above all bodily sufferings. 107

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رئ هم بندر در عمر در بند به بندر بازد.
در مرم بندر در مرم بندر بازد بازد.
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"She is not injured in the passibility of the suffering body / and she is not destroyed when her outer garment is destroyed." 108

In other words, the body suffers, but the soul does not suffer within it. Despite the fact that body and soul are bound together as one person, the bodily nature experiences suffering, while the nature of the soul does not. This language is early reminiscent of the way that dyophysite writers speak of the human nature of Christ suffering while the divine nature does not.

Given the confluence of these various arguments that might undergird dyophysite Christology, I think their appearance in this memra is likely not a coincidence. After all, as we have seen, Narsai was not the only post-Chalcedonian writer to use the body-soul relationship as a metaphor for Christ's

¹⁰³ SD 5 (Severus, Extracts from Diodore); Behr, 239; see also the same quotation in Latin: PD 1 (Palatine Collection, Extracts from Diodore); Behr, 267.

¹⁰⁴ On the Incarnation, fol. 4; Behr 451-453.

¹⁰⁵ Commentary on Luke, Fragment 48; text: Philoxenos of Mabbug: Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke, ed. by J. W. Watt, CSCO 392, Script. Syri 171 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1978), 53-55; translation: Philoxenos of Mabbug: Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke, trans. by J. W. Watt, CSCO 393, Script. Syri 172 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1978), 46-47.

¹⁰⁶ Commentary on Luke, Fragment 49; text: Commentary on Luke, 55-57; translation: Commentary on Luke, 47-48.

¹⁰⁷ 66.258-260; M.II.245.9-11.

¹⁰⁸ 66.411-412; M.II.249.12-13.

identity. It is interesting to note, though, how coy Narsai is with this argument. He never makes the links explicit between the body-soul relationship and Christ's natures, but the arguments are so similar that it seems like his ultimate purpose in deploying this language must have been didactic in nature for his audience. Without giving them the explicit link, he provides them with the language and with the undergirding arguments that would ultimately support his christological claims.

As a final piece of this argument, it is worth observing that theologians in the Alexandrian/miaphysite milieu also employed the body-soul relationship in their christological arguments. For example, in his third letter to Nestorius, Cyril of Alexandria uses language of the body-soul:

As for our Savior's statements in the Gospels, we do not divide them out to two subjects or persons. The one, unique Christ has no duality, though he is seen as compounded in inseparable unity out of two differing elements in the way that a human being, for example, is seen to have no duality but to be one, consisting of the pair of elements, body and soul.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, Severus of Antioch also employs the body-soul analogy:

We are composed of body and soul, and we see two natures (*kyana*) the one that of the body, the other that of the soul; but the human being is one from the two due to the union. And the fact that he is composed out of two natures does not permit us to conclude that he who is one is two men, but rather one single man, as I have said, on account of the composition from body and soul.

And the man that we are may serve us as an example. For with regard to him we comprehend two natures, one that of the soul and the other that of the body. However, although in subtle reflection we distinguish or in the imagination of the mind perceive a distinction, we still do not juxtapose the natures and do not allow in them the power of the separation to exhaust itself entirely, but we understand that they belong to a single unique being in such a way that from then on the two are no longer two, but through the two a single living being has been formed.¹¹⁰

It is worth noting that Cyril and Severus make use of the exact same analogy as Theodoret and Narsai, yet they employ it in support of the opposite Christological conclusion, emphasizing the unity of the human being that is a result of the composite of body and soul. It appears, then, that this analogy works both ways, depending on how one describes the body-soul relationship. Is it a composite of two, acting as one? Or is it one entity that maintains a distinction between the two? This is, of course, the inherent problem with analogies: they are malleable.

Conclusion

In the preceding analysis, I have attempted to read and understand Narsai's arguments concerning the body-soul relationship and the nature of the soul in his memra "On the Soul" within a broader literary and intellectual context. On the surface, Narsai does not engage any particular competing ideologies concerning the soul; however, when read in concert with other ancient and late-ancient authors, it becomes readily apparent that Narsai is aware of and conversant with contemporary trends in philosophical debates about the soul. In particular, it is illuminating to read Narsai's claims alongside Nemesius, because Nemesius often provides a polemical framework within which we can see Narsai participating in theological debates through his homilies. In this sense, we can view Narsai's homily "On the Soul" as a sort of theological catechism for his audience, training them to think correctly about significant theological matters without engaging directly in polemic.

¹⁰⁹ Cyril, "Third Letter to Nestorius," 8, (Cyril of Aledandria: Select Letters, 22-23).

¹¹⁰ Severus, Philalethes, 42; CSCO 134, 213ff; Quoted in Grillmeier, Christ in the Christian Tradition, Volume 2, 34.

Throughout the homily, Narsai invites his hearers to consider the marvels of their own composition as an impetus to praise God. However, with the polemical context of Narsai's claims in mind, it is clear that Narsai also wants his hearers to reflect on their existence as a proof of particular theological claims. Humans, made in God's image, bear the likeness of their creator; thus, for Narsai—and other authors in late antiquity—a proper understanding of human nature undergirds "orthodox" theology. When read within this framework, the didactic strategy of Narsai's homily "On the Soul" emerges: the body-soul relationship is not merely an analogy for explaining complex theological arguments, it is a divine revelation which, when properly understood, reveals God's very nature:

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خ فخنون عغزيد عبريد عبر خبر كرسوسه به المنافعة عبر المنافعة المنافعة عبر المنافعة المنافعة المنافعة المنافعة ا
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As on a tablet/page, you have depicted the world in body and soul, so that heaven and earth might seek you through its revelation.¹¹¹

The human form is, as such, an inspired revelation, a text upon which God has inscribed the wisdom that leads to knowledge of God. Narsai, as master exegete, exhorts his audience to interpret this text correctly in order to understand the divine mysteries that God has revealed.

¹¹¹ 66.355-356; M.II.247.23-248.1.