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Anthropological Views in Nag Hammadi: The Bipartite and Tripartite Conceptions of Human Being

Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta

1 Introduction

Gnostics are often credited by modern scholarship to have held very diverging opinions both on the soul and the soul-body relationship. Expressions such as “bewildering variety” or “great divergence” are frequently used, not always without disdain, to describe the anthropological views we find in Gnostic texts.\(^1\) Admittedly, behind this modern approach one still hears echoes of the old anti-heretical claim that while truth is singular, falsehood has many forms.\(^2\) Based on the Greek distinction between \textit{aletheia} and \textit{doxa}, which allots soundness to unity and disorder to difference, the argument has an obvious rhetorical force. So much so that it was also used by pagans against Christians with a view to ridiculing Christian views on the soul,\(^3\) even though in paganism one finds the same variety of conceptions. As a matter of fact, ancient views on the soul were so divergent that we possess several doxographical summaries that intended to bring some order to this varied whole: Aristotle, Cicero, Aetius, Tertullian, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Nemesius all provide overviews of the numerous opinions on the soul held in their time.\(^4\)

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\(^{3}\) Celsus (\textit{apud} Origen, \textit{Cels.} 8.49) ridiculed this variety of denominations. As an example of this diversity, see, e.g., the heresiologists’ interpretation of the nature of the Gnostic “divine spark” (\textit{ψυχαῖος σπινθήρ; scintilla animae}), namely the portion of the intelligible light in man. Whereas in some testimonies it is interpreted as a reference to the soul or to the \textit{πνεῦμα} (“spirit”; see Irenaeus, \textit{Haer.} 1.13.3; Satornil \textit{apud} Epiphanius, \textit{Pan.} 37.4.1–3; Clement of Alexandria, \textit{Exc.} 1.3; 3.1, who identifies it in 53.5 as \textit{ἡ λογικὴ οὐράνια ψυχή} [“rational soul”]), according to others this spark is clearly identified with the \textit{νοῦς} (“intellect”; see Hippolytus, \textit{Haer.} 5.19.13–17; 10.11.7–10, esp. 10.11.10, where the \textit{σπινθήρ} is explicitly explained with \textit{νοῦς}).

\(^{4}\) Aristotle, \textit{De an.} 406a–41b; Cicero, \textit{Tusc.} 1.19 ff.; Aetius, \textit{De placitis reliquiae} 4.2–3 (in the...
Indeed, there was diversity of opinion not only concerning the nature of the soul, but also its character or condition and its position within the human being. As to its nature, the soul was either deemed to be divine or simply mortal. As regards its condition, in addition to the view of the soul as incorporeal and not a substance held by Aristotelians, until the first century BCE a rather materialist view of the soul seems to have reigned, conceiving of it as either as fire, breath, inflamed air, heart, brain, or blood.\(^5\) From the start of the Common Era, however, one sees a wide acceptance of the Platonic conception of the soul as an immaterial substance.\(^6\) As regards its relationship to the body, positions were as varied as in both previous cases, and as an example of the complexities surrounding the issue, it is sufficient to mention the variety of views one finds in Plato.

As has been pointed out, the *Corpus platonicum* offers a wide range of views on the soul-body relationship which are not necessarily from different periods of Plato's life.\(^7\) Dialogues from the so-called Socratic period provide up to three different conceptions. While in *Charmides* Socrates defends a monistic view of man, according to which soul and body form an indissoluble union as the part and the whole,\(^8\) *Alcibiades i* presents a moderate kind of dualism, since the body is seen as an instrument of the soul.\(^9\) The *Gorgias* in turn includes the famous dualistic conception of Pythagorean origin according to which the body is the grave of the soul.\(^10\) If we add to these opinions those expressed

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\(^5\) Cicero, *Tusc. 1.17–19.*

\(^6\) Nemesius (*De natura hominis* 536–537) distinguishes three groups: (1) the soul is a body (Stoa); (2) the soul is incorporeal but not a substance (Aristotelians); (3) the soul is an incorporeal substance (Platonism). See E.K.E. Emilsson, “Platonic Soul-Body Dualism in the Early Centuries of the Empire to Plotinus,” *ANRW* 36.7:5331–5362.


\(^8\) Plato, *Charm. 156d11ff.*

\(^9\) Plato, *Alc. i 130a1–3.*

in later dialogues such as the *Phaedo*, the *Respublica*, or the *Timaeus*,\(^\text{11}\) we may easily understand the ambiguous status the soul had in Late Antiquity. Plato’s variety of views not only failed to help later Platonists to resolve their doubts regarding the soul-body relationship, but frequently made this even more complicated, as they seemed to provide scriptural support for many opinions.

Consequently, we might safely affirm that when Gnostic texts present a diversity of views regarding the soul, the body, and their relationship they are simply reflecting the variety of opinions that were held in their respective intellectual milieus. This means that their anthropological peculiarities should be explained against the backdrop of the conceptual developments that were taking place at the time. I would like to exemplify this by analysing the different anthropological patterns that emerge from a reading of Nag Hammadi writings. In opposition to the widespread opinion that the anthropology of this corpus of texts is mostly tripartite, distinguishing three elements in man—namely, intellect, soul, and body, a trichotomy which allegedly is behind the famous tripartite division of humanity into *pneumatikoi*, *psychikoi*, and *hylikoi*—there is a group of texts reflecting rather a bipartite scheme discriminating between soul and body only. Irrelevant though it may seem, this difference is seminal, since it not only implies a different psychology, or theory of the soul, but also a different cosmology, which in its turn also involves a dissimilar soteriology, or theory concerning man’s salvation from the constraints of the material world.

Do these tripartite and bipartite patterns reflect, on the one hand, the influence of the tripartition widespread in Platonic milieus and, on the other, its adaptation to a more basic Christian bipartite opposition distinguishing spiritual and physical realities? Is perhaps the dichotomy in the latter case influenced by the bipartite background to Gen 2:7? Must we suppose a genealogical relationship between the tripartite and bipartite anthropological schemes? Or does the divergence simply proceed from the dissimilar milieus in which the texts arose?

With a view to providing some answers to all these questions, in the following pages I intend to offer an overview of both anthropological views and provide some examples. My exposition follows a tripartite plan: § 2 surveys the bipartite anthropological scheme, § 3 focuses on the more widespread tripartite view of man found in some of the Nag Hammadi texts, and § 4 provides some conclusions.

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As already advanced, the bipartite scheme distinguishes two aspects or elements of the human being, namely soul and body. This view has a very long history in Greek thought and appears for the first time during the transition from the archaic to the classical period. Even if, according to some scholars, it is the result of internal conceptual developments in the Greek world, according to others, the idea of a soul separable from the body comes into Greek culture from the East, together with the idea of the transmigration of the soul. What in the beginning was a simple dichotomy gradually evolves towards a hierarchy in which the soul occupies the higher position, but this only occurs after some hesitation. Democritus provides testimony to a view in which the body still seems to hold a higher status than the soul, since the latter is conceived of as responsible for wrong choices and actions that may negatively influence the body’s health. However, the soul very soon takes the highest rank in the hierarchy, since it is then conceived of as the real self, and the higher seat of intelligence, in contrast to the body which brings the individual closer to lower animals. In the final stage of this evolution the ψυχή acquires a divine or quasi-divine nature and is consequently seen as the pre-existent and immortal element in man, only temporarily descending to inhabit its dwelling-place, the material and mortal body (Plato).

It is this point in the development that interests us, since thanks to the influence of Platonism this conception gained wide acceptance in the imperial period and became the “natural” view of man, especially in Greek and Roman ethics. As a result, it tended to gain ground even in cultural environments with

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15 As Robinson (Robinson, “Defining Features,” 37) rightly comments this already begins with the advent of Orphism, but it only reached wider sections of society through the influence of Platonism, which incorporated Orphic lore.
16 Democritus B 159 DK.
a monistic view of man, such as in Judaism. In point of fact later writings of the Old Testament, such as Maccabees and Wisdom of Solomon show a bipartite anthropology that distinguishes soul and body.\textsuperscript{17} In line with Wis 9:15, Philo of Alexandria also presents a clearly negative view of the body, since its passions inclines man to sin.\textsuperscript{18} He believes that the body is a heavy burden for the soul\textsuperscript{19} and widely echoes a bipartite concept of man.\textsuperscript{20}

The testimony of the New Testament is equivocal: while the Synoptic Gospels seem to remain faithful to Jewish monism, in the letters, both Pauline and other, the situation is more complicated. Even if till very recently there the epistles were placed in the conceptual world of Judaism and their anthropological views interpreted as strictly monistic, the last years have seen new insights that definitively changed our views on early Christian anthropology. As a matter of fact, Paul clearly shows a high degree of spiritualization of the human being, which can be seen in the opposition between an ἐσω ἄνθρωπος and an ἐξω ἄνθρωπος, namely an “Inner Being” as opposed to an external one,\textsuperscript{21} but

\textsuperscript{17} The bipartite view is clear in 2 Macc 3:16–17; 7:37; 14:38; 15:30. Wis 8:19–20 establishes a close relationship between purity of the soul and that of the body and, more importantly, seems to echo a belief in the pre-existence of the soul; see J.M. Reese, Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and Its Consequences (AnBib 41; Rome 1970). Wis 2:2–4 describes the process of the death of both soul and body in diverse ways. According to Wis 9:15 the perishable body clearly burdens the soul in a way comparable to Plato’s Phaedo (81c20). Contra Neher (M. Neher, Wesen und Wirken der Weisheit in der Sapientia salomonis [BZAW 333; Berlin 2004], 131–133), who, following D. Georgi, “Weisheit Salomos,” in Unterweisung in lehrhafter Form (JSchr 3.4; ed. W.G. Kümmel et al.; Gütersloh 1980) and O. Kaiser, Grundriss der Einleitung in die kanonischen und deuterokanonischen Schriften des Alten Testaments 111, Die poetischen und weisheitlichen Werke (Gütersloh 1994), 118–119, attributes these ideas not to the original text but to a later addition.

\textsuperscript{18} Philo is not always consistent, however, and sometimes retains the positive Jewish view of the body; see E. Schweizer, “Die hellenistische Komponente im neutestamentlichen sarx-Begriff,” ZNW 48 (1957): 237–253, esp. 246–250.

\textsuperscript{19} Philo, Gig. 31; Leg. 3.152; Det. 16.

\textsuperscript{20} Philo, Leg. 3.62; Cher. 128; Det. 19; Agr. 46, 152; cf. Abr. 96 etc. In Opif. 135 Philo affirms that man is mortal κατὰ τὸ σῶμα but immortal κατὰ τὴν διάνοιαν. The bipartition is also clear in his conception of the soul leaving the body after death (Plant. 147; Abr. 258; Somn. 1.31).

authors such as Betz did their best to present him as a monist. More recently, however, van Kooten has convincingly shown that Paul’s discourse should be placed in the wider Greco-Roman context and his anthropology interpreted in line with the widespread trichotomous pattern. In my view Irenaeus’ desperate efforts in his *Adversus haereses*, to read 1 Thess 5:23 in a monist way, seems to provide external support for the view that even in Antiquity Paul was also interpreted in a trichotomous way.

Some Nag Hammadi texts include such a bipartite anthropological pattern; they tend to oppose spiritual and physical realities, and contrast the inner and true being with the external and material sensible one. A good example of this bipartite view of man appears in the *Sentences of Sextus* (*NHc* xii,1). In discussing who should rightly be called a philosopher, the text states that only he who pays heed to the inner being is really wise: “No man who ⟨looks⟩ down upon the earth and upon tables is wise. (392) The philosopher who is an outer body, he is not the one to whom it is fitting to pay respect, but (the) philosopher according to the inner man.”

According to the dualistic view of these texts, the physical body is an odious accretion, something alien to man’s real nature. The *Letter of Peter to Philip* (*NHc* viii,2) echoes this widespread motif, since it asserts that due to the imprisonment of the inner man, the Gnostics have to struggle against the “authorities” in order to “strip off ... what is corrupted” and become “illumi-
nators in the midst of mortal men.” The bipartite anthropological conception behind this motif, however, is clearer in the *Interpretation of Knowledge* (*NHC XI,1*), which describes the body as a “net of flesh” for the “man within,” as a temporary residence in which humanity was imprisoned by the rulers and authorities, who, in Pauline fashion, seem to govern over the lower world of matter:

... he [i.e., the devil] brought us down, having bound us in nets of flesh. Since the body is a temporary dwelling which the rulers and authorities have as an abode, the man within, after being imprisoned in the fabrication, fell into suffering. And having compelled him to serve them, they constrained him to serve the energies.

*Interp. Know.* [*NHC XI,1*] 6.26–37

The same conception can be found in the Hermetic treatise *Asclepius*, of which the Nag Hammadi codices also include a fragmentary translation. The *Asclepius* explicitly states that only man has a double nature, namely one which is simple and divine, which is called essential (οὐσιώδης), and another material one (ὑλικός) which is formed out of the four elements. In spite of the positive view of the latter due to Stoic influence, the *Asclepius* nevertheless stresses the higher quality of man’s “essential” part by describing it as “divine,” “eternal,” and “substantial” and by asserting that it is through this part that man ascends


28 *Interp. Know.* (*NHC XI,1*) 6.30–35. For a similar but more general opposition, see *Gos. Phil.* (*NHC II,3*) 123; 82.30–83.9.


31 Man’s duality in *Asclepius* 7 (304.2–6 NF 11); 8 (305.15–306.2 NF 11); 11 (309.5–6 NF 11); 22 (324.18 NF 11).


33 “divine”: *Asclepius* 10 (309.3 NF 11); 22 (324.18 NF 11); 22 (323.25 NF 11). “eternal”: *Asclepius* 8 (306.4 NF 11).
to heaven. With regards to the Coptic version of the Asclepius, even if it has been to a certain extent adapted by the translator, the changes do not affect its basic anthropology and we find the same bipartition of soul and body. The Coptic Asclepius also refers to the separation of the soul from the body and the ascension of the former to the region “in the middle of the air between the earth and heaven,” where it is judged by demons. Only after the positive result will the demon give the soul its free-pass to the celestial region. We see, consequently, that the bipartite scheme governs not only the anthropology of the text, but also its cosmology and soteriology, since the archons or demons are not placed in any specific region, but on the dividing line between heaven and earth.

However, the most obvious example of a bipartite anthropology in the Nag Hammadi collection I know of is the Exegesis of the Soul (NHCI 11,6). Even if originally divine, the soul seems to have lost its nature due to its fall into materiality. The Exegesis of the Soul states that the soul used to be virginal and androgynous, but lost both conditions as a result of the incarnation in a body. The soul’s interaction with the sensible world is described in such dark hues that it is equated to prostitution and violation: “... when she [i.e., the soul]

34 Asclepius 10 (308.23–309.1 NF 11).
37 A similar conception can be found in Auth. Teach. (NHCVI,3) 25.6–9, which describes the soul’s contact with the world and the subsequent appearance of desires as a “contamination” of man’s virginity: “For if a thought of lust enters into a virgin man, he has already become contaminated.”
38 See L. Roig Lanzillotta, “Earthly Existence as Violence in Two Nag Hammadi Treatises: Authoritative Teaching (NHCVI,3) and Exegesis on the Soul (NHCI 11,6),” in Loren Stuckenbruck, Michael Becker, Matthias Hoffmann (eds), Religiously Motivated Violence (Leiden: Brill). Forthcoming.
fell down into a body and came to this life, then she fell into the hands of many robbers. And the wanton creatures passed her from one to another ... Some made use of her [by force], while others did so by seducing her with a gift.\textsuperscript{39}

Due to the loss of its original androgynous condition and the subsequent lack of a rational faculty (its male part), the soul appears to be trapped in the bonds of nature. Behind this conception we see the background of the partition of the soul into rational and irrational halves standard in Middle Platonism (below). Due to her irrational condition, the soul is now controlled by both the influence of sensorial perception and by the passions.\textsuperscript{40}

There is no trace of a third element in the text’s anthropology. There is no reference to the intellect whatsoever and the only passage that mentions the \textit{pneuma} does not seem to consider it as a differentiated part of the soul, but rather as the divine element by means of which God awakens the soul’s dormant rational capacity.\textsuperscript{41}

As is also the case in the \textit{Asclepius}, the dichotomous scheme that governs the text’s anthropology can also be seen at the level of its cosmology, which opposes the divine celestial region to the earthly realm. There is no reference to a third intermediate region either. This means, of course, that man’s salvation consists in regaining his rational pristine nature; in letting the soul supersede all bodily influences with a view to regaining her original abode. There are no other obstacles the soul has to deal with, such as the password owed to the archontic


\textsuperscript{40} The anthropology of the \textit{Auth. Teach. (NHC VI,3)} is very close to that of the \textit{Exegesis of the Soul}. In spite of the view that considers it a composite work that includes various theories on the soul, it presents a rather consistent view in its overall bipartite view of man. As in the \textit{Exegesis of the Soul}, the soul is said to have dwelled in the \textit{pleroma} (divine region) and to have changed its condition due to the fall into a body (23.12–17): “... when the spiritual soul was cast into the body, it became a brother to lust and hatred and envy, and a material soul.” Her contact with the body not only means she becomes a material soul, it also produces the oblivion that will keep her attached to the world (24.17–22): “Therefore she does not remember her brothers and her father, for pleasure and sweet profits deceive her. Having left knowledge behind, she fell into bestiality.”

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Exeg. Soul (NHC 11,6)} 133,34–134,2, on which Roig Lanzillotta, “‘Come out of Your Country,’” 418–419.
powers occurring in tripartite world-views. Salvation is automatic once the soul regains, after repentance and the Father's grace, its original rational nature. As the text expressively affirms: “This is the ransom from captivity. This is the upward journey to heaven.” Let us now take a look at the tripartite anthropological scheme.

3 Tripartite Views of Man in Nag Hammadi

As already advanced, most of the Nag Hammadi texts fall within this category and add a third element, namely the intellect (or spirit, or *logos*), to soul and body. True, some might object that bipartite anthropological schemes also include frequent references to a third element, be it νοῦς (intellect) or πνεῦμα (spirit). However, it is important to note that this third element is never considered a constitutive part of man, but rather a kind of *deus ex machina* that comes from without to liberate the soul from the drama of her present physical condition. In contrast, in trichotomous schemes the intellect is a constituent of the human being in its own right.

Trivial though it may seem, the appearance of a third element is therefore of crucial importance and has far-reaching consequences. To begin with it influences the conception of man to the extent that it replaces the soul, in assuming the highest position in the human hierarchy: not only is the intellect higher than the soul, but it is also man's only immortal part. Furthermore, the soul is no longer conceived of as divine and everlasting, as in the previous scheme, but clearly as mortal. As far as its internal structure is concerned, the soul is still described as possessing rational and irrational parts, but their function has slightly changed: given the intermediary position it occupies between intellect and body, the rational and irrational halves are now related to intellect and body respectively. As we will immediately see, these alterations produce important changes at the level of cosmology and soteriology.

Nag Hammadi texts widely attest this anthropology. The tripartite scheme is at work in the *Treatise on the Resurrection* (NHC 1,4) and is clearly expressed

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42 *Exeg. Soul* (NHC 11,6) 134.13–15.

43 The motif of the garment one has to take off in order to ascend to divine regions appears in tripartite contexts as well. According to Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 64, Valentinians affirmed that the spiritual elements must leave behind their souls before they can achieve the vision of God. Souls are further explicitly referred to as ἐνδύματα in 61.8; 63.1. See A.D. Nock, ed., and A.-J. Festugière, trans., *Corpus hermeticum i, Traité i–xii* (2nd ed.; Budé; Paris 1960), 131n57. According to Dodds, *Proclus, 307*, behind the Valentinian inter-
in its conception of the “spiritual resurrection, which swallows up the psychic in the same way as the fleshly.”\textsuperscript{44} The same view appears in the *Teachings of Silvanus* (NHC VII,4), which presents a triadic conception of man formed of a physical body, a soul, and a “divine mind which has come into being in conformity with the image of God. The divine mind has the substance of God.”\textsuperscript{45} According to this text, humans:

... have come into being from three races: from the earth, from the formed, and from the created. The body has come into being from the earth with an earthly substance, but the formed, for the sake of the soul, has come into being from the thought of the Divine. The created, however, is the mind, which has come into being in conformity with the image of God.

*Teach. Silv. ([NHC VII,4])* 92.15–25

The same anthropological scheme is behind the anthropogonical myth included in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II,4), which presents an interesting tripartite reinterpretation of the passage of Gen 2:7 that we are dealing with in this volume:


[^45]: See also *Teach. Silv. ([NHC VII,4])* 92.23–26. See also *Teach. Silv. ([NHC VII,4])* 102.34 ff.: “My son, do not allow your mind to stare downward, but rather let it look by means of the light at things above. For the light will always come from above. Even if it [i.e., the mind] is upon the earth, let it seek to pursue the things above. Enlighten your mind with the light of heaven so that you may turn to the light of heaven.” Translation by M. Peel and J. Zandee, “The Teachings of Silvanus,” in *The Coptic Gnostic Library: Nag Hammadi Codices VII* (ed. B.A. Pearson; NHMS 30; Leiden 1996), 249–369.
The rulers laid plans and said, ‘Come, let us create a man that will be soil from the earth.’ ... They had taken some soil from the earth and modelled their man after their body and after the image of God that had appeared to them in the waters ... And he breathed into his face; and the man came to have a soul (and remained) upon the ground many days. But they could not make him arise because of their powerlessness ...

_Hyp. Arch. [NHC II,4]_ 87.33–88.8

It is well known that Gnostics had a very low opinion of the world and of its creator. In their view, Genesis could not narrate the deeds of the true god, but referred to the creative activity of some lower and ignorant creator god(s), whose imperfection was apparent in the results. The _Hypostasis of the Archons_ therefore reinterprets Gen 2:7a such that it accords with this negative view of both creator and creation, attributing the formation of the human soul and body to the ignorant gods that populate the astral sphere. The _rulers_ first shape the body from the soil according to the likeness of God reflected in the waters; then the chief ruler breathes into his face and the body becomes soul-endowed. In spite of their efforts, however, their creature remains lifeless on the ground because of their lack of power. It is the intervention from above, from the invisible spirit of the highest God that will provide the spark of life, the _ψυχαῖος σπινθήρ_ according to other sources, to animate the first man. Only then we find a reference to the “living soul” in Gen 2:7b:

Now all these things came to pass by the will of the father of the entirety. Afterwards, the spirit saw the soul-endowed man upon the ground. And the spirit came forth from the Adamantine Land; it descended and came to dwell within him, and that man became a living soul.

_Hyp. Arch. [NHC II,4]_ 88.10–15

The _Hypostasis of the Archons_ describes all three anthropological elements referred to above: while the body proceeds from the earth, the soul proceeds from the demiurgical sphere, namely from the rulers who breathe it into man, and the intellect or spirit from the highest godly region.

Other texts, especially of Valentinian origin, explain man’s three constitutive elements as a result of a downward movement that determines the intellect’s

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devolution from its divine origin. Even if the cause initiating this process is never completely clear, at the end of the devolutive movement the intellect (or spirit, or *logos*) has to cope with the accretions of soul and body. At any rate, after the first step has taken place we see a dispersion of the intellect’s unity, which necessarily results in ignorance. This ignorance is the cause of a second stage of degradation because it initiates a series of affections: first of all, insecurity and doubt, then fear and, finally, a desire to know, since knowledge can remove all previous affections. The third and final step consists in a kind of “substantialization” of affections that produces the appearance of matter and the physical body.

The *Tripartite Tractate* (**NHC 1,5**) may help us to understand how the first dispersion takes place: the text describes how, due to the *Logos*’ inability to grasp the ungraspable and to bear the intensity of the light, it “doubts” and “looks down to the depth.” As a result, a “division” and a “turning away” take place and these in turn produce the appearance of ignorance and oblivion. The *Gospel of Truth* (**NHC 1,3**) in turn describes the two subsequent steps, namely the appearance and development of affections that will generate the psychic and *hylic* levels of reality. Anguish and fear appear as direct consequences of ignorance, and as anguish grows solid like a fog, it provides the suitable context for error to appear, which “became powerful” and “worked on its own matter foolishly.” The final stage of devolution is the alienation of the intellect and the soul in the realm of *physis*. The original ignorance remains unaltered and is perpetuated by oblivion and by the deficiency of the body’s cognitive means. Sensorial perception is not only unable to help man achieve knowledge, but also prolongs his ignorance since it delivers him to the delusion of externals.


48 *Tri. Trac.* (**NHC 1,5**) 76.23–77.11: according to the text, the fall of the *logos* has been planned by God. See R. Kasser et al., eds., *Tractatus Tripartitus 1, De supernis* (Bern 1973), 340 and L. Painchaud and E. Thomassen, ed., introd., comm., and trans., *Le traité tripartite (NH 1,5)* (BCNHT 10; Québec 1989), 333 ff.

49 *Tri. Trac.* (**NHC 1,5**) 77.21–25.


51 The same view can be found in the *Acts of Andrew*, see L. Roig Lanzillotta, *Acta Andreae Apocrypha: A New Perspective on the Nature, Intention and Significance of the Primitive Text* (CO 26; Geneva 2007), V* 213–214 (= Bonnet AAA 11.1 44.12–14) with ch. 4, § 3.4.2.1.

As was the case in bipartite schemes, we see a strict correlation between the view of man and that of the universe, consisting of transcendent, celestial, and earthly realms. Anthropology and cosmology are so intrinsically related that each anthropological element is conceived of as belonging to one cosmological realm: the intellect is related to the transcendent realm, the soul to the celestial region, the body to the earth. As could be expected, soteriology presents exactly the same trichotomous structure. Given the intellect's divine nature, its liberation consists in deconstructing the accretions gained during its downward movement to *physis*. The body returns to the elements, the soul is given back to the archons who populate the astral region, and the *nous* or *pneuma* speeds to its divine abode.

Now, where does this trichotomous scheme come from? It is well known that man's tripartite conception is explicitly stated for the first time in Late Antiquity in Plutarch's *De facie in orbe lunae*, where Sulla defends the view that man does not consist of two parts, but rather of three, namely intellect, soul, and body. In doing so, Sulla rejects the view that considers the intellect a part of the soul, but also establishes a clear hierarchy among the parts: νοῦς γὰρ ψυχῆς, ὅσῳ ψυχὴ σώματος, ἀμεινὸν ἐστὶ καὶ θειότερον.53 If we were to accept Deuse's hypothesis, this tripartition of man should be traced back to the bipartition of the soul into rational and irrational halves, which on the basis of Plato's views in the *Respublica* and the *Timaeus*,54 was standard in

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54 Against the view expressed in the *Phaedo* (783b–c) that the soul is not “composite”—and therefore not liable to destruction—the *Respublica* affirms that the soul has three parts—the spirited, the irrational, and the rational ones. As Dörrie (H. Dörrie, *Porphyrios’ “Symmikta zetemata”: Ihre Stellung in System und Geschichte des Neuplatonismus nebst einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten* [Zet 20; München 1959], 167–168) has pointed out, however, Middle Platonists reduced the former to a single part in order to bring it into line with the bipartition irrational-rational in the *Timaeus*. See on the bipartite structure of the soul in Middle Platonism, J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (2nd ed.; Ithaka, N.Y., 1996), 102 (Antiochus of Ascalon), 174–176 (Philo), 194 (Plutarch), 256–257 (Atticus), 263 (Severus), 290–294 (Alcínous).
Middle Platonism. In Deuse's view, Timarchus' myth in the Plutarchean *De genio Socratis* allows us to see how Plutarch develops his distinction between intellect and soul from a basic bipartite conception of the soul consisting of a rational and an irrational part. Philo of Alexandria might also seem to provide some precedent for this conception. Even though mostly endorsing the regular Platonic bipartite view of man, Philo's application of the bipartition of the soul as sometimes brings him close to a trichotomous view of man. For example, in *De migratione Abrahami*, the first chapters present a clear tripartite view of man, distinguishing body, soul, and *logos*, the latter being a specific aspect of the rational part of the soul. Not only his allegorical interpretation of God's command to Abraham in Gen 12:1 ("‘Land’ or ‘country’ is a symbol of the body, ‘kindred’ of sense-perception, ‘father’s house’ of speech [*logos*]"), but especially his use of the term *nous* to describe the rational part of the soul, seems to point in this direction. Note that Migr. 13 even asserts the separability of mind from the soul-body complex: "... when mind (*nous*) begins to know itself and to hold converse with the things of mind, it will thrust away from it that part of the soul which inclines to the province of sense-perception."

However, there are several reasons not to accept this inner Platonic origin of the trichotomous anthropology. To begin with, there is the fact that trichoto-


56 The *logos*, however, is nevertheless clearly seen as a differentiated part of the soul—witness his assertion, some lines below, that discursivity (*dianoia*) is the rational part of the soul as opposed to the irrational one that rules over sensation. Philo, *Migr.* 3.4–5 (*αἰσθήσεις δὲ συγγενὲς καὶ ἄδελφον ἐστὶ διανοίας, ἄλογον λογικῆς, ἐπειδὴ μίας ἄμφω μέρη ψυχῆς ταῦτα ...*).


58 Philo, *Migr.* 13.4–5 (*ἐπειδὰν γοῦν ὁ νοῦς ἀνέχεται γνωρίζειν ἐστὶν καὶ τοῖς νοητοῖς ἐνομιλεῖν θεωρήμασιν, ὅπως τὸ κλινόμενον τῆς ψυχῆς πρὸς τὸ αἰσθητὸν εἶδος ἀπώσεται*). See also Philo, *Her.* 69–74, where he expounds his view of ecstatic experience, conceived as the action by means of which the mind quits itself.
mous patterns do not oppose the intellect to the body, but rather the intellect to the soul-body complex. In a Platonic context this seems to be too drastic a re-characterization of the soul, since it implies changing its status from divine to mortal. Another important argument is that, as we have seen, anthropological schemes in Antiquity normally coincide with cosmological ones. This means that both patterns are expressions of a more fundamental conception of the reality and that one cannot change without affecting the other. Last but not least, not all Middle Platonists presenting a bipartition of the soul develop it into a trichotomous anthropological scheme, witness Maximus of Tyre.

Given that the trichotomous view of man is not exclusive to Philo or Plutarch, but also appears in other Middle Platonists, such as Alcinous, in the Corpus hermeticum, as well as in the Nag Hammadi corpus, one needs to find a more general explanation for its appearance. As has been pointed out, all trichotomous schemes are mainly concerned with a clear distinction between intellect and the soul-body complex, and this seems to reflect a clear Peripatetic background, since it was Aristotle who redefined Plato’s conception of a dichotomy in man, opposing his soul to his body when he opposed the νοῦς ("intellect") to the ψυχή ("soul"). Following Aristotle, all the examples dealt

59 The same hierarchy is at work in the tenth Hermetic tractate, called The Key (Corp. herm. 10.24 [125.10–16 NF 1]), which not only clearly distinguishes intellect, soul, and body, but also stresses the higher rank of the former, without which the soul resembles an irrational animal; only the intellect is divine and recovers its true nature after taking off the clothes of the soul that served it as a vehicle (Corp. herm. 10.16–17 [120.22–121.19 NF 1]).

60 See Bos, “Distinction,” 61ff.

with above not only deny immortality to the human soul, but repeatedly state that the intellect is man's most divine and only eternal element.\textsuperscript{62}

4 Conclusions

From the preceding it seems obvious that anthropological schemes correlate with cosmological ones. Following the old Democritean view that the human being is a microcosmos, the human tends to be considered in the light of a cosmological framework. In Plato, for example, his bipartite conception of man consisting of soul and body strictly correlates with his view of the cosmos, which opposed ideas to matter. The same holds true for Aristotle, since a tripartite conception of man that differentiates \textit{nous} ("intellect") from soul and body also correlates with his tripartite vision of the cosmos consisting of the realm of the Unmoved Mover, the astral sphere, and sublunar world. As has been pointed out, even the Stoic dualistic conception of the cosmos, with its two principles, namely the active (\(\tau\nu\pi\omega\upsilon\nu\nu\)) and passive (\(\tau\nu\pi\alpha\sigma\chi\upsilon\omega\nu\)), is determinant for their view of man, which sharply distinguishes soul and body.\textsuperscript{63}

As we have seen, Nag Hammadi texts are no exception to this rule. Texts including a bipartite view of man coherently present a bipartite view of the cosmos. The fullness of the \textit{pleroma} (divine region) is contrasted to the barrenness of the \textit{kenoma} ("emptiness"), the realm of creation: they oppose divine and earthly regions in the same way as they contrast soul with body. This naturally affected both their view of salvation and of the procedure that must be followed to attain it. As for texts including a tripartite view of man, they present,

\textsuperscript{62} Aristotle, \textit{Eth. nic.} 1177b26–1178a2: the intellect as the divine element in man by which he achieves complete happiness and partakes in the divine. See his conclusion in \textit{Eth. nic.} 1178a2–7, that the intellect is man's true self; \textit{Eth. nic.} 1178a22–32, the man who lives according to his intellect, that is, the man who pursues intellectual activity, cultivates his intellect and keeps it in the best condition is the most beloved of the Gods; \textit{Eth. eud.} 1248a24–29, where the intellect is said to be man's highest element and to be connected with God; \textit{De an.} 430a23–25; \textit{Metaph.} \(\lambda\lambda\) 1072b23–26; \textit{Part. an.} 656a8, 10; 686a27–28; \textit{Gen. an.} 736b28; 737a8–11; \textit{Protr.} frg. 108 (in the edition of I. Düring, introd., text, trans., and comm., \textit{Der Protreptikos des Aristoteles} [QdP 9; Frankfurt am Main 1969], 86–87). See P. Moraux, \textit{Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen: Von Andronikos bis Alexander von Aphrodisias 1, Die Renaissance des Aristotelismus im 1. Jh v. Chr.} (Perip 5; Berlin 1973), 230, and additional bibliography in n. 24.

\textsuperscript{63} Emilsson, "Soul-Body Dualism," 5332.
also coherently, a tripartite world-view, insofar as they oppose the transcendent divine region to the realm of movement, including the astral and earthly regions, in the same way that they contrast the intellect with the soul-body conglomerate.

The relatedness of the different aspects of the conceptual world behind the texts prevents us from attempting too simplistic an explanation of the anthropological differences between them. In our view, the different anthropological schemes are neither due to the influence of a more basic Christian opposition of spiritual and material realities nor to the bipartite background of Gen 2:7. Furthermore, the relatedness of the anthropological, cosmological, and soteriological schemes also poses clear difficulties to a genealogical or developmental explanation. Given the existence of several strands of Platonism at the time of composition of the Nag Hammadi texts, it seems preferable to explain the diverse anthropological schemes as arising from the different conceptual milieus in which the texts first saw light. While bipartite schemes appear to remain faithful to traditional Platonism, free of Aristotelian influences—as represented, for example, by Atticus—, trichotomous anthropologies reflect the tripartite view of man current in Middle Platonic contexts under the influence of the Peripatos, which from the second century onwards is more palpable thanks to the edition of the Corpus aristotelicum by Andronicus of Rhodos more than a century earlier.

We may then conclude that the diverging opinions referred to at the beginning are not due to the incoherence or erratic thought of the Gnostic authors. They might simply proceed from the variety of views they found in their intellectual milieus.

64 On which, see Merlan, “Greek Philosophy,” 53–83.