



World Soul – Anima Mundi: On the Origins and Fortunes of a Fundamental Idea

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World Soul – Anima Mundi: On the Origins and Fortunes of a

Fundamental Idea, edited by Christoph Helmig, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2020, viii + 364 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-062846-3 € 109.95 / US\$ 126.99 / £ 100.00. Hardcover.

About the ‘origins and fortunes’ of World Soul, we have learned a great deal in recent decades, and this emerging field of research continues to open up with the publishing of *World Soul – Anima Mundi*, the first-ever collected volume on the doctrine. The volume edited by Christoph Helmig with the help of Laura Marongiu gathers contributions from a 2011 conference with new researches that together provide a survey of the doctrine’s presence and influence in (although not limited to) the ancient and late-ancient world.

The essays vary from the technical (as, for example, Petrucci’s dense look at the Middle Platonic musical theories) to the introductory (see Baltzly’s very common-sense approach to Proclus). Some, again, break very new ground (as does Ullaco’s study of pseudo-graphic Pythagorean texts) and others return to more well-known material. Most of the contributions fall within that space familiar to handbooks and companions lying somewhere between ‘introduction’ and ‘new research’ (See Dillon’s and Zachhuber’s essays, which rest most comfortably in this middle ground). The authors generally manage to offer novel contributions while providing the reader with the familiarity needed to begin exploring the perennial difficulties and unexplored territory themselves. As a pioneering volume in a still very new field, *World Soul* is a very welcome publication.

The first impression made by these chapters is the great diversity of World Soul’s many different uses, interpretations, and adaptations. Moreover, as a volume that focuses upon the ancient and late ancient worlds, this is not even to mention some of the most diverse forms of the concept’s latter representations (we might think, for example, of the 12th c. Latin interpreters, some of whom understood World Soul to be an image of the Holy Spirit or the modern German thinkers whose original use of the idea have a reference in the last essay of the volume, but are, nevertheless not its focus). Such diversity is first apparent from Helmig’s own introduction which helpfully provides a historical survey of World Soul ‘in antiquity and beyond.’ Regrettably, however, Helmig neglects to connect his history to some of the strongest existing research. I think especially of Tullio Gregory’s (2020) monumental book on World Soul in the Latin tradition which just received a second edition this year (See also Gregory 2006, Caiazzo 1993, and Hicks 2017). He also misrepresents Miklós Vassányi’s (2011) seminal study of World Soul among Modern German thinkers by omitting its subtitle – for the correction and a few supplements, see below.

If we sought to begin with a basic definition, we might say that World Soul – the invention of Plato’s *Timaeus* – is the universal life which mediates between the worlds of eternity and time as it governs the motions of the heavens and is a principle of all other living things. However, it is perhaps foremost among the

contributions of this volume that to speak so confidently of a such a static doctrine of World Soul emerging from the ancient world whole cloth would be to ignore centuries of exegetical and philosophical innovations.

Indeed, World Soul neither has a singular beginning in Plato nor does it have an authorized interpretation among his followers. It is tempting to suggest that the only thing which persists about 'World Soul' is the name (and even that would not be entirely true since the name we are familiar with is not even the name Plato coined – *anima mundi* was but the Latin adaptation of Plato's own ἡ τοῦ παντὸς ψυχή, 'the Soul of the All,' *Timaeus* 41d). To illustrate, in the four essays which deal most explicitly with World Soul in Plato himself, each of the four provides a different understanding of the doctrine's significance relative to a different approach to Plato's works. Filip Karfik writes from within the framework of the *Timaeus*' 'likely story' seeking to understand the place of World Soul within the Timaeian cosmogony. Franco Ferrari seeks instead to illuminate the more poetic mode of the *Timaeus* by beginning with the metaphysics of the *Sophist*. From a very different angle, Federico M. Petrucci writes on the musical themes involved in the mathematical sections of the *Timaeus* which describe World Soul's constitution. Finally, John Dillon leaves the *Timaeus* aside and turns instead to Plato's *Laws* where World Soul has grown in importance to become even 'the most ancient of all things' (*Laws* 896a).

These four distinct (and sometimes conflicting) accounts of World Soul's beginnings in Plato set the stage beautifully for the seven essays which follow, all of them describing different aspects of World Soul's ancient and late-ancient receptions. These seven essays together make the volume's second principal contribution: World Soul is a doctrine born in an inextricably *textual* tradition. I speak, of course, of the Platonic tradition in the ancient world which is first and foremost the tradition of teaching and interpreting the Platonic corpus (consider Marc-Antoine Gavray's contribution which deals almost entirely with exegetical disputes concerning Plato's text). Philosophy begins with the works of the Divine Plato, and there through reading, teaching, and commentary whole worlds of philosophical thinking are born. This is a point made beautifully by Dirk Baltzly's contribution to World Soul in Proclus' *Timaeus* commentary. Baltzly urges us to remember that while we approach World Soul, a doctrine which can seem so strange from the present, we must seek to understand it as a dynamic part of a complete intellectual life: "The teaching and learning environment that we glimpse through its textual remains [are] aimed at self-transformation that consisted in living "in and through" the texts of Plato' (307). Each of the essays on the latter Platonists exhibits the results of this pursuit to some degree. Damian Caluori offers a glimpse of a very developed doctrine in the thought of Plotinus. James Wilberding provides a more particular example of how Porphyry and Plotinus seek to see the World Soul at work in human reproduction, and Carl O'Brien shows something similar in the *Timaeus Commentary* of Calcidius which seeks in World Soul a vision of fate's obedience to providence.

Thus, by the conclusion of the volume Helmig and his contributors have established some of the crucial building blocks of World Soul's history. And the evidence of diverse approaches to this Platonic doctrine is both philosophically

exciting and necessary to discover as we continue to encounter the history of philosophy, but there remains the question of how we are to understand the larger movements and developments which may be threaded through the particular expositions. How are we to understand, for example, the diverging interpretations of World Soul among Stoics and Middle Platonists in the Hellenistic world – do these distinct doctrines develop different aspects of Plato's own teaching or has each school mingled Plato with other influences? We are eager to know more about the crucial distinction Caluiori makes between Plotinus' World Soul (or soul-sister) and the Soul which is the third of three hypostases (following Intellect and The One). World Soul, it seems, has been subordinated to yet another arch-soul. How does this distinction become possible and what are its effects? In what ways is the doctrine transformed over the centuries between the beginnings of 'Neoplatonism' and the close of the academies? Finally, there is the vexing question of the relationships between these accounts of Greek origins and the later Latin adaptations of World Soul. While it is not the express purpose of *World Soul – Anima Mundi* to pursue broader histories, I believe its contributors must be credited all the same by providing the means by which such questions may be formulated with more clarity.

There is, however, one exception, for the organizers of this volume graciously include a single essay that pursues precisely these kinds of historical questions. I speak of the volume's concluding essay on World Soul's 'Nachleben,' by Johannes Zachhuber. It is even more difficult to understand a doctrine like World Soul when its adopters have mingled it with different (or even 'contrary') ideas, and Zachhuber shows us that to understand World Soul in latter periods we must become sensitive to this kind of 'interference.' Zachhuber seeks to show that the concept of World Soul which re-emerges in Modern German philosophy is not simply a return to Plato's *Timaeus* but rather the reception of an idea which has been blended with what he calls 'an element of Aristotle's philosophy of nature' (336). This is, as Zachhuber demonstrates, one of the keys to understanding World Soul's lasting significance; we must seek to understand how the Platonic idea has been incorporated into the tradition of Aristotelian science (for which reason we can also be thankful for the contribution of Johan C. Thom which is not about World Soul at all, but rather an 'alternative' theory from the Aristotelian tradition).

In this case, Zachhuber begins with a puzzling comment which he draws from correspondence between Salomon Maimon and Immanuel Kant. Maimon describes a speculative use of the 'World Soul' concept and explains it in a way that he says is consonant with 'the Aristotelian School' (190). Puzzled by this reference, Zachhuber compares it to a discussion which developed previously among Greek and Arabic commentators on Aristotle who compare Plato's World Soul with Aristotle's idea of 'celestial heat' from *On Generation and Corruption*. Plato's World Soul can be understood as a universal principle of life and Aristotle posits celestial heat to explain how matter and form are drawn together. While it is by no means a comparison that Peripatetics unanimously assent to, it is undoubtedly a fertile analogy. It is by such channels, as Zachhuber explains, that World Soul 'became influential for philosophical and proto-

scientific conceptions about nature, the origin, and the evolution of life from the 16th to the 18th century' (336). It is my hope that by Zachhuber's example our understanding of World Soul will continue to grow.

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Responses to naturalism: critical perspectives from idealism and pragmatism, edited by Paul Giladi, Routledge, 2020, ix + 319 pp., £120.00, \$155.00 (hardback), ISBN: 9781138744745

This volume sits at the crossroads of three notable developments in recent Anglophone philosophy. Their intersection is no coincidence, I think, since all three have mutually supported each other's progress. I'm talking about: the critique and/or reform of *naturalism*, and the resurgence and reinvigoration of both *idealism* and *pragmatism*. As editor Paul Giladi says, this crossroads is fertile ground for philosophical progress, since it involves 'do[ing] justice to the discursive complexity *within* idealist ... and ... pragmatist responses to naturalism' (11), as well as putting these two traditions 'into conversation with one another about how best to respond to naturalism' (11).

While critiques of naturalism are nothing new, two things are notable about these responses to naturalism. Firstly, there is the historical self-consciousness with which analytically-trained philosophers are criticizing naturalism, with an understanding of and dialectical sensitivity to the historical contexts of its adoption. Secondly is, of course, the re-emergence of idealism and the reinvigoration of pragmatism from within this critique. It is notable that these two traditions are currently at the highest point in Anglophone philosophy they have been for over a century. That idealism and pragmatism have returned to the stage, in particular to criticize naturalism, one of the analytic tradition's central pillars, reminds me of Richard Rorty's comment in the late 20th century that