

RELIGIOUS STUDIES



UDC 2:1



Original article

<https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-3-43-47>



“The Problem of the Body” in the Christian Tradition

Vladimir A Ter-Arakelyants

Don State Technical University, 1, Gagarin Square, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation

✉ protoierey.vladimir@gmail.com

Annotation

Introduction. In Christianity, the interpretation of “the problem of the body” had fundamentally specific features caused by the essence of the Christian Revelation itself about the incarnated God. The idea of a real embodiment of a transcendent Personal Beginning, unthinkable in ancient times, nevertheless became the subject of gravity of thought among the Gnostics, who tried to combine the Christian Revelation and some ideas of ancient philosophy. The specifics of Gnosticism were in this syncretism, in particular, in the desire to place the idea of the Person of Christ the Savior and the dependent, acquiring personal salvation from Him, human person “from flesh and blood” into the ancient picture of the world.

Materials and methods. Consideration of “the problem of the body” in the Christian tradition is in the steady development of the philosophy of religion, the whole complex of philosophical and general scientific methods: analytical, phenomenological, principles of objectivity, universal connection, contradiction, methods of comparative analysis and synthesis, scientific generalization. The study uses a conceptual and logical analysis of theoretical terminology in order to define the term “body” for the sociocultural context.

Results. The Fathers of the Church did not consider the soul and the body as two self-sufficient substances, individually “responsible” for the imperfection (perfection) of a person. In this case, the soul and the body must be represented not as separate beginnings-substances, but as two energies of a single human personality manifesting itself. However, the vital psychic-corporal energy of a person can acquire a different direction in a person, different vectors of attraction: either to the materially transient world, where the lusts of the flesh dominate, or to the eternal world (God).

Discussion and conclusion. Pleasure as a certain state of mind “captured by the body” was evaluated by the fathers of the Church (as well as by the subsequent Christian tradition) as something that testifies to a certain wrong motivation of a human being, their realized worldview and value orientations, namely, “bound by desires”. This is what caused their attention to the teachings of hedonism which declared pleasure as the leading motive and goal of human behavior.

Keywords: body, flesh, mortification of the body, soul, personality, energy, pleasure, body capture

For citation. Ter-Arakelyants VA. The “problem of the body” in the Christian tradition. *Science Almanac of Black Sea Region Countries*. 2023;9(3):43–47. <https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-3-43-47>

«Проблема тела» в христианской традиции

В.А. Тер-Аракелянц

Донской государственный технический университет, Российская Федерация, г. Ростов-на-Дону, пл. Гагарина, 1

✉ protoierey.vladimir@gmail.com

Аннотация

Введение. В христианстве прочтение «проблемы тела» имело принципиально специфические черты, вызванные сутью самого христианского Откровения о воплотившемся (вочеловечившемся) Боге. Немыслимая в античную эпоху идея действительного воплощения трансцендентного Личностного Начала, стала тем не менее предметом тяготения мысли у гностиков, пытавшихся соединить христианское Откровение и некоторые идеи античной философии. В этом синкретизме, в частности, в желании как-то поместить представление о Личности Христа-Спасителя и зависимой, приобретающей личное спасение от Него человеческой персоне «из плоти и крови» в античную картину мира, и состояла специфика гностицизма.

Материалы и методы. Рассмотрение «проблемы тела» в христианской традиции находится в устойчивом развитии философии религии, целого комплекса философских и общенаучных методов: аналитического, феноменологического, принципов объективности, всеобщей связи, противоречия, методов сравнительного анализа и синтеза, научного обобщения. Применяется концептуально-логический анализ теоретической терминологии с целью определения термина «тело» для социокультурного контекста. Исходной методологической идеей исследования являются диалектический и системный подходы.

Результаты исследования. У отцов Церкви душа и тело не рассматривались в качестве двух самостоятельных субстанций, по отдельности «отвечающих» за несовершенство (совершенство) человека. В данном случае душу и тело необходимо представлять не как отдельные начала-субстанции, а в качестве двух энергий единой проявляющей себя человеческой личности. Однако жизненная душевно-телесная энергия человека может приобретать в человеке разную направленность, разные векторы притяжения: либо к материально-преходящему миру, где господствуют плотские страсти, либо к миру непреходящему (Богу).

Обсуждение и заключение. Наслаждение, или удовольствие как определенное душевное состояние, «плененное телом», оценивалось отцами Церкви (как и последующей христианской традицией) как нечто, что свидетельствует об определенной ошибочной мотивированности человеческого существа, его реализованных мировоззренчески-ценностных ориентиров, а именно — «связанностью хотениями». Именно этим было вызвано их внимание к учениям гедонизма, объявлявшим наслаждение как ведущий мотив и цель поведения человека.

Ключевые слова: тело, плоть, умерщвление тела, душа, личность, энергия, наслаждение, пленение телом

Для цитирования. Тер-Аракелянц В.А. Решение «проблемы тела» в христианской традиции. *Научный альманах стран Причерноморья*. 2023;9(3):43–47. <https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-3-43-47>

Introduction. In Christianity, the interpretation of “the problem of the body” had fundamentally specific features caused by the essence of the Christian Revelation itself about the incarnated God. The idea of a real embodiment of a transcendent Personal Beginning, unthinkable in ancient times, nevertheless became the subject of thought gravity among the Gnostics who tried to combine the Christian Revelation and some ideas of ancient philosophy. The specifics of Gnosticism were in this syncretism, in particular, in the desire to place the idea of the Person of Christ the Savior and the dependent, acquiring personal salvation from Him, human person “from flesh and blood” into the ancient picture of the world.

Materials and methods. In the study, the methodology is complex in nature, which is due to the interdisciplinary approach to studying the problem. Consideration of “the problem of the body” in the Christian tradition is in the steady development of the philosophy of religion, the whole complex of philosophical and general scientific methods: analytical, phenomenological, principles of objectivity, universal connection, contradiction, methods of comparative analysis and synthesis, scientific generalization. The study uses a conceptual and logical analysis of theoretical terminology in order to define the term “body” for the sociocultural context. Methods of historical and genetic analysis of scientific methodology are involved to analyze its reorientation from a formal-theoretical attitude to a socially significant one. The initial methodological idea of the study is dialectical and systemic approaches. “The problem of the body” needs a new

research methodology involving a new conceptual apparatus and methodological tools. Our study considers the object — the patristic theological tradition. Methodology as a logical organization for solving “the problem of the body” is to determine the purpose and the subject of the research, to find approaches and guidelines to the problem, to choose research methods. The religious and philosophical aspect of the “body” is also an object of the social sphere of the research. This is due to the ambiguity of the concept of “theology of the body”. Modernity requires clarification and development of this concept, corresponding to their new understanding.

Results. One of the ideas of ancient philosophy (in particular, Platonism and Stoicism) that retain significance for Gnosticism is concluded in the ancient Orphic formula for the body as “prison” or “grave” of the soul. The body, being material beginning, was assessed as something connecting a person with something vile, in any case, as evidence of human imperfection. The fact of the connection of the soul with the body in mortal life was considered here as evidence of the fall of a person out of Divine fullness (pleroma). This was followed by the conclusions that the body is the enemy of the soul, at best, a slave, with whom there can be only appropriate “consumer” relationships (according to the word of Stoic Marcus Aurelius, “the body is not myself, this is my first property” [1]). In life practice, from this worldview, both immeasurable asceticism aimed at suppressing any natural manifestations of the body, at “killing” it, and a kind of libertism (up to outright dissipation), caused by the feeling that spiritual people, “pneumatics” (i. e., genuine Gnostics) are not subject to the body’s influence, were born. Such moral and practical doubling was, from the point of view of spiritual experience of Christianity, the evidence of the unresolved problem of the body itself. Indeed, it is necessary to agree with the opinion that “ascetic of Gnostics in relation to the body and “affairs of the flesh” was essentially reduced to squeamish disengagement, although it could be a consequence of high individual-psychological tension” [2, p. 38]. At the same time, Christian theologians and ascetics could use the ascetic terminology of ancient philosophers (representatives of Platonism and Stoicism), however, similar terms most often acquired completely different basic meanings in the light of the Christian worldview. So, the famous father of the Church of the IV century. St. Gregory the Theologian said that “the soul is God’s breath... this is the light enclosed in the cave, but divine and abiding. And you, my soul... who made you a dead bodies carrier?” [3, p. 143]. However, calling the body “a dead body” had this kind of ascetic meaning, which meant not the denial of the bodily principle, but only reflected the motive for the need for a significant spiritual transformation of the entire human being.

The very presence of a body in a person is considered in Christianity not so much as a limiting (spiritual possibilities) feature of a person, but as a peculiar potential advantage of a person (for example, in front of bodiless angels), who gets the opportunity to be fully (not only spiritually) involved in the incarnated God. One of the key ideas of Christianity is based on this — the idea of Theosis. The apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Corinthians says: “Don’t you know that your bodies are members of Christ?” that “your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit living in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? ... Therefore, glorify God both in your bodies and in your souls which are the essence of God” (1 Cor. 6: 15, 19–20). In soteriological terms (salvation, connection with God), the attitude towards the body did not just allow but prescribed love. Hence the apostolic justification of marriage as a sacred union of souls and bodies followed. “Husbands, love your wives, like Christ loved the Church and had given Himself for it”; “For no one has ever had hatred for their flesh, but nourishes and warms it, just like the Lord nourishes and warms the Church” (Eph. 5: 25, 29).

“The body is not a bond, but... as in good as in evil, it assists the soul...,” one of the first Christian writers Methodius of Patara stated. [Quote according to: 3, p.143] It was this idea that was a reflection of the general Christian world view justifying the bodily beginning but assigning it a valuable co-operative-instrumental role (without any squeamish disengagement) in a single spiritual-life work. Thus, according to St. Irenaeus of Lyon, “soul is a master, artist. Body is a tool, instrument» [4, p. 100]. For Christianity, it was essential to recognize the presence of sin, evil, realized in vile and even unnatural lusts of the flesh, and introducing a common disharmony into human life, but the body was not considered as the culprit of the soul’s sin. In a real state of a person’s “fall”, their tendency to sin, the body becomes a limiting, “landing” and sensual-selfish beginning if it acts as determining the leading needs and life preferences of a person. “The soul accompanied by its body... to some extent delayed by the mixing of its quickness with the slowness of the body” (St. Irenaeus of Lyons) [Quote according to: 3, p. 143]. Therefore, the soul acquired some functional superiority compared to the body; its energy, activity was assessed as dominant compared to the body’s own energy, as energy that controls and connects a person with the spiritual world.

In theological literature, there is an opinion that the Church Fathers did not consider the soul and the body at all as two self-sufficient substances, separately “responsible” for human imperfection (perfection). According to the modern Christian thinker Ch. Yannaras, the soul and the body must be represented not as separate substances but as two energies

of a single self-manifesting human person. According to the Russian religious thinker archpriest V. V. Zenkovsky, "the sphere of the body and the spiritual sphere are not "glued" together, but form a living unity in a person"... in such a way that... "he always turns out to be both bodily and spiritual in everything" [Quote according to: 3, p. 144]. However, the vital mental and bodily energy of a person can acquire a different orientation in a person, different vectors of attraction: either to the materially transient world, where the lusts of the flesh dominate, or to the eternal world (God); or the person will be more guided by the "current moment", sensual desires "here and now", and thereby express the needs of the body rather than the soul, or their view will be directed to eternity, and they will be saturated with spiritual reality.

However, the soul of a person can be "captured by the flesh", indulging in carnal pleasures and sensual passions, so that idealistic aspirations in it are infringed and suppressed, as the ancient idealist philosophers said in their own way, without solving, nevertheless, according to the Christian worldview, the problem of the "presence" of the body. After all, bodily experience is one way or another a necessary component of human existence, a condition of its "earthly" completeness and integrity. However, "flesh" is not evidence of the presence of a phenomenon of the body and sensuality, but "sensually-desirable sphere of the subconscious" [5, p. 43], which tragic confrontation with the sphere of conscious will and mind was discovered and so "felt" by the Christian study of asceticism. The Apostle Paul talked about the relevance and life tragedy of the resistance of the flesh to the law of mind (consciousness) and the law of God in man: "I do not what I want, but what I hate, ... there is a desire for good in me, but so that to do it, I do not find it" (Epistle to the Romans 7, 18). "Captivity by the flesh" is manifested in the action of the so-called lusts of the flesh (gluttony, lechery, etc.). In the literature of the Christian study of asceticism (it is enough to point to the large-scale collection of ascetic and theological creations "Philokalia"), a whole analysis of nature and functioning of lusts and the fight against them has been developed.

Lusts characterizing the distorted spiritual and moral image of person's being, "their local directed energy, the desire for anything worldly (object, position, state, etc.) in contrast to the aspiration for God (otherness, eternity)" [6, p. 352], encapsulate the idea of slavery or captivity of a human being, according to the famous ascetic of Ephrem the Syrian, "the subjugation of the soul, the embarrassment of the mind and slavery" [Ephrem the Syrian], or, according to the theologian of the 20th century, "suffering in the sense of passivity and slavery" [7]. Thus, gluttony caused by the desire for "excessive caring for the flesh" is in fact "internal idolatry to the pleasure of the utero" [6, p. 357], sensual egocentrism, tearing a person away from the experience of God's message, and therefore making him, in a moral and practical sense, an atheist.

Discussion and conclusions. Pleasure as a certain state of mind, "captured by the body", was evaluated by the fathers of the Church (as well as by the subsequent Christian tradition) as something that testifies to a certain wrong motivation of a human being, their realized worldview and value orientations, namely, "bound by desires" [Ephrem]. This is what caused their attention to the teachings of hedonism which declared pleasure as the leading motive and goal of human behavior.

References

1. Marcus Aurelius. *Nayedine s soboy. Razmyshleniya = Alone. Reflections*. Available from: <http://www.opentextnn.ru/man/?id=518> (Accessed 10 December 2021).
2. Rozhkovsky VB. *Paradoks idei umaleniya cheloveka v pravoslavnoy mysli = Paradox of the idea of diminishing a person in Orthodox thought*. Rostov-on-Don: Antey; 2013.
3. Lorgus A, Priest. *Pravoslavnyaya antropologiya (kurs lektsiy) = Orthodox anthropology (lecture course)*. Moscow: Graf-Press; 2003.
4. Cyprian (Kern), archimandrite. *Antropologiya svyatitelya Grigoriya Palamy = Anthropology of sanctifier Gregory of Palamas*. Moscow; 1996.
5. Vysheslavtsev BP. *Etika preobrazhennogo Erosa = Ethics of the transfigured Eros*. Moscow: Republic; 1994.
6. Ephrem the Syrian (reverend). O strastyakh. V kn. Yefrem Sirin (prp.). *O pokayanii = About passions*. In the book Ephrem the Syrian (reverend). On repentance. Available from: http://www.golden-ship.ru/knigi/2/efrem_sirin_o_pokayanii.htm#q3 (Accessed 12 October 2022).
7. Sophronius (Sakharov) (Archimandrite) *Starets Siluan Afonskiy = Elder Siluan of Athos*. Available from: <http://predanie.ru/lib/book/69621/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).
8. *Filosofiya: kratkiy tematicheskiy slovar = Philosophy: A short thematic dictionary*. Ed. Matyash TP, Yakovleva VP. Rostov-on-Don: Phoenix; 2001.

About the Author:

Ter-Arakelyants Vladimir Arakelovich, archpriest, Ph.D. (Advanced Doctorate) in Philosophy, Professor, Department of Philosophy and World Religions, Don State Technical University (1, Gagarin Square, Rostov-on-Don, 344000, RF), protoierey.vladimir@gmail.com

Received 05.07.2023

Revised 28.07.2023

Accepted 30.07.2023

Conflict of interest statement

The author does not have any conflict of interest.

The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

Об авторе:

Тер-Аракельянц Владимир Араkelович, протоиерей, доктор философских наук, профессор кафедры философии и мировых религий, Донской государственный технический университет (РФ, 344000, г. Ростов-на-Дону, пл. Гагарина, 1), protoierey.vladimir@gmail.com

Поступила в редакцию 05.07.2023

Поступила после рецензирования 28.07.2023

Принята к публикации 30.07.2023

Конфликт интересов

Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов

Автор прочитал и одобрил окончательный вариант рукописи.