

SEMEN, PHILOSOPHY, AND PAUL

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In the section on Stoic logic in *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley helpfully note that “logic” in Stoic thought encompasses far more than what we might imagine. While today “logic” brings to mind theorems and proofs, the Stoics considered this category to include “everything to do with rational discourse” – including definitions, stylistics, and epistemology.¹ This is but one of many instances where ancient philosophical categories differ from our own, and it follows from this that we may often be surprised at what we find included as “philosophical” in antiquity.

One such surprise is the ancient philosophical concern with the physical aspect of human conception, generation, and reproduction, topics generally relegated today to the realm of science and biology.² From a modern perspective, these matters do not relate obviously to philosophical concepts – or even to the ancient concepts that come most readily to mind, such as

¹ A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, *Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 188.

² There has been a growing focus on the this aspect of ancient philosophy within the last two decades, heavily influenced by Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, vol. 2 and 3, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988-1990). Cf. Philip J. van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health, and Disease* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Julie K. Ward, ed., *Feminism and Ancient Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

living with moderation and freedom from fear. I would like to turn our attention to this aspect, the philosophy of human physiology, as an entrée into considering the much-debated traces of philosophical thought in Paul, focusing in particular on the use of reproductive and generative language. Using 1 Cor 15:35-49 as a case-study of sorts, I hope to show that focusing on the physiological language in Paul may (further) evince the use of philosophical discourse, as well as help unravel the tangle of metaphors and analogies found in this passage and elsewhere in the Pauline corpus.

COSMOLOGY OR PHYSIOLOGY?

In *Paul and the Stoics*, Troels Engberg-Pedersen compares the structural similarities between Pauline Christian conversion and Stoic transformation, providing a persuasive argument that Paul (at least in Philippians, Galatians, and Romans) may best be understood through Stoic *topoi* and perspectives.³ In a recent paper from the Copenhagen project “Philosophy at the Roots of Christianity,” Engberg-Pedersen focuses on the Stoic understanding of *pneuma* in explicating Paul’s concept of resurrection in 1 Cor 15.⁴ There, he argues, the presentation of a resurrected, pneumatic *and* material body “can only derive from Stoicism.”⁵

At each stage in the passage, Engberg-Pedersen elucidates a facet of Stoic cosmology to show its influence on Paul’s explanation of resurrection. For example, the categorization of heavenly bodies apart from earthly bodies (vv. 40-41) reflects the *scala natura* of Stoic thought that separates the aethereal bodies (e.g. the stars, *intellegentia*, *sensus*) from sublunary ones (e.g. humans, animals, organic and inorganic matter). The transformation of the body (and *not* simply the sloughing off of the flesh) is identified with the Stoic concept of conflagration where all material is consumed back into the Divine. Thus, humans will transform from psychic bodies into pneumatic ones, joining Christ in the heavenlies, themselves then also being of a “heavenly ‘stuff.’”⁶

What Engberg-Pedersen leaves out of his analysis, however, is Paul’s use of agricultural and, I will argue, physiological language. Of course his paper does address the metaphorical force of the language, for example, the ideas of change and growth, but the usage of words such as *sperma* and *speirō* goes unquestioned. What if we were to consider this passage from a physiological

³ Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).

⁴ Idem, “A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma in Paul” (paper presented at the project “Philosophy at the Roots of Christianity,” Copenhagen, 1-2 September 2006).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

viewpoint? For example, could not the verses used to indicate a Stoic *scala natura* instead (or also) point to a physiological conception of heredity? Consider verse 39: “Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.”⁷ Certainly there is the presence of a hierarchy of species,⁸ but when it follows, in the text, that “God gives . . . to each kind of seed its own body” (v. 38, *bekastō tōn spermatōn idion sōma*) there also arises the concept that “like bears forth like” in animal reproduction.

This is a foundational concept in Aristotle’s investigation of biology in *The Generation of Animals*: “Among animals of this class, those which are formed as the result of copulation of animals of the same kind, themselves generate in turn after their own kind.”⁹ From this general observation arise the problems of conception and development (who contributes matter or form and how?) and heredity (how do offspring come to resemble one parent or the other? how is the sex of the fetus determined?). These would continue to be matters for philosophical discussion up to Paul’s time and beyond.

If Paul should be using philosophical discourse, or, at least, philosophical language, in 1 Cor 15, the study of his physiological understanding would be just as appropriate as the cosmological. In this case, the use of *sperma* could be seen as the physiological counterpart (in significance, not function) to the cosmological *pneuma*. This, too, is a *topos* shared by Paul and the philosophical schools, and its investigation may not only provide a framework for understanding Pauline resurrection but also other Pauline passages revolving around the concept(s) of *sperma*.

What follows is a brief exploration of the themes surrounding *sperma* in ancient philosophy, focusing on the understanding of it as human semen/sperm. It will quickly become apparent why *sperma* should occupy the minds of philosophers, given that, even when spoken of as a physical substance, it is considered a first principle, the cause of growth, form, and motion.

PHYSIOLOGY AS PHILOSOPHY

In ancient philosophical discussions of *sperma* as semen, the foremost topic up for debate was whether the male alone contributed semen or if the female

⁷ All New Testament texts from the New Revised Standard Version.

⁸ Cf. Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 125.

⁹ Arist. *Gen. an.* 1.1.715b3-4.

also contributed. Censorinus records this debate beginning already with the pre-Socratic philosophers:

Then, from where semen arises is not agreed upon among teachers of knowledge. For Parmenides thought that it came from both right and left parts. But to Hippo of Metapontinum, or, according to Aristoxenus, of Samos, semen seems to flow forth from the marrow, and this seem to be proved by this, that after the mating of animals, if someone should kill the males, he would discover their marrow as being exhausted. But some refute this opinion, such as Anaxagoras, Democritus, and Alcmaeon of Croton: for these respond that, after the mating of herds, the males are exhausted not only in the marrow, but also in the fat and in much flesh. That makes the opinion varied among authorities whether an offspring is born only from the semen of the father, as Diogenes and Hippo and the Stoics wrote, or also from [the semen] of the mother which seemed [true] to Anaxagoras and Alcmaeon and likewise to Parmenides and Empedocles and Epicurus.¹⁰

When Galen addresses this debate in the second century C.E. he draws from two sources as material representing either side: the Hippocratic corpus and Aristotle.¹¹ In Aristotle we have the first philosophical discussion of the theory of *epigenesis*, where the male's semen provides the "form" and serves as the "principle of movement" while the female provides the material upon which it acts.¹² And although Plato, Aristotle's teacher, does not focus directly on biological processes, the general assumptions of *epigenesis* can be seen in the creation narrative of *Timaeus*, where the three natures correlate with the father (the generating), the mother (the place of generation), and the child (the thing generated).¹³ Stoic thought would eventually draw from Platonic and Aristotelian physiology in its cosmology (see more of which below) and the association of male semen with form and generation would heavily influence even those who disagreed with the one-seed theory.¹⁴ The

¹⁰ Cens. *De die natali* 5.2-4.

¹¹ Gal. *De semine*.

¹² Arist. *Gen an.* 1.20.729a9-12. Aristotle does speak of female semen but as containing only matter and no generative principle: "whereas the female's semen contains material only" (*to de tou theleos hulēn monon*) (4.1.14-15).

¹³ Pl. *Ti.* 50c-d.

¹⁴ Galen, for example, proposed a two-seed theory but, nevertheless, located the lion's share of generative power within the male semen. Cf. Gal. *De semine* 2.2.19-21. According to Martin, popular opinion held that both male and female produced semen. Martin, "Contradictions of Masculinity: Ascetic Inseminators and Menstruating Men in Greco-Roman Culture," in *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity through Early Modern Europe*, ed. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 84.

philosophically minded authors of Hellenistic Judaism, in their mentions of human conception, also seem to assume a theory of *epigenesis*, naming “blood” (that is, the menses) as the material contribution of the mother to be formed by the father’s seed.¹⁵

The one-seed theory, however, generated multiple problems for philosophical considerations of heredity. If the male seed served to generate form, how was it that offspring often resembled the female? And if like should bear forth like, why would female offspring ever come into existence if *male* semen was the only creative force acting upon passive matter? The Epicureans avoided these problems altogether with a two-seed theory, thus, the determination of the offspring’s features, sex, and characteristics could be decided by a warlike encounter between the male and female seed:

And when at the mingling of the seed the female has happened to conquer the force of the male with sudden force and seize upon it, then children are made like their mothers by the mother’s seed, as they are like their fathers by the father’s seed. But those whom you see partake of both appearances, closely mingling the looks of their parents, spring from both the father’s body and the mother’s blood, when mutual passion, breathing in unison, has dashed together seeds aroused throughout the frame by the goads of Venus and neither of them has overcome or been overcome.¹⁶

For Aristotle, the solution comes from an agricultural analogy, for just as a plant’s seed is affected by the kind of soil it grows from, so offspring also take their *genus* from the matter they are made from. Hence, when animals of different species produce offspring, “as time goes on and successive generations are produced, the offspring finish up by taking after the female as regard their bodily form.”¹⁷ On the other hand, individual features and characteristics are directed by the seed.

Of course Aristotle’s theory of heredity is problematic since it implies that children always resemble their father, and this, obviously, is not always the case. Galen solves this problem by separating out types of inheritance: species, traits, and sex. Offspring take after the species of their mother, since they spend nine months in her womb and blood. Traits are determined in much the same fashion as the Epicureans held, through a battle for

¹⁵ Cf. Wis 7:1-2, 4 Macc 13:19-20, Philo *Op.* 67, the last lacking a reference to blood but depicting a passive womb, nevertheless.

¹⁶ Lucr. 4.1208-1217. Cf. Aëtius (Plutarch) *Doxography* 5.5.1

¹⁷ Arist. *Gen. an.* 2.4.738b33-34.

domination between the male and female seed. Thus the male seed might dominate in the formation of the nose of the offspring but the female seed in the formation of the eyes, and so on. As for the sex, this is determined by temperature and moisture, both in the semen and the ambient atmosphere. Here Galen echoes Aristotle, who postulated that the conditions during intercourse determine whether seed or matter would dominate in hereditary matters.¹⁸

So far we have covered two major points of discussion in philosophical considerations of *sperma*, the one-seed versus two-seed theory and the problems of heredity. The last example from Aristotle points to the third major feature of *sperma*-orientated discourse: the explication of spermiac function by way of agricultural language. This feature is ubiquitous, with semen always represented by the seed, which penetrates, rests in, and derives nourishment from the womb as earth/soil, the penetrated, material, and nurturing element. The connection between sexual intercourse and planting is so commonplace that “sowing” becomes a euphemism for sex.¹⁹ This occurs to such a degree that sexual activities that cannot bring forth offspring are equated to sowing on barren soil – Pseudo-Lucian witnesses to the widespread use of this analogy by calling it a “proverb” in regards to same-sex sexual activities:

The same sex entered the same bed. Though they saw themselves embracing each other, they were ashamed neither at what they did nor at what they had done to them, and, sowing their seed, to quote the proverb, on barren rocks they bought a little pleasure at the cost of great disgrace.²⁰

Although the quotation above brands this type of activity as more or less self-evidently disgraceful and shameful, the comparison to barren soil points us to the real issue at hand: such sexual activity can generate no children, and

¹⁸ For Aristotle, the temperature and moisture of the mixture of male semen and female material, along with the conditions of mating (in a wind, facing north or south, etc.) contribute to where the male semen will “dominate” and where, as it is weakened, the female matter may influence the shape of the offspring more (4.1.766b7-4.2.767a35). This constitutes the basic framework of Galen’s conception of heredity, even with a two-seed theory. Cf. Gal. *De semine* 2.5.1-6.

¹⁹ Denise Kimber Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 21-49, 54-68; cited in Tat-siong Benny Liew, “Re-Mark-Able Masculinities: Jesus, the Son of Man, and the (Sad) Sum of Manhood?” in *New Testament Masculinities*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, SBL Semeia Studies, no. 45 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 100.

²⁰ Pseudo-Lucian *Amores* 20. Cf. Pl. *Leg.* 8.838e-839a.

generation was not only an utmost sign of masculinity but of great practical necessity in its production of heirs.²¹

Hence, sex between men posed as great a threat as agricultural blight, to the point where “cities are desolated” because men are ignorant of proper “husbandry” (here in English the word is a double-entendre). As soil, these men are not just infertile but downright caustic, “even destroy[ing] the seed deposited within them.”²² Neither do men who marry “barren” women escape censure because they also choose to “plough the hard and stony land.”²³ Such futile activity can only be the sign of immoderate lust, since the goal of “sowing” is out of reach. Thus, the comparison of insemination and the production of offspring to the sowing of seed for the production of crops highlights the philosophical social-ethical concern for human reproduction. Immoderation in sexual sowing is comparable to the wasting of seed for the feeding of a *polis*.

This is in contrast to the activities of the sower par excellence, the Divine, who always sows with perfect efficacy. The understanding of the Divine also as an inseminator creates a triad of subjects in constant comparison with each other: the Divine (on a cosmological level), the farmer (on an agricultural level), and the father (on a physiological level). Thus Aristotle connects *epigenesis* and human reproduction with nomenclological trends in cosmology: “This is why in cosmology too they speak of the nature of the Earth as something female and call it ‘mother,’ while they give to the heaven and the sun and anything else of that kind the title of ‘generator,’ and ‘father.’”²⁴ Here we reach our final point of discussion on philosophical *sperma*, the consistent comparison of a creation narrative with the act of insemination and generation, indeed, as the ultimate act of such kind.

In *Timaeus*, Plato characterizes the divine *sperma* as that which imparts the worthy, discerning, and, hence, immortal part of each human being.²⁵ This *sperma* is immaterial, of course, being consistent with Platonic dualism. In Stoic thought, the divine *sperma* is absolutely material as it is “the prime matter of all bodies,” constructing the universe from that which it is itself.²⁶ In both medical texts and Aristotle, human semen contains *pneuma* as the

²¹ Cf. Martin, “Contradictions of Masculinity,” 84ff for the association of generation with masculinity.

²² Philo *Cont.* 62.

²³ Philo, *Spec.* 3.34.

²⁴ Arist. *Gen. an.* 1.2.716a14-18.

²⁵ Pl. *Ti.* 41c; 90a.

²⁶ Calcidius 293.2-3.

generative element, a “self-moving source of the animal.”²⁷ In Stoic cosmology, *logos* comprises the divine seed. This seminal *logos* not only crafts the universal body but also drives all causes and events. Thus the conception of Stoic divine *sperma* undergirds Stoic determinism.²⁸

We also find divine *sperma* in Hellenistic Judaism, but there it is separated from the creation narrative. Rather, its function serves to explain the unique place the Jews have as the progeny of God. In fact, it may be interpreted that some authors claim the Jews to be descended from two *sperma*, the human (which, of course, is also provided by God for the blessing of descendants) and the divine, which sets them apart as the chosen people and even as “stock akin to God.”²⁹ Philo’s focus on Abraham’s *sperma* (or lack of) reflects these themes:

What [Abraham] says is, “Lo, I have virtue laid up by me as some precious treasure, and this by itself does not make me happy. For happiness consists in the exercise and enjoyment of virtue, not in its mere possession. But I could not exercise it, shouldest Thou not send down the seeds from heaven to cause her to be pregnant.”³⁰

Here Philo allegorizes “Sarah” to be both “virtue” (*aretè*) and, in turn, the promised descendants. Drawing from Aristotelian teleology, Philo shows Abraham’s happiness (*eudaimonia*) as incomplete until this wife/womb/virtue/promise can achieve its natural end in offspring. In this case, only heavenly *sperma* will do. One might say that the resulting progeny (Isaac) as doubly springing from divine *sperma*, since he receives both his fleshly generation from God (his mother or father or both being barren) and his spiritual heritage also.

Thus we have covered four major features of the discussion of *sperma* in philosophical discourse: 1) the debate regarding the one-seed or two-seed theory, encompassing issues of movement and matter, 2) discussions of heredity, from the generation of species to individual characteristics to sex, 3) the use of agricultural language to express insemination and to condemn non-procreative sexual activity, and 4) comparing human insemination to a creation narrative, with divine *sperma* possessing that which makes immortal (as in Plato) or *logos* (as in the Stoics). For Hellenistic Judaism, the *sperma* of God brings forth the people of Israel in the promised and miraculous

²⁷ Gal. *De semine* 1.8.6.

²⁸ Aristocles (Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 15.14.2.)

²⁹ Philo *Mos.* 1.279. Cf. 4 Macc 13:19-20.

³⁰ Philo *Det.* 59-60.

conception of Isaac. With this constellation of discussion in mind, we turn back to Paul and the resurrection in 1 Cor 15.

PHYSIOLOGY AS PHILOSOPHY IN PAUL

Adele Reinhartz performs a similar analysis in locating the philosophical concern with physiology in the Gospel of John, stating boldly that “the relationship between God and Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is the Aristotelian theory of *epigenesis*.”³¹ Reinhartz does qualify this statement in her conclusion, noting that she does not intend to claim whether *epigenesis* is “intended by the author, present within the text, or simply evoked in the mind of this reader.”³² Nevertheless, the question remains whether the discussion of *epigenesis* is warranted in examining the Christology of John. For example, Reinhartz posits that the use of *archē*, *logos*, and forms of *gīnomai* in the prologue uses the language of Aristotelian embryology, denoting the first principle, the rational principle of semen, and birthing, respectively.³³ Certainly the language of generation is being used (e.g. the reference to cosmological creation and the children of God) but the narrative lacks any striking parallel to the Aristotelian narrative of generation. That is, “the word became flesh,” (1:14) might *possibly* allude to the enlivening of female matter by the male pneumatic *sperma* but it does not *necessitate* an Aristotelian framework.

Following this, the next question to ask is if even philosophical language is at work in the passage. Human reproduction is certainly discussed by ancient philosophers, as we have seen, but it is also a matter of great interest to ancient physicians, novelists, politicians, and, of course, in popular culture. The concepts of sex, conception, and birth are obviously available as “the facts of life” to all. I would argue in the case of John’s prologue that the passage does function at a philosophical level, given its reference to cosmology and revelation. Its identification with Aristotelian thought, however, remains questionable.

³¹ Adele Reinhartz, “‘And the Word Was Begotten’: Divine Epigenesis in the Gospel of John,” in *God the Father in the Gospel of John*, ed. Adele Reinhartz, SBL Semeia Studies, no. 85 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 83. An example of an earlier study is Henry J. Cadbury, “Ancient Physiological Notions Underlying John 1:13 and Hebrews 11:11,” *Expositor* 9 (July-Dec 1924): 430-439. There the two -seed theory is used to explain Heb 11:11 (*pistei kai autē Sarra steira dunamin eis katabolēn spermatos elaben*) so that Sarah also can contribute seed.

³² Reinhartz, 98.

³³ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

There are then two questions we must ask as we turn our analysis to Paul: 1) Is he even using philosophical language in his mention of *sperma* and 2) if he is, can we identify what school of philosophy he draws from in the passage. In answer to the first question, Paul undoubtedly uses philosophical language. He sketches a complex cosmology wherein astral bodies have different kinds of glory, where the “physical body” (*sōma psuchikon*) becomes the “spiritual body” (*sōma pneumatikon*). If Paul wishes to persuade an audience that he does not simply speak of a zombie-like afterlife, and if he speaks to those for whom a “genteel and amateur eclecticism was fashionable,” then this type of philosophical-sounding cosmology would be rhetorically handy.³⁴

In addition to his use of cosmology, the use of philosophically oriented physiological language would also increase Paul’s cachet as an erudite thinker. In this passage we have, first of all, the use of agricultural analogy in the comparison of the growth from a seed to the resurrected body. There has been a tendency in biblical scholarship to link the use of agricultural imagery to a rural, peasant population and mindset. However, as shown above, the efficacy in using such imagery appealed to those writing philosophical treatises as well. That Paul is speaking philosophically seems likely especially given that the reference to sowing (vv. 36-37) is immediately followed by reference to the Divine provision of the body for the seed (v. 38).

As aforementioned, the *scala natura* present in verses 39-41 can also be read as an allusion to the phenomena of heredity. The issue of heredity and resemblance continues in verses 47-49, where just as the man who grew out of the earth was of dust, so the man who grew from heaven should be of heavenly material. Thus, just as we first resemble (*ephoresamen tēn eikona*) our progenitor of dust, so we will resemble our progenitor of heaven.

But does Paul draw from a specific philosophical school in his reference to *sperma*? Since the passage does not set forth to *explain* the process of human conception but only to *use* general concepts surrounding it, it is difficult to identify any specific spermatoc theory. We could postulate quite generally that Paul seems to follow a one-seed theory, with its attendant consequences in terms of heredity, but there is no presence of any clear alignment with a school of thought. What *is* present, though, is mention of divine generation and the creation narrative, agricultural analogy, and the phenomena of heredity, which comprise the nexus of topics prevalent in philosophical writings on *sperma*. What I conclude is that in combination with the cosmological vocabulary present in the passage, Paul heightens his

³⁴ Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 129.

philosophical tone (not specific discourse) by engaging the philosophical vocabulary of physiology. As Diana Swancutt argues that Romans is protreptic, serving as an “empowered rhetorical form,” so I interpret Paul here to use the language of the elite for the efficacy of his own purposes.³⁵ By using the vocabulary of the educated, Paul not only appeals to the self-styled philosophers among them but advances the validity of his own arguments. His usage of philosophical vocabulary here may be identified with Bhabhian mimicry – a mixture of Jewish creation narrative and apocalypticism with Greco-Roman physiology and cosmology that is “not quite, not right.”

This is not to say that the *sperma* language used here does nothing more than philosophize Paul’s tone. Of course it informs – as well as complicates – Paul’s presentation of resurrection. With the use of the agricultural/physiological Paul creates two analogical opportunities for his readers. The first allows for a resurrection that effects transformation and, yet, at the same time, preserves a central essence. The second allows for the concept of like bearing like so that two separate “sowings” are alluded to, the earthly and the heavenly.

In philosophical readings of the text that focus on the cosmological, the idea of the preservation of some core essence in the resurrection is central. Engberg-Pedersen defines this preservation as the related to the Stoic conflagration, where the body – constructed and constituted by divine *pneuma* – transforms. It does not become something new by leaving the flesh behind. Rather, it “will be *transformed* so that what is *self-identically the very same body* will become a body made up of *pneuma*.”³⁶ For Martin, the resurrected body is the (material) *pneuma* that has shed flesh and blood, “like so much detritus,” to ascend the cosmological hierarchy while remaining, in its highest nature, the same.³⁷

This preservation of essence despite transformation or shedding is exactly emphasized by Paul’s use of the growing seed. He brings to mind what any fool should know, that a seed *becomes*, that one does not sow stalks of grain but the *sperma* of grain (v. 37). Those who are not fools, the philosophically minded, may carry this one step further. The essence of the *sperma* does not disappear but achieves growth from itself, changing and yet remaining the

³⁵ Diana Swancutt, “Pax Christi: Empire, Identity, and Protreptic Rhetoric in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” (presentation at the Yale University New Testament and Ancient Christianity Seminar, “Philosophy at the Roots of Christianity?” New Haven, 25 October 2006), 1.

³⁶ Engberg-Pedersen, “A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma,” 15.

³⁷ Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 128.

same so that it, paradoxically, both dies (v. 36) and receives its proper, divinely chosen, body (v. 38).³⁸ Compare this with Galen, influenced by Aristotelian teleology, who argues that the male *sperma*, which, once joined with the female *sperma*, changes and stretches and hollows out to become “bloodless” nerves, veins, and arteries.³⁹ The “vital *pneuma*” (*pneuma zōtikos*) of the *sperma* remains (indeed it goes on to determine the sex of the offspring) yet the material form and nature has changed utterly.

Thus the physiological aspect of the passage supports and further explicates the cosmological aspects of the passage in its concepts of transformation and preservation. What is sown and what is raised (v. 42) are completely different, and yet the same. So it is with the *psukikos* human and the post-resurrection *pneumatikos* human. The reference to the grain of wheat and human *sperma* also grounds the cosmology in a material understanding: the resulting stalk of grain or human offspring is no less material in body than the grain or *sperma* from which it grew.

But what does one do with the first Adam and the last (vv. 45-49)? Surely they did not grow from each other? It was not that the first Adam was “sown” and from him grew the last Adam. How, then, does this function when what preceded was sown one thing and raised another (v.42-44)? Here we turn to the other analogy at work in the same physiological language of *sperma*.

As shown above, the soil (womb, blood, matter) in which the *sperma* is planted is of utmost importance. In some philosophical understandings, the matter which the generative principle activates determines entirely the resulting offspring, so that in some species the female matter will eventually wipe out the hereditary legacy of the male *sperma* entirely. The phenomenon of the matter determining the offspring explains the differentiation of the two Adams. They are set in a chronological context – *prōtos* and *deuteros* – but the second does not follow the first ontologically as in the first analogy. Instead, the first Adam grew, so to speak, *ek gēs*, so of course he would be *choikos*, a “man of dust” (v. 47). The second Adam comes *ex ouranou*, and, though the text does not provide a parallel adjective to *choikos*, it is clear that

³⁸ Contra Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 281, who argues that the seed analogy present is not used by Paul “with an eye to the organic connection” but simply reflects the Mediterranean understanding of the cycle of life and death. The lack of the bearing of fruit in the passage weakens the argument that Paul here alludes to a “cycle.” Rather, the emphasis seems strictly linear.

³⁹ Gal. *De semine*, 1.5.1-17.

the reader should conclude that this second Adam would be of the most heavenly stuff.

In this way, there exist two “sowings” for those who will be resurrected. The first is as the first Adam was sown – from the earth, from the physical and fleshly. The second comes from a sowing within one’s *pneuma*, out of which will grow, at the resurrection, the heavenly stuff that Christ also is made of. The first sowing is common to all humans. The second remains exclusive to those who have had the sowing from which the pneumatic body will rise. Compare this with Philo’s description (cited above) of the conception of Isaac and the formation of the Jews, springing both from human *sperma* and the divine, the latter so that the Jews are of “stock akin to God.”

These two sowings are far from explicit in the passage, and the force of the physiological vocabulary lies with the first analogy of change which retains essence. However, this second divine sowing is a consistent theme elsewhere in the Pauline corpus. In fact, we have a glimpse of this second sowing at the beginning of this letter at 3:6-8. Paul here casts himself as the role of the one sowing this second *sperma*, as the one who “plants” – the verb *phutenoō* also carrying the sense of “begetting” as a father begets a son. We may read this as Paul impregnating the Corinthians, although here, again, God provides the body or “growth.”

PHILOSOPHICAL PHYSIOLOGY IN THE PAULINE CORPUS

If I have established that Paul uses the philosophical language and concepts of human conception and reproduction, the next step would be to explore the other *sperma* passages in Paul and their contexts using a similar analysis. It seems quite possible that Paul is drawing from a consistent conception of insemination both in the flesh and in one’s *pneuma*. For example, the opening of Romans immediately presents one with two lines of heredity: the *sperma* of David and that of the Divine (1:3-4). And, again, this is in the context of discussing resurrection from the dead with almost the same cluster of vocabulary as in 1 Cor 15.

One could go on – the topics surrounding philosophical *sperma* seem everywhere throughout Romans, starting with the creation narrative and God as inseminator par excellence (vv. 19-20) to those who would insist on sowing on rocky and barren soil (v. 26-27) rather than imitate their creator in sowing for the production of offspring. This is, of course, followed up by the concern with the *sperma* of Abraham (chs. 4, 9) and the wombs of Sarah and Rebecca (9:9-10). And might the Roman audience be wombs also, as the

skenoï molded by God (9:20-23), waiting for the divine seed? The Messianic seed?⁴⁰

Of course Galatians 3 also comes to mind, and sundry other passages. There seems always to be the triumvirate of the seed, the soil/womb, and the growth/offspring. At times the metaphors overlap in a bizarre manner so that Paul may be read as giving birth to his congregants even as they are to be pregnant with the fetus of Christ (Gal 4:19). But suffice it here to say that at least in 1 Cor 15, the physiological seems as pertinent as the cosmological and is no less philosophical. Hence, *sperma* may be worthy of as much consideration as *pneuma*, concepts of heredity as much as hierarchy, and biological growth and change as much as transformation.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Cf. Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, *Contraversions*, no. 1, ed. Daniel Boyarin and Chana Kronfeld (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), 144-145.

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