

in that they all use ‘at least two theories of visual perception to describe the complex role of humanity in relation to the world’ (176). C. explains their combinatory efforts as ‘describ[ing] the complexity of human visual perception’ and thus channelling the intuition that ‘vision is subjective, and ... combining separate theories ... emphasizes and defines this subjectivity’ (178). Multiple problems arise: (1) Why would anyone choose to combine ‘contradictory’ (179) theories to emphasise the subjectivity of vision? (2) The claim that Tertullian merges Stoic and Epicurean theories of vision depends on a questionable reading of *De Anima* 17 (47); (3) Gregory and Augustine are taken as ‘combining’ Platonism and Stoicism, yet (what we call) ‘Neoplatonism’ was an eclectic philosophical system already built on the fusion of Stoic and Platonic premises.

It is surprising that peer review neither caught these points nor addressed the book’s repetitions (C. mentions her interest in Christian ‘agency, identity, and epistemology’ 37 times across 194 pages) or the overreliance on translated texts (quoted Greek is scarce, mostly in footnotes, and at times careless: compare the accent and breathing on *eide* on 99 and 100). The book presents itself as inspired by Paul’s enigmatic ‘Now we see [God] in a mirror, *dimly*’ (1 Cor. 13:12), but only on 97 do we learn that ‘dimly’ translates *en ainigmati*, and C. does not ask ‘how one understands enigma to function’ until 185. More targeted feedback might have helped this fascinating project find a better format. The book is ultimately a missed opportunity to build on profound and timely questions to develop something of lasting impact.

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JESSICA L. WRIGHT, *THE CARE OF THE BRAIN IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY* (Joan Palevsky Imprint in Classical Literature.) Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022. Pp. 310. ISBN 9780520387676. £80.00/US\$95.00.

In this ambitious and sophisticated book, Jessica L. Wright draws on an impressive sample of primary sources from the third to the seventh centuries to demonstrate the importance of medical knowledge about the brain in early Christian culture. She meticulously reconstructs how Christian intellectuals explored the characteristics of this organ to think about the human being and the soul, revealing the central role of these texts in the process of identifying the brain with the human self that shaped Western science and philosophy for centuries.

In the Introduction, W. defines the matter of her study. She argues for the significant developments in the concept of the brain prompted by Christian authors in Late Antiquity, a period characterised by a series of ‘negotiations’ with the past that ‘filtered and reshaped’ (7) previous ideas. Since homilies and sermons circulated far more widely than medical texts, W. emphasises the importance of Christian authors in transmitting interpretations of the brain to wider audiences. Yet these texts were anything but passive vehicles of knowledge: theologians and preachers appropriated knowledge about the brain ‘to establish the natural status and moral value of specific behaviours ... and categories of people’ (13).

To disentangle these layers of meaning, W. looks at the brain as a cultural object through the lens of critical neuroscience, ‘an explicitly political’ field of research that ‘seeks to expose the values, moral frameworks, and ideologies’ (12) underpinning any engagement with the brain. She also draws on conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), a framework that sees metaphors as conceptual tools that reflect reality. This approach allows her to read Christian references to medical concepts as ‘basic windows into and tools for shaping experiences of embodiment and relationality’ (14) in Late Antiquity.

In ch. 1, W. outlines her study’s social and cultural context, discussing the circulation of medical knowledge in Late Antiquity. She emphasises the ‘cultural capital’ (28) attached to this knowledge among non-specialists and how Christian authors used medical references to reinforce their authority. W. also introduces the link between brain and soul, remarking how demonstrating an understanding of the former conferred therapeutic expertise about the latter upon preachers and theologians.

Ch. 2 offers a comprehensive overview of ancient interpretations of the brain, from the Presocratics to Galen. We learn how the model of reading the body as a ‘network centered around

a single organ' (62), synthesised in the Stoic concept of *hēgemonikon* but originally proposed by Alcmaeon, was instrumental in the subsequent theorisation of the brain. In refutation of the Stoic theory that located the *hēgemonikon* in the heart, Galen identified the brain as the control unit of the body's network, leaving a long-lasting mark in the debate.

In ch. 3, a close re-examination of the sources allows W. to reevaluate the model of brain function known as ventricular localisation, first described in the fourth century. According to this theory, each of the 'ventricles' (or 'cells') identified by earlier anatomists within the brain controlled a discrete faculty of the soul activated by the movement of *pneuma* (refined air). W. demonstrates that late antique authors did not conceive the brain simply as a container for the *pneuma*. Instead, brain substance and ventricles worked in tandem, the latter being compared to a musical instrument for the rational soul to play.

Chs. 4, 5 and 6 look at different figurative appearances of the brain in early Christian rhetoric. The brain was customarily presented as a governing agent within the human body, and in Late Antiquity it even became a metaphor for Christ the king. At the same time, Christian authors emphasised the fragility of this organ, exploiting this characteristic to construct arguments for and against ascetic practices. There is no space here to list all the fascinating discoveries made by the author in her nuanced analyses of the sources. One example of their richness must suffice. In ch. 5, W. notes that the brain's 'softness' carried a feminine quality, potentially heralding a lack of self-control and constituting a threat to 'masculine' reason (124). To keep this inclination at bay and prevent the brain from getting polluted with insidious passions, John Chrysostom advised parents to stuff their children's nostrils, 'for nothing so loosens, nothing so slackens the tension of the soul, as to take pleasure in fragrant smells' (125: John Chrysostom, *De inani gloria* 715–21).

Ch. 7 elegantly brings together and elaborates on the many insights collected in the previous chapters. W. observes that while Christian texts did engage with comparative anatomy to justify human governance over other animals, they never compared the brain with their animal counterparts. The reason for this anomaly, she argues, is that early Christian authors intended to present the brain as a distinctively human organ: its vulnerability embodied human dependence on God, making this organ a perfect symbol of the human being.

The book is beautifully written and impeccably copy-edited. While ancient brain specialists will be already familiar with the author's thought-provoking arguments (five out of the book's nine chapters are adapted from previous publications), W. has done an excellent job of expanding and assembling this rich material into a coherent and enlightening narrative that will appeal to all scholars with an interest in ancient medicine. I was particularly impressed by W.'s commitment to dismantling once and for all the still-lingering image of Late Antiquity as a decadent period of calcified ideas. Her detailed research reveals a complex intellectual environment, agile and malleable like the brain.

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GIAMPIERO SCAFOGLIO and FABRICE WENDLING (EDS), *ROMANISER LA FOI CHRÉTIENNE? LA POÉSIE LATINE DE L'ANTIQUITÉ TARDIVE ENTRE TRADITION CLASSIQUE ET INSPIRATION CHRÉTIENNE*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2022. Pp. 253. ISBN 9782503600871. €60.00.

The question at the heart of this volume, the editors tell us (9), is whether Christian Latin poetry was merely a method of adorning faith ('un simple ornement pour la foi') or whether it actively shaped faith, at least for some of its authors and readers. Put another way, as the title does, to what extent does the sense of Roman tradition shape how Christianity is portrayed in Latin verse? The ten papers (deriving from a seminar held at Nice between 2016 and 2018) vary significantly in length, quality and the extent to which they engage meaningfully with the theme. The focus is primarily on poets of the Theodosio-Honorian renaissance, though Ennodius is the subject of two papers and is prominent in a third.