

When and how a person starts is a fascination for every child and culture, and a conundrum familiar to philosophers and physicians. The Hippocratic *Nature of the Child* described gradual fetal formation and quickening, using plant and animal analogies, whereas Plato's *Timaios* and Aristotle's zoology cast the issue in terms of the "entry" of the soul into the developing body. Orphics and Stoics rejected gradualism, and asserted that the soul entered with *pneuma* (breath) at birth. Neo-Pythagoreans chose the opposite extreme and believed in ensoulment at conception. Thus most philosophers favored a supervenient soul, whereas some medical writers (e.g. Asklepiades of Bithunia and Sōranos) preferred an epiphenomenal or emergent soul. Without a means to *observe* the soul, much less its entrance, the debate remained open, but two scientific developments rendered the issue more pressing. First, beginning *ca* 100 BCE, some astrologers argued that to be accurate a person's horoscope must be cast for their moment of origin (*cf.* Vitruvius 9.6.2; Ptolemy *Tetrabiblos* 3.1), i.e., their conception. Second, advances in surgical procedure allowed "Caesarian" section (Pliny 7.47), and (by *ca* 100 CE) surgical abortion. That is the background and conceptual context of a 3rd-c. CE debate on fetal formation and ensoulment, preserved in three little-studied documents, by Galēn, *On Fetal Formation*, Porphyrios, *How the Fetus is Ensouled*, and someone close to Iamblikhos (pseudo-Galēn, *An Animal* 19.158 ff. K.). Although radically disagreeing on what they see as the main issue, they all share certain presumptions, especially that the body or some of its part(s) must be in a suitably receptive state to receive a soul, and thus that anatomy will limit the possible arrival-time. Moreover, Hippocratic plant analogies, particularly that umbilicus and placenta are like plants' roots, are deployed by all three. Galēn advocates a tripartite (i.e. Platonic) and gradual ensoulment, based on the formation of the liver, heart, and brain, allegedly in that order, corresponding respectively to "nutritive" soul (shared with plants), "animate" soul (shared with animals), and rational, i.e., human soul. But he rejects precise demarcation, and with uncharacteristic modesty confesses ignorance regarding when the full soul can be present. Porphyrios is committed to the doctrine taught by Plōtinos (*Enneads* 4.3) and by his teacher Ammōnios (*cf.* Nemesios, 3), that the soul is unitary, and can only be joined to a body perfectly suited to it. The body is not suitable until birth, and thus Porphyrios is committed *a priori* to an imperfect fetus, and muddles or disregards anatomical evidence: e.g., he asserts that even slightly premature births have uncongealed internals wrapped in a fully-formed exterior. The last work argues by analogy and authority for fetal ensoulment at conception. Just as the world-soul entered the *kosmos* at its first moment, so does the human soul; likewise, since semen is drawn from all parts of the body, embryos possess all body-parts from the moment of conception. The author offers early (and legendary) Pythagorean laws as models for the anti-abortion legislation he submits to the emperor (probably Gallienus). Theory and observation intersect in different ways in each of these three authors, and each appears to be responding to his predecessor. Galēn's response to anatomical underdetermination seems more honest (and his arguments more coherent and evidence-based), but Roman law, actively being codified at this time, preferred decision to debate, and actionable answers to aporetic underdetermination.