Volitional Sin in Origen's *Commentary on Romans*[*]

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Introduction

The study of Origen's anthropology has generated a great deal of interest in the last few decades.[1] This ongoing reassessment has filled considerable lacunae and redressed fundamental misconceptions in this area of his thought. There remains, however, an aspect of his anthropology in need of more thorough analysis. Scholarship on Origen's understanding of sin remains underdeveloped. Most studies

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[1] For recent studies on Origen's anthropology, see Cécile Blanc, "L'attitude d'Origène a l'égard du corps et de la chair," *StPatr* 17 (1982) 843–58; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) 160–77; Henri Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1956); idem, *Origen* (trans. A. S. Worrall; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989) 87–98; idem, "L'anthropologie d'Origène. De l'arché au telos," in *Arché e Telos. L'antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa. Analisi storico-religiosa. Atti del colloquio, Milano, 17–19 maggio 1979* (ed. Ugo Bianchi; Studia patristica Mediolanensia 12; Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1981) 36–57; Anders-Christian Lund Jacobsen, "Origen on the Human Body," in *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition; Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress, Pisa, 7–31 August 2001* (ed. Lorenzo Perrone in collaboration with P. Bernardino and D. Marchini; 2 vols.; BETL 164; Louvain: Louvain University Press, 2003) 1:649–56; Henri de Lubac, "Tripartite Anthropology," in *Theology in History* (trans. Anne Englund Nash; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996) 117–49; Jacques Dupuis, *L'Esprit de l'homme. Étude sur l'anthropologie religieuse d'Origène* (Museum Lessianum section théologique 62; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967); Mark J. Edwards, "Christ or Plato? Origen on Revelation and Anthropology," in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community* (ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones; New York: Routledge, 1998) 11–25; idem, *Origen against Plato* (Ashgate Studies in Philosophy and Theology in Late Antiquity; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2002) 87–122; idem, "Origen No Gnostic; or, On the Corporeality of Man," *JTS* 43 (1992) 23–37; and Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, *Origene. Studi di antropologia e di storia della tradizione* (Nuovi saggi 90; Rome: Edizioni dell'ateneo, 1984).

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of his conception of sin have concerned themselves with his famous teaching on the preexistent fall found in *First Principles*. Seldom has scholarship traced this theme beyond this early treatise. A notable exception is the ambitious attempt by Georg Teichtweier to offer a comprehensive account of Origen's understanding of sin in his *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes*. However, the scope of Teichtweier's project is so broad that any sustained expression of any particular aspect of Origen's hamartiological teaching is inhibited.[2]

The present analysis will focus exclusively on how Origen conceives of volitional sin. To delimit the study further I will focus on Origen's understanding of sin in his *Commentary on Romans*. A careful examination of his elucidation of sin in this extensive commentary has yet to be written.[3] Here we possess Origen's sustained exegesis of an entire biblical book—the only one of its kind to survive—giving the reader his most prolonged reflection on human sin in his entire corpus.[4] Such a reflection demonstrates that Origen understands volitional sin as a misappropriation of the individual's tripartite makeup, a situation where God's law—natural law, Mosaic law, or the law of Christ—is breached through the soul's lack of moderation, caused when the lower element of the soul usurps the higher element and gives undue attention to the ephemeral needs of the body.[5] Through his close interaction

[2] Georg Teichtweier, *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes* (Studien zur Geschichte der katholischen Moraltheologie 7; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1958). This study is useful in its attempt to offer a wide-ranging and systematic account of Origen's doctrine of sin (e.g., the problem of evil, consequences of sin, punishment for sin, types of sin, forgiveness of sin, etc.). But the broad character of Teichtweier's project, while noteworthy and often valuable, precludes any sustained thesis and offers little sensitivity to particular exegetical concerns on the part of Origen.

[3] The study by José Ramón Díaz Sánchez-Cid, *Justica, Pecado y Filiación. Sobre el Comentario de Orígenes a los Romanos* (Toledo: Estudio Teológico de San Ildefonso, 1991), is concerned primarily with soteriological themes. Sánchez-Cid's analysis of sin is minimal and limited almost exclusively to the sin of Adam.

[4] Even though we possess Origen's exegesis of the entire epistle, Rufinus, admittedly, has compressed its length to half the original (Pref. Ruf. 1.1). The reliability of the Latin translation by Rufinus is attested in Henry Chadwick, "Rufinus and the Tura Papyrus of Origen's Commentary on Romans," *JTS* 10 (1959) 10–42, esp. 15, and Karl H. Schelkle, *Paulus, Lehrer der Väter. Die altkirchliche Auslegung von Römer I–II* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1956) 443–48. For the Greek fragments, see Jean Scherer, *Le Commentaire d'Origène sur Rom. III.5–V.7 d'après les extraits du Papyrus n° 88748 du Musée du Caire et les fragments de la Philocalie et du Vaticanus gr. 762. Essai de reconstitution du texte et de la pensée des tomes V et VI du "Commentaire sur l'*Épître aux Romains" (Bibliothèque d'Étude 27; Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1957). Scherer notes, "Le traduction de Rufin est souvent précise, exacte et, dans une large mesure, fidèle" (88).

[5] The present analysis will be unable to address a significant theme in the *Commentary on Romans*, namely, volitional sin in relation to Jewish versus Gentile salvation. This corporate dimension of sin plays a large role in Origen's exegesis of Paul and deserves its own study. Nevertheless, Origen often situates this theme within the above context where he sees the soul acquiescing to the flesh in the realm of biblical interpretation. Sin occurs when the law is understood in a fleshly manner rather than a spiritual manner. From there he provides a close reading of Paul that exhibits genuine insight and sensitivity with regard to this important subject, revealing a nuanced and thought-provoking appraisal of Paul's teaching. For more on this, see Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 3.1; 4.2; 6.12; 7.17; 8.1, 6–9, 11; Jeremy Cohen, "The Mystery of Israel's Salvation: Romans 11:25–26 in Patristic and Medieval

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with the apostle, Origen achieves here a greater measure of clarity and consistency in his understanding of sin than that found in his early work *First Principles*.

Deterministic and Origenian Anthropology

The fundamental framework for this discussion of sin is Origen's tripartite anthropology. The extent to which he articulates his anthropology in the *Commentary on Romans* is striking and the reason for this sustained explication is the deterministic anthropology attributed by Origen to Basilides, Valentinus, and Marcion. These "heretics," Origen says, argue "that the cause of each person's actions is not to be attributed to one's own purpose but to different kinds of natures."[6] Origen counters by arguing that natures cannot be predetermined. Since everything that exists has been made by God, "uncleanness and defilement consists not in things or in essences, but in actions and thoughts less right."[7] The rebuttal of this doctrine of natures is one of the prominent themes of the commentary.[8] Such defective cosmological and anthropological reasoning is resolved for Origen through an examination of what Scripture says about the individual. Based on the apostle's own words (1 Thess 5:23), Origen understands the individual to consist of "spirit" (spiritus), "soul" (anima), and "body" (corpus).[9] These are three "aspects" (esse) in the individual,[10] and they contain an inherent hierarchy.[11] While this tripartite structure is usually understood in a dynamic or tendential sense, its basis is nevertheless ontological.[12] The human spirit is distinct in Origen's anthropology.[13]

Exegesis," *HTR* 98 (2005) 247–81, esp. 261–63; Peter Gorday, *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9–11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983) 43–102; and Annie Jaubert, *Orig*ène. *Hom*élies sur Josué (SC 71; Paris: Cerf, 1960) 12.

[6] Origen, *Comm Rom*. 1.1 (Hammond Bammel, 16:37; Scheck, 103:53). The English translation is *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1–5; 6–10* (trans. Thomas P. Scheck; FOTC 103–4; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001–2002), unless otherwise noted. All citations are to the critical edition: *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes* (ed. Caroline P. Hammond Bammel; 3 vols.; AGBL 16, 33, 34; Freiburg: Herder, 1990–1998).

[7] Origen, *Comm Rom*. 10.3 (Hammond Bammel, 34:791; Scheck, 104:258).

[8] Ibid. 2.4, 7; 4.12; 8.10.

[9] "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:23; RSV). See also Origen, *Comm Rom*. 1.12, 21; 7.1; *Dial*. 136–42; *Princ*. 3.4.1; *Comm. Matt*. 13.2; 14.3.

[10] Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 1.12 (Hammond Bammel, 16:69; Scheck, 103:79).

[11] Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 1.12; 7.2; 9.25. See also Maurice Wiles, *The Divine Apostle: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles in the Early Church* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 33.

[12] Crouzel, *Origen*, 88; Dupuis, *L'Esprit de l'homme*, 66–76. The dynamic quality of this structure is realized often in Origen's appropriation of the "two ways" tradition common in the commentary: "The soul is always midway between the spirit and the flesh and . . . it joins itself either to the flesh, thus becoming one with the flesh, or it associates itself with the spirit and becomes one with the spirit" (*Comm. Rom*. 1.7 [Hammond Bammel, 16:58; Scheck, 103:71]).

[13] Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 7.1. See also Henri Crouzel, "L'anthropologie d'Origène dans la perspective du combat spirituel," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 31 (1955) 1–22, at 10.

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He identifies it with the "conscience" (conscientiam),[14] says it acts as a pedagogue to the soul,[15] and sometimes refers to it as the "intellect."[16] The human spirit is the divine element in humanity. It is responsible for moral instruction. When the soul deviates from the human spirit, the latter is reduced to a state of dormancy.[17] The soul is the seat of rationality,[18] serves to vivify the body,[19] and, even though it has fallen from its original state—an idea largely muted in the commentary[20]—it nevertheless remains a good creation of God.[21] But the soul is unstable, and while it may contain higher and lower elements or tendencies, it nevertheless should not be confused with Plato's tripartite division.[22] Origen describes the soul as an intermediary between body and spirit,[23] and says that alongside the spirit it is created in the image of God, thus representing the "inner man."[24] An examination of Origen's conception of the body is directly related to our forthcoming discussion of sin and the passions and need not presently detain us long. Although this is a notoriously difficult and nuanced area of his thought, some measure of clarity is obtained by making the critical distinction between body qua body as opposed to body qua flesh.[25] The latter is a distinct theological concept that refers to the world of sin, corruption, and death as a consequence of Adam's transgression, as well as the emulation of this condition in our daily lives. This condition makes ethical decisions more difficult, but Origen insists that free will is preserved in the individual and it serves as a dominant motif in the commentary in his effort to refute his deterministic adversaries.[26] This refutation is further accomplished by refracting his doctrine of free will through the tripartite composition: the soul must always choose between virtue (spirit) and vice (body/flesh). Origen's hamartiology is a pronounced theme in the commentary and one major reason for this is found in

[14] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 2.7 (Hammond Bammel, 16:136–37).

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid. 7.2.

[17] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 1.21. See also Crouzel, *Origen*, 88; idem, "L'anthropologie d'Origène," 38–39.

[18] Origen, *Comm. Rom.*, 1.19; 7.2.

[19] Ibid. 3.2. See also Origen, *Princ.* 3.4.1.

[20] Even though the *Commentary on Romans* contains no explicit references to the preexistent fall, there are at least two enigmatic passages that could be taken in this manner: 5.4 and 7.6. For the preexistent fall in *First Principles*, see 1.6.2; 1.7.4; 1.8.1; 2.1.1; 2.8.3; 4.4.8.

[21] "From this observation [Rom 3:12] it is clear that the original work of the rational nature which was made by God had been upright and was set on the right path as a gift of its Creator," Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 3.2 (Hammond Bammel, 16:213; Scheck, 103:195).

[22] Crouzel, "L'anthropologie d'Origène," 36–57; idem, *Origen*, 87–92; Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, *Origène. Traité des Principes* (ed. and trans. Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti; 5 vols.; SC 252, 253, 268, 269, 312; Paris: Cerf, 1978–1984) 4:87; and Henri de Lubac, "Tripartite Anthropology," esp. 138–44.

[23] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 6.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:458). See also 1.7, 21.

[24] Ibid. 1.22 (Hammond Bammel, 16:97; Scheck, 103:101). See also Origen, *Cels.* 6.63.

[25] Crouzel laments, "Origen's notion of the body . . . is not easy to pin down and shows many ambiguities" (*Origen*, 90).

[26] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 1.1, 19, 21; 4.10, 12; 5.3, 10; 6.1, 3, 4; 7.6, 14; 8.4, 8, 10, 12; 9.2, 3.

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the stark clarity with which he presents the ethical life: the individual must either progress in virtue or regress in vice.[27]

Sin and the Law

Origen's tripartite anthropology is the essential framework through which to understand his conception of volitional sin. I will now show how this anthropology is joined to his characterization of sin through his understanding of law. Origen offers three definitions of sin in the commentary and each definition suggests that a violation of God's law constitutes sin:

> A matter can be called "sin" if it is wrongfully committed, contrary to what nature teaches or what the conscience convicts us of.[28]

> This (natural) law raised sin from the dead, so to speak. In fact this is the nature of sin, if what the law forbids to be done happens.[29]

> One should know, however, that other learned men use this definition as well, that the nature and cause of sin is in whether something is added to or subtracted from the virtues.[30]

These are his clearest and most succinct definitions of sin in the commentary. The definitions make it evident that Origen is organizing his thoughts around the idea of natural law and its relationship to the individual. In exploring this theme, I will demonstrate how he makes use of Stoic and Aristotelian vocabulary and ideas to clarify the apostle's thought. But this incorporation is not the impetus for his discussion nor does it supplant the authoritative role Scripture plays in his theology of sin. Throughout Origen's corpus, philosophy serves as a handmaid to biblical exegesis and is useful in elucidating scriptural revelation.[31] In the *Commentary on*

[27] Ibid. 1.21; 4.1, 7.

[28] Ibid. 4.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:282; Scheck, 103:246). See also Origen, *Princ*. 1.5.2; *Cels*. 4.99; Marcus Aurelius, *Med*. 9.1.

[29] Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 6.8 (Hammond Bammel, 33:502; Scheck, 104:33).

[30] Ibid. 9.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:722; Scheck, 104:200).

[31] Older scholarship tended to see Hellenistic influences that often eclipsed Origen's Christian confession (e.g., Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913] and Eugene de Faye, *Origen and His Work* [trans. Fred Rothwell; London: Allen & Unwin, 1926]). Recent scholarship has tended to see Origen as a man guided by Scripture *over against* most Hellenistic influences (e.g., Edwards, *Origen against Plato*; P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* [Leiden: Brill, 2006]; and idem, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology* [Leiden: Brill, 2007]). The primary focus of this recent scholarship has been to exonerate Origen from the alleged Platonist influence on his thinking. These works have attained a certain degree of success by clarifying misconceptions and properly situating Origen within a Christian context. But their achievements are limited in that their claims are often overstated. See, e.g., the judicious review of *Origen against Plato* by Maurice Wiles in *JTS* 55 (2004) 340–44, as well as the telling review of *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* by Mark J. Edwards in *JEH* 58 (2007) 109–10, at 109, where he notes that the premises put forth by Tzamalikos "distend the evidence." This relationship is best understood in a manner that does not see Origen as compromising his Christian

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Romans he remains disciplined in his plan to unfold the apostle's train of thought in the epistle and seeks to elucidate sin in light of the economy of salvation. To explore the compatibility of these definitions alongside his numerous other excursions on the subject I will now turn to his understanding of law and how this informs our reading of Origen's conception of volitional sin.

Origen's understanding of salvation usually arises from his cosmology, which in turn is always inextricably linked to personal responsibility. This is demonstrated in his understanding of the apostle's use of homonyms in the epistle, specifically the homonym "law."[32] Origen recognizes that the apostle's use of the term law changes according to context. The law cannot always refer to the Mosaic law (e.g., Rom 2:14; 5:13, 20); rather passages such as these are best understood as including references to natural law. Accordingly, Origen offers several sustained reflections on natural law in the commentary, as he is the first church father to speak at length on the subject. Natural law is a gift of God for everyone (including angels) to convict all of sin.[33] The ability to ascertain natural law, that is, the state of being "capable of reason" (rationis capax), steadily grows in the individual,[34] and the goal of this "reasoning capacity" is "to teach him that what he is doing ought not be done."[35] Those for whom natural law brings an awareness of sin and its subsequent moral corrective are said to exhibit better both the image of God and their own awareness of this image.[36] Origen wants to communicate that those without access to the Mosaic law are without excuse, for a transgression of natural

confession nor steering clear of any philosophical categories altogether. His tempered incorporation of philosophical ideas serves the purpose of attempting to clarify Scripture. But philosophy remains an incomplete discipline in Origen's thinking in that it is insufficient to lead anyone to salvation. Henri Crouzel, for the most part, strikes the appropriate balance with regard to this relationship. He argues that Origen favors some schools over others: Platonism and Stoicism over Aristotelianism and Epicureanism. But no school of thought is without critique and, with the exception of Epicureanism, Origen can find some elements in each school to clarify Scripture. With special attention paid to the Stoics, Crouzel aptly states: "Certes l'intention du Stoïcien, motivée par le sens du bien commun et le respect d'autrui dans la justice, appartient à une moralité authentique. Mais elle ne suffit pas au chrétien dont l'amour de Dieu doit inspirer toute la vie. Le Seigneur doit être le but unique de son activité, l'amour du prochain et tous les autres amours, le sens du bien commun, étant intégrés à l'amour de Dieu" (*Origène et la Philosophie* [Paris: Aubier, 1962] 101). For more on the Stoic influences on Origen, see below (nn. 38, 40).

[32] For a more extended treatment of Origen's homonymic use of "law" in the *Commentary on Romans*, see Reimer Roukema, *The Diversity of Laws in Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988). See also *Comm. Rom.* 1.1; 3.3.

[33] "The Apostle is saying these things about the law which every being, both men and angels, bears naturally within itself by a certain divine dispensation and gift" (Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 5.1 [Hammond Bammel, 33:380; Scheck, 103:320]). See also *Comm. Rom.* 3.3.

[34] Ibid. 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:376–377; Scheck, 103:317–318, respectively).

[35] Ibid. 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:377; Scheck, 103:317). Later in the commentary Origen notes that those too young to apprehend natural law are characterized as being "before the mind within us grows vigorous when it reaches the age of reason" (*Comm. Rom.* 6.8 [Hammond Bammel, 33:501; Scheck, 104:32]).

[36] Ibid. 5.1.

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law leaves the individual no less culpable than a transgression of the Mosaic law.[37] But this reflection on natural law is always attuned to the needs of his audience. A misunderstanding of natural law is a misunderstanding of God's economy of salvation. This is precisely the message he desires to convey to an audience that may have fallen under the influence of Basilidean teaching. Interestingly, two of Origen's longest digressions on natural law in the *Commentary on Romans* (5.1; 6.8) serve the purpose of castigating the Basilidean teaching that souls are transferred through various animals only to eventually reach humans (μετενσωμάτωσις). He insists that Basilides grossly misinterprets the apostle's declaration "but I was once alive without the law" (Rom 7:9). This does not refer, as Basilides supposes, to an absence of law altogether and its concomitant implication that our souls existed and were living in various animals before arriving in our present human bodies. Rather it refers to natural law, that is, to the law given by God before the Mosaic law. This is how we are to understand the apostle's teaching in light of the economy of salvation.

Although Origen remains committed to expounding the apostle's thought in Romans, this does not preclude his incorporation of Stoic concepts for further clarification.[38] The Stoics consistently taught that the ethical ideal is to live in accordance with nature. The first-century Stoic author Arius Didymus argues that the aim of all virtues is to live "consistently with nature,"[39] and "that every virtue which is associated with man and the happy life is consistent with and in agreement with nature."[40] "It is manifest," says the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, "that in everything we should make it our aim neither to avoid that which nature demands, nor to accept that which is in conflict with nature."[41] But Origen is not alone in appropriating

[37] "Yet I do not know what time period they could find prior to the giving of the law which was void of sins. When Cain was murdering Abel and defiling the earth with his brother's blood . . . was not sin abounding?" (Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 5.6 [Hammond Bammel, 33:412; Scheck, 103:345]).

[38] In *Against Celsus* Origen admits to having read Chrysippus (*Cels.* 1.64; 5.57; 8.51) and Epictetus (*Cels.* 6.2). The incorporation of Stoic ideas in Origen's exegesis has been demonstrated by Richard A. Layton, "*Propatheia*: Origen and Didymus on the Origin of the Passions," *VC* 54 (2000) 262–82, esp. 265, and Ronald E. Heine, "Stoic Logic as Handmaid to Exegesis and Theology in Origen's Commentary on the Gospel of John," *JTS* 44 (1993) 90–117. For Origen's relationship to Stoic thought in *Against Celsus*, see Henry Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Stoa," *JTS* 48 (1947) 34–49. Crouzel summarizes their influence: "As for the Stoics, their morality is accepted, but their cosmology and their theology are regarded as materialist and Origen pokes fun at their cyclical view of time" (*Origen*, 157).

[39] Arius Didymus, *Ecl.* 5b3, in *Epitome of Stoic Ethics* (ed. Arthur J. Pomeroy; Texts and Translations: Graeco-Roman Series 44/14; Atlanta: SBL, 1999) 17.

[40] Ibid. 6 (Pomeroy, 37). See also ibid. 7b; 10a. Tzamalikos admits some Stoic influence on Origen despite his overall aim to refute the Hellenistic charges against him: "Origen definitely moves in a Stoic vein in taking the view that created rationality is always and necessarily embodied in matter. This Stoic tenet was an aspect of their doctrine that matter is permeated and controlled by a rational principle. . . . The cosmos as a whole exhibits a rational structure and governing principle, but obviously some parts of it are distinguished by having a rationality of their own, and are called 'microcosms' on this account" (*Origen*, 116).

[41] Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.26.1–3, in *Epictetus: The Discourses as Reported by Arrian, the Manual,*

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Stoic ethics in such a manner. His understanding of sin as a violation of nature is consonant with the Alexandrian theological tradition. His predecessor Clement utilizes a similar definition in his own theology, even identifying reason (or nature) with the Word, or Christ.[42] Origen never explicitly makes such an identification, but would likely have agreed with his teacher.[43]

This concern for the standard of natural law is limited if the individual's ability to ascertain such a standard is lacking. Origen addresses this by finding recourse in the individual's constitution in arguing that reason is implanted in the soul.[44] Even though Origen rejects the Stoic materialist conception of the soul, he nevertheless retains their particular language of governance within the soul. He insists that aid in ascertaining natural law is found within, insofar as this law "has been inscribed by the one who created man in the beginning on the governing part of man's heart [principali cordis]."[45] The *principale cordis*, or its Greek equivalent *hegemonikon* (ἡγεμονικόν), is the Stoic term used to designate the higher or ruling part of the soul that serves the purpose of ordering the lower parts.[46] For the Stoics the *hegemonikon* perceives—or better registers and unifies—that which the senses

and Fragments (ed. G. P. Goold; trans. W. A. Oldfather; 2 vols.; LCL 131; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925) 1:167.

[42] "Everything that is contrary to right reason is sin. Accordingly, therefore, the philosophers think fit to define the most generic passions thus: lust, as desire disobedient to reason; fear, as weakness disobedient to reason; pleasure, as an elation of the spirit disobedient to reason. If, then, disobedience in reference to reason is the generating cause of sin, how shall we escape the conclusion, that obedience to reason—the Word—which we call faith, will of necessity be the efficacious cause of duty? For virtue itself is a state of the soul rendered harmonious by reason in respect to the whole life. Nay, to crown all, philosophy itself is pronounced to be the cultivation of right reason; so that, necessarily, whatever is done through error of reason is transgression, and is rightly called, (ἁμάρτημα) sin . . . for he who transgresses against reason is no longer rational, but an irrational animal, given up to lusts by which he is ridden (as a horse by his rider). But that which is done right, in obedience to reason, the followers of the Stoics call προσῆκον and καθῆκον, that is, incumbent and fitting" (Clement of Alexandria, *Paed*. 1.13, as translated in *ANF* 2:235).

[43] See for example Origen, *Comm*. *Rom*. 2.5 (Hammond Bammel, 16:116), where he asserts that the one who dishonors justice and truth dishonors Christ.

[44] Origen has already shed some light on this in *Princ*. 3.1.2–3 and *Or*. 6.1.

[45] Origen, *Comm*. *Rom*. 5.6 (Hammond Bammel, 33:414; Scheck, 103:346).

[46] P. Aloisius Lieske identifies three functions of the *hegemonikon* in Origen's thought: 1) the cradle of the intellectual life, 2) the operation of freedom or self-determination of the will, particularly in regard to the religious life, and 3) the communion of the soul with the Logos that establishes religious significance (P. Aloisius Lieske, S.J., *Die Theologie der Logos-mystik bei Origenes* [Münster: Aschendorff, 1938] 104–5). However, Lieske nowhere develops a relationship between the *hegemonikon* and sin, nor does he speak of its role in the *Commentary on Romans*. Stoics understood the soul to be composed of eight parts: five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell), voice, reproduction, and the *hegemonikon*. See also A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (2 vols.; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 1:53H; Julia Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 61; and Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) 29. Inwood, however, clarifies that figures like Chrysippus (and possibly Zeno) can affirm a monistic soul insofar as "the various powers of the soul all function together harmoniously, with no internal conflict or opposition" (ibid., 33).

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detect.[47] In this same passage Origen equates *hegemonikon* with "mind" (mens) and elsewhere refers to the soul's rational power as the "heart" (cor).[48] Henri Crouzel fills out the picture by noting how Origen (in the Latin translation of Rufinus) can also refer to this part simply as "soul" (anima), while reserving an alternative Latin term for "mind" (sensus) to refer to the lower element of the soul.[49] So we have in Origen several terms used to designate the ruling part of the soul—the interior locus of the law. The interiorizing of natural law provides the theological rationale for the ethical standard and therefore emphasizes personal responsibility. This moral onus is intensified through his later assertion that natural law and divine law are one and the same: "*God speaks* . . . in the governance of the heart [principali cordis]."[50] Origen does not hesitate to equate the law of the mind with God's law,[51] and such agreement between the two is also basic to the Stoic philosophical tradition.[52] Indeed, Crouzel has observed that for Origen the *hegemonikon* "dirige son activité et que est une parcelle ou une émanation de la Raison universelle."[53] As "l'organe de la contemplation divine," the *hegemonikon* contains both an intellectual and moral sense, and is the principle of the supernatural realities.[54] Thus the activity of the *hegemonikon* in appropriating Origen's ethics is difficult to overstate. Yet another instance of the term demonstrates this interplay between its rational and moral facets. He notes that the apostle commands Christians to provide food and drink to the enemy in an effort to "heap burning coals on his head" (Rom 12:20). Origen makes the point that this desired repentance in the enemy is located in his "head": " 'Head' is the name given to the governing part of the heart [principale cordis], and it is rightly called the head since from its intelligence and wisdom all the members are guided."[55] Thus the operations of both the intellectual and moral facets are instrumental in fulfilling the ethical life, for the *hegemonikon* is responsible for the actions of both the soul and the body.[56]

As we can now see more clearly the act of sinning is not dependent upon possessing the Mosaic law. Origen clearly teaches that "God has implanted into

[47] Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, 62–63.

[48] See Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 2.7 (Hammond Bammel, 16:136; Scheck, 103:132) and *Princ.* 1.1.9: "That heart is used for mind, that is, for the intellectual faculty, you will certainly find over and over again in all the scriptures, both the New and the Old" (as translated in *On First Principles: Being Koetschau's Text of the "De principiis"* [trans. G. W. Butterworth; Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973] 14). See also Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 3.3 and *Cels.* 6.69.

[49] Crouzel, *Origen*, 88–89. See also Origen, *Princ.* 2.8.3 for the distinction between "mind" and "soul."

[50] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 7.16 (Hammond Bammel, 34:633; Scheck, 104:125) [emphasis mine].

[51] Ibid. 6.12.

[52] Richard A. Horsley, "The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero," *HTR* 71 (1978) 35–59.

[53] Crouzel, "L'Anthropologie d'Origène," 12.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 9.23 (Hammond Bammel, 34:746; Scheck, 104:220).

[56] There are indications in the commentary that Origen sees the *hegemonikon* as even desiring the good: see ibid. 6.12; 7.6.

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the soul"[57] this "internal law"[58] and it is therefore "naturally innate within men."[59] It is now evident why Origen crafts his first two definitions of sin around acts that are contrary to nature. Both the standard and the means of discerning such a standard work in concert with each other. But this act of violating nature is a complex ontological and ethical problem that necessitates further reflection and will require that we turn to his understanding of the passions.

Sin and the Passions

In this section I will argue that Origen understands sin to arise from irrational impulses found in the lower element of the soul. Such impulses are in close relationship to the body and become passions, and therefore sin, when admitted by the soul's higher element. Once again the tripartite structure of his anthropology, and indeed the ruling function of the *hegemonikon*, play a crucial role in helping us to understand the nature of the rise of the passions. Origen's manner of speaking about the passions is varied. Occasionally he simply echoes the language of Scripture (Rom 1:26), while at other times he incorporates the term in his explication of sin. Prior to our conversion "we were being impelled by the passions [passionibus] of sin and of the flesh. These passions [passiones], because of the law in our members, were bearing fruit, not for God but for death."[60] This rather typical account of the passions in the commentary is helpful but by no means exhaustive of what he thinks of this phenomenon.

Origen draws from an existing philosophical and theological tradition. The doctrine of the passions is derived largely from the Stoics and is a notoriously difficult idea to describe with precision. This doctrine was articulated by the Stoics as part of their moral psychology to explain irrationality and the presence of (excessive) emotion in the individual. Broadly speaking, early Stoics understood the passions as judgments of the soul while later Stoics understood them as movements of the soul. Arius Didymus defines a passion as "an impulse which is excessive, disobedient to the choosing reason or an <irrational> motion of the soul contrary to nature (all passions belong to the controlling part of the soul)."[61] The Stoics

[57] Ibid. 1.19 (Hammond Bammel, 16:83; Scheck, 103:90). Elsewhere Origen speaks of the law being "ingrafted" (*Comm. Rom.* 3.3 [Hammond Bammel, 16:225; Scheck, 103:206]).

[58] Ibid. 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:376; Scheck, 103:317).

[59] Ibid. 3.3 (Hammond Bammel, 16:223; Scheck, 103:203). Roukema notes, "In this *Commentary* Origen often interprets *nomos* in the epistle to the Romans with regard to the natural law in order to demonstrate that God is not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also (Rm 3,29). For it is evident that all texts which deal with the natural law pertain also to the Gentiles. His interpretations, which have been criticized since his own time . . . can be understood as an effort to actualize the Pauline principle 'for the Jew first and also for the Greek'" (*Diversity of Laws*, 81).

[60] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 6.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:485; Scheck, 104:21). See also 1.22; 5.10; 6.3.

[61] Arius Didymus, *Ecl.* 10 (Pomeroy, 57). J. M. Rist defines passions as "impulses (ὁρμαί) which have got out of hand, or as irrational movements of the soul" (*Stoic Philosophy* [Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1969] 39).

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understood four cardinal passions: appetite, fear, pleasure, and distress. The debt Origen owes to Stoic thought seems to be mediated by the debt he owes to his predecessor Clement of Alexandria. Origen works within an existing tradition and this tradition is evident in Clement's *Miscellanies*:

> Appetite is then the movement of the mind to or from something. Passion is an excessive appetite exceeding the measures of reason, or appetite unbridled and disobedient to the word. Passions, then, are a perturbation of the soul contrary to nature, in disobedience to reason. But revolt and distraction and disobedience are in our own power, as obedience is in our power. Wherefore voluntary actions are judged. But should one examine each one of the passions, he will find them irrational impulses.[62]

Clement offers themes we have already seen and others to be explored in this section. What captures our attention presently is his language of "appetite" (ὁρμή), "impulses" (ὁρέξεις), and "perturbation" (κίνησις). This language is not peculiar to Clement. Several times in the Latin translation of Rufinus we see the terms "appetite/movement/impulse" (motus), "thoughts" (cogitationes), and "suggestions" (suggestiones). Although the careful definition of such terms is crucial in ascertaining Origen's conception of sin, this has not always proven to be an easy undertaking. Richard Sorabji has noted Origen's tendency in *First Principles* to conflate "first movements" (primi motus) with "thoughts" (cogitationes), resulting in statements where he affirms that "pleasure" (hēdonē) is experienced before assent is given.[63] One gets the sense that the mere thought about sinning is sin itself. While this may be the natural conclusion from select comments in *First Principles*, it is certainly not the picture painted in the *Commentary on Romans*.

Reading the commentary in light of his understanding of "impulse" (motus) produces a measure of clarity. Origen praises the Greek, who through the work of natural law in his heart "and moved by natural reason [naturali ratione motus]," is able to "hold fast to justice or observe chastity or maintain wisdom, moderation, and modesty."[64] Indeed, he says God has given every man "every disposition and every drive [omnes affectus omnesque motus] by which he can press forward and advance toward virtue."[65] In these texts Origen understands *motus* as an impulse to be followed because it accords with God's law. But not all impulses are equal.

[62] See Clement of Alexandria, *Strom*. 2.13: "'Ορμὴ μὲν οὖν φορὰ διανοίας ἐπί τι ἢ ἀπό τοὗ πάθος δὲ πλεονάζουσα ὁρμὴ ἢ ὑπερτείνουσα τὰ κατὰ τὸν λόγου μέτρα, ἢ ὁρμὴ ἐκφερομένη καὶ ἀπειθὴς λόγῳ παρὰ φύσιν οὖν κίνησις ψυχῆς κατὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸν λόγον ἀπείθειαν τὰ πάθη (ἢ δ ἀπόστασις καὶ ἔκστασις καὶ ἀπείθεια ἐφ' ἡμῖν, ὥσπερ καὶ ἡ ὑπακοὴ ἐφ' ἡμῖν διὸ καὶ τὰ ἑκούσια κρίνεται) αὐτίκα καθ' ἓν ἕκαστον τῶν παθῶν εἴ τις ἐπεξίοι, ἀλόγους ὀρέξεις εὕροι ἂν αὐτά," (For the edition from which this passage is drawn see *Les Stromates. Stromate II* [ed. Claude Mondésert, S.J.; SC 38; Paris: Cerf, 1954] 82; for a translation into English see *ANF* 2:361).

[63] Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 346–51. Sorabji sees examples of this in *Princ*. 3.1.4; 3.2.4; *Comm. Jo*. 15.3; *Comm. Matt*. 21; and *Comm. Cant*. 3.

[64] Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 2.5 (Hammond Bammel, 16:128; Scheck, 103:125).

[65] Ibid. 3.3 (Hammond Bammel, 16:223; Scheck, 103:204).

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Some of these suggestions are made by the devil, angels, and evil spirits.[66] However, more often Origen speaks of impulses that seem to derive from ourselves. In book 4 he speaks hypothetically of the man who possesses natural law and is faced with sexual temptation: "By a judgment of his own mind [mentis]," Origen says, this man "refused even to permit his thoughts [cogitationes] to consent to this sort of defiling activity."[67] This text yields two interrelated points in Origen's hamartiology. This particular suggestion of a defiling activity is at odds with God's law, and these impulses are mediated, judged, and rejected by the rational faculty of the soul. In the commentary he clearly affirms that while many suggestions are irrational, one is not culpable until deemed so by the rational faculty of the soul.[68] The thoughts are declared evil when the soul moves to recognize these irrational impulses. Now to understand the origin of these impulses we turn once again to the nature of the body and soul.

I recall the previous distinction between body qua body and body qua flesh, as this helps to understand how flesh is construed almost exclusively in negative terms.[69] This terminological transition is inextricably linked to the nature of the soul. The soul is unstable, and the reason for its instability is twofold: the exterior attraction to opposing options and the interior opposing tendencies. Henri Crouzel has noted this characteristic in Origen's theology: "The soul is both the scene and the stake . . . [and] by reason of the two elements or tendencies that divide it, the soul is in league with both sides."[70] There seems to be here at least a tacit recognition of irrationality on the part of the lower element of the soul. So we remind ourselves that just as the higher element of the soul is in close relationship to the spirit, the lower element of the soul is in close relationship to the body. The relationship between the lower element of the soul and the body is evident throughout his exegesis in the commentary. This point is illustrated in his explanation of the spiritual meaning of circumcision:

> Circumcision means to cut off a certain part of the genital organ through which the succession of the human race and fleshly propagation is served. I judge that, through this, something is indicated in a figurative sense: namely, that if some uncleanness cleaves to the soul by association with the flesh,

[66] Ibid. 1.21. Elsewhere in the commentary Origen makes the point that resisting the temptations of the devil is actually evidence of peace (*Comm. Rom.* 4.8). See also Origen, *Princ.* 3.2.4.

[67] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 4.4 (Hammond Bammel, 33:298; Scheck, 103:257). See also 1.21, where he gives an illustration of the soul that receives counsel from virtue and vice, but makes clear that the choice is subsequent to the counsel.

[68] Annas clears up the common misconception that "irrational" impulses are devoid of reason. Rather, the distinction is one between good reason versus bad, inadequate reason (*Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, 106).

[69] The exceptions, possibly owing to the Latin translation by Rufinus, are found in *Comm. Rom.* 3.2; 4.2; 6.1, 9, 14; 7.2, 9, 10, and 13, where "body" and "flesh" are equated. Conversely, "body" can also mean "flesh" (4.6). References to the "flesh" of Christ are entirely positive and ostensibly serve the purpose of warding off a docetic threat.

[70] Crouzel, *Origen*, 92.

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> if someone has covered his soul [anima] with a mind [sensus] that is set on seductive desire, these things ought to be cut off from it. The reason why the cutting is inflicted upon the genital organs and not upon the other bodily parts is to clarify that the vices of this sort do not come to the soul from its own essence [animae non ex propria substantia] but rather by an inborn impulse [genuino motu] and by the incentive of the flesh [incentiuo carnis].[71]

Here our author identifies three distinct actors in the drama of sin: 1) "its own essence" (propria substantia, viz., the soul's higher element / *hegemonikon*), 2) "an inborn impulse" (genuino motu) or "mind" (sensus, viz., the soul's lower element), and 3) "the incentive of the flesh" (incentiuo carnis, viz., the body).[72] First, recall that *sensus* usually refers to the lower element of the soul, and with this in mind, it should also be understood as this "inborn impulse" (genuino motu). Furthermore, the "inborn impulse" and the "incentive of the flesh" do not stand in apposition, but refer instead to two distinct but closely related ideas. Hence we have two actors seeking to overtake the soul: the *sensus* or *genuino motu* and the *incentiuo carnis*.

Such a manner of expressing the etiology of sin was not quite as clear to Origen earlier in his career. *First Principles* 3.4.1–5 chronicles his struggle to account for the duality of will insofar as we possess within us a will to sin. He offers three possible solutions: Plato's tripartite division of the soul, the "two souls" theory (viz., one superior or heavenly and one lower or earthly), and finally a single soul possessing a good will while the flesh possesses an evil will.[73] He rejects the Platonic theory for lacking scriptural support. He explains the merits of the "two souls" theory and leaves it open-ended. He also leaves the soul/flesh theory open-ended with the caveat that it implies God created something at odds with himself.[74]

What eluded Origen in *First Principles* seems to achieve a greater measure of clarity in the *Commentary on Romans*. Here he may be drawing the present distinctions in order to counter the "two souls" theory and predetermined natures.

[71] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 2.9 (Hammond Bammel, 16:164; Scheck, 103:155). See also Origen, *Princ.* 2.10.4.

[72] By referring to the *hegemonikon* as simply "soul" Origen is employing a common Stoic linguistic maneuver. See also Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 29–30.

[73] For various assessments of Origen's exploration of the "two souls" doctrine see José Antonio Alcáin, *Cautiverio y Redencíon del Hombre in Origenes* (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 1973) 113–17; R. Ferwerda, "Two Souls: Origen's and Augustine's Attitude toward the Two Souls Doctrine; Its Place in Greek and Christian Philosophy," *VC* 37 (1983) 360–78; and G. G. Stroumsa and Paula Fredriksen, "The Two Souls and the Divided Will," in *Self, Soul & Body in Religious Experience* (ed. Albert I. Baumgarten et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 198–217. See also Clement, *Strom.* 2.20, where he cites Basilides's son Isidorus as an adherent of this doctrine.

[74] Sorabji both clarifies and obscures the problem. He acknowledges that church fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen speak of and are faced with the heretical teaching of a second soul that is material, has a will of its own, and is directed towards evil. He is also correct to note that Origen rejects this teaching (*Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 315). However, Sorabji's conclusion is that Origen posits a higher will of our spirit and a lower will of our soul, support for which he curiously finds in the notoriously *inconclusive* passage in *First Principles* 3.4.1–5 (Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 315 n. 66).

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These two works should be placed alongside the biblical text that first brought Origen into this quagmire and appears no less than seven times in *First Principles* 3.4.1–5: Gal 5:17 ("The spirit warreth against the flesh and the flesh against the spirit, so that we may not do the things that we will to do"). What may have once suggested to him that humans are endowed with a second soul now seems to suggest something different. In at least two places in the commentary (1.21; 6.1) he uses Gal 5:17 to prove his tripartite anthropology, an anthropology that posits only one soul. He seems more inclined to understand that as a result of the fall the lower element of the soul and the body have acquired sinful tendencies and are said by the apostle to have a will of their own. The soul's lower element and the flesh belong to a world where sin, corruption, and death are commonplace.[75] He makes this clearer in book 7 when he suggests that part of the soul may have a "life" that acts to separate us from the love of God. He describes this as the life of sin.[76] In *First Principles* Origen struggles to articulate a proper dissociation of sinfulness from createdness. He is now able to do so in the *Commentary on Romans* because flesh is not created, it is acquired. Origen's exegesis exhibits a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, he insists that the higher element of the soul is not in its essence corrupt or reprobate, a lesson he repeats ad nauseam throughout the commentary.[77] The essence of the soul, the *mens* or *hegemonikon*, is pure. On the other hand, he must acknowledge the presence of sinful tendencies in the lower element of the soul. Without capitulating to his deterministic enemies, he must nevertheless paint a negative picture regarding the soul's proclivity to be led into sin.

A consideration of Origen's exegesis of Rom 7:14–25 sheds more light on the complex relationship between the law, the *hegemonikon*, and impulses. In taking on the persona of the weak man in order to instruct the church in these matters,[78] "Paul" says, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man; but I see in my members another law fighting against the law of my mind, leading me away as a captive to the law of sin that is in my members" (Rom 7:22–23). He continues:

> This will for the good he designated as the law of the mind [mentis], which law of the mind [mentis] agrees with the law of God and consents to it. But the impulses [motus] of the body and the desires of the flesh, on the other hand, he calls the law of the members, which leads the soul away captive and subjects it to the laws of sin. For it is certain that the desires of the flesh drag the soul toward sin and subject it to its laws. And just as the law of the mind [mentis], which agrees with the law of God, if it can take possession of the soul, leads it to the law of God, so also the law that is in the members, and the lust of the flesh, if it seduces the soul, would subject it to the laws of sin.[79]

[75] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 6.12.

[76] Ibid. 7.10 (Hammond Bammel, 34:604; Scheck, 104:101).

[77] Ibid. 1.1; 2.4, 7; 4.12; 8.10.

[78] Ibid. 6.9.

[79] Ibid. (Hammond Bammel, 33:514–15; Scheck, 104:41).

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Here the function of "law" is as follows: law of the mind ≈ law of God.[80] So once again, the "law of the mind" is the higher element of the soul or *hegemonikon*. What Origen means by "law of the members" is what our previous text calls "incentive of the flesh." What is assumed in this excerpt is once again the presence of the lower element of the soul as an actor in the drama of sin. This is so because he says the "law of the mind" or *hegemonikon* must "take possession of the soul." This suggests, as Crouzel has maintained, that the soul is in league with both sides: spirit and flesh. Sin has occurred when the *hegemonikon* no longer has possession of the soul. Here the lower element is active in preventing the soul from agreeing with the law of God. Its presence is always one of a familial relationship with the body, and, if I can be so banal as to say so, the lower element of the soul sympathizes with the body in its desires. As such the soul is always on the precipice of inciting the passions. Conversely, as Origen states elsewhere in the commentary, sin is eliminated when "this soul *comes back to itself* and opens the door of its mind once again to piety and the virtues."[81] Thus we see how the lower element, by virtue of its fallen nature,[82] associates itself with the law of the members.

Origen does not consider the "impulses" (motus) of the body and the desires of the flesh to be ipso facto evil. After all, the apostle endured both external and internal afflictions "for the sake of the self-control of his body and his endeavors for the highest instruction."[83] Conversely, the one who sins is the one who is "ensnared by the allurements of the present life."[84] What is evil, and therefore sin, is when the soul, seduced by such an attraction, moves in the direction and thus under the domain of these bodily desires and impulses. If Origen attributes evil to the impulse he does so knowing, from extensive experience and speaking after the fact, that following such an impulse will lead to evil.[85] A "small detour" is enough to usurp nature and lead the soul into death.[86] Persistent acquiescence to these suggestions (impulses) is to be under the dominion of sin. This failure to properly control nature's inducement is characteristic of the body becoming flesh. It is an act first suggested by the flesh's cohort, the lower element of the soul. In and of itself the body does not have its own "will," but as we have seen its "will"

[80] Sometimes the two are described as virtually the same and brought together seamlessly (5.6; 6.9) and other times they are basically equated at the outset (6.9; 6.12).

[81] [Emphasis mine.] "Quodsi in semet ipsam regressa haec anima pietati rursus et uirtutibus mentis suae ianuam pandat none ingressa pietas impietatem continuo depellet" (Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 2.1 [Hammond Bammel, 16:100; Scheck, 103:103]).

[82] That is, it was added to the "mind"/"intellect" as a result of the preexistent fall. See also Origen, *Princ.* 2.8.3.

[83] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 4.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:343; Scheck, 103:291).

[84] Ibid. 4.11 (Hammond Bammel, 33:349; Scheck, 103:295).

[85] He speaks of the law of the members as always "suggesting the desires of the flesh" (desideria carnis suggerens), and waiting for decisive action on the part of the soul (ibid. 5.6 [Hammond Bammel, 33:414; Scheck, 103:347]).

[86] Ibid. 5.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:418; Scheck, 103:350).

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is the personification of the lower element of the soul due to their close association. When these two usurp the order of nature then sin is said to establish dominion.

Despite the familiarity with sin that some people exhibit, the activity of the moral life is not predetermined. The apostle neither teaches nor intimates that the body and the soul are destined for a certain fate irrespective of people's desires. Origen is clear that humanity has in common a single nature that is suited equally for salvation or perdition.[87] His teaching on the olive trees (Rom 11:16–24) is concentrated around the idea that the soul has the ability and responsibility to guide the impulses in a godly direction. Incorporating Matt 12:33 for support he argues that a tree (soul) is made good or evil by its choices, not on account of its birth.[88] Origen is clear: the impulse is only evil when the rational faculty makes a choice that is contrary to the law of God. All rational beings possess the ability to guide the soul. The soul sins by following an impulse that, if carried to its fulfillment, will lead to moral failure. These moral decisions define the soul,[89] and a negative decision by the soul is always caused by a lack of faith.[90] In fact, any good or evil moral action taken in this life, according to Origen's reading of Rom 2:15–16, makes an indelible imprint on the soul to accuse or defend it on the day when God will judge the secrets of humanity.[91] Those who consistently fail in this regard are said to lack the second (spiritual) circumcision and are "enslaved to Egyptian customs and barbaric mental inclinations [motus animi barbaros seruet]."[92]

Origen's tripartite anthropology is essential in understanding his teaching on sin. The lower element of the soul acts in collusion with the body to provide the initiation of sin. The body's role in this act is theologically so intimately bound up with the lower element of the soul that making distinctions is of little importance to him. The passions are incited when the *hegemonikon* makes an improper judgment to acquiesce to these impulses and moves in the direction of the body.

Sin and Moderation

In what follows I will move on from an emphasis on some of the ontological aspects of sin to a more thoroughly ethical discussion. My investigation of volitional sin in Origen's *Commentary on Romans* has testified to some reliance on Stoic thought forms. But as Origen continues to wrestle with the apostle's thought in Romans he turns to Aristotle for further clarification. His incorporation of the Aristotelian conception of moderation will play an important role in the remainder of this

[87] Ibid. 8.10 (Hammond Bammel, 34:692; Scheck, 104:176).

[88] Ibid. (Hammond Bammel, 34:693; Scheck, 104:176). See also Matt 12:33: "Either make the tree good and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit" (RSV).

[89] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 2.1; 7.14.

[90] Ibid. 10.5. This lack of faith on the part of the soul is exemplified by its loss of the contemplation of the cross of Christ (ibid. 6.1).

[91] Ibid. 2.7; 9.41. See also Origen, *Princ.* 2.10.4.

[92] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 2.9 (Hammond Bammel, 16:168; Scheck, 103:158).

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investigation. Simply stated, one violates nature, and therefore incites the passions, when one lacks moderation. Here I recall Origen's third definition of sin: "One should know, however, that other learned men use this definition as well, that the nature and cause of sin is in whether something is added to or subtracted from the virtues."[93] This definition is found in the midst of a protracted exhortation on the value of the virtue of "moderation" (temperantia), and stems from the apostle's command in Rom 12:3: "Do not be wiser than you ought to be, but be wise in moderation."

Origen asserts that virtues become vices when not governed by moderation. Thus the over-realization of justice leads to injustice and the over-realization of prudence leads to imprudence. He borrows a page out of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* when he argues that excess and deficiency destroy perfection, while adherence to the mean preserves it.[94] But virtue is always rooted in cosmology and he consistently reminds his readers that a proper understanding of the virtues is a proper understanding of the law of God.[95] We begin to glimpse how the third definition complements the first two by considering how moderation, as dictated by natural law (i.e., philosophers knew this) and confirmed in Paul, plays a significant role in delineating virtue and vice in Origen's thought. But the immediate arena of the working out of moderation is the human body. Since nature provides discernible bounds of right and wrong (further illumined by Scripture[96]), his ideal of moderation precludes the existence of excess (or deficiency) in a manner that violates nature and allows the soul to succumb to the excessive needs of the body. The absence of moderation indicates the presence of the passions. Therefore as Origen considers the passage in Rom 6:1–2—living in sin and dying to sin—he makes the argument that living in sin is indicative of an unstable soul that usurps the law of nature and inflames the passions:

> The flesh has natural appetites for food and drink which need to be kept within certain limits of satisfaction. But if someone, by the enticement of sin, should exceed these limits, he is no longer yearning after food and drink, a flesh which suffices nature, but after excess and drunkenness. In a similar way there even exists in the flesh a natural drive by which it demands to be united with a woman for the sake of procuring offspring. But if he should be turned aside from the law, sin enticing in this occasion, and his impulses [motus] of natural lust should be roused to illicit things, he lives to sin, since

[93] Ibid. 9.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:722; Scheck, 104:200).

[94] Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 2.6.9, in *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. H. Rackham; LCL 19; London: William Heinemann, 1926). See also 3.10.1: "Now we have said that Temperance (σωφροσύνη) is the observance of the mean (μεσότης) in relation to pleasures." For more on this theme in Aristotle, see 3.11.3; 3.12.9; and 4.4.4. Caroline P. Hammond Bammel has rightly identified this Aristotelian theme in Origen's commentary (*Der Römerbrieftext des Rufin und seine Origenes-Übersetzung* [AGBL 10; Freiburg: Herder, 1985] 226–27).

[95] E.g., Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 6.9.

[96] Ibid. 2.5.

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> he is not obeying the law of God in these instances but the persuasions of sin [peccati persuasionibus].[97]

We now begin to see more clearly the confluence of Origen's three aforementioned definitions of sin. The first two definitions bring into sharp relief the fact that any act contrary to nature is a sin. These are rather austere descriptions of sin. What brings out their force, and therefore their theological color, is how he complements them with a theology of moderation. This all comes together in the above text. Origen here repeats that the standard of nature is not to be breached, and if it is breached one has allowed otherwise innocuous impulses to be "roused to illicit things." For Origen moderation cuts the Gordian Knot of ethics. This much is evident by the overwhelming emphasis he places on the concept throughout the commentary. Provision within the bounds of moderation is the focal point of his exegesis of Rom 8:12–13 when encountering the warning not to "live according to the flesh." Origen notes how the apostle makes the distinction between provision with respect to necessary matters and provision with respect to lusts.[98] His comments on Rom 13:14 likewise demonstrate his emphasis on this delicate ethical balance. He notes how the apostle practices his "customary moderation" with regard to necessities, but no provision should be made for "pleasures and excess and every kind of lust."[99]

Moderation is the goal of ethical living. The standard of nature—indeed nature itself—is usurped when the impulses are roused to excessive measures. Once again I need to draw attention to the fact that our author does not suggest that nature's inducement is evil. Nature's inducement is what maintains life: food and drink for the body and a natural drive for reproduction.[100] Provision is requisite for the terrestrial life. Too much or too little provision is sin, or, as Lorenzo Perrone has aptly stated, sin is the abandonment of the "virtuous 'golden mean.'"[101] Achieving the "golden mean" is difficult enough for the Christian and nearly impossible prior to conversion. Before conversion we were "impelled by the passions . . . [and] . . . bearing fruit . . . for death."[102] "Overwhelmed" by vices, we were nevertheless "not without our own active engagement in sin."[103] Free will

[97] Ibid. 5.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:418; Scheck, 103:350). See also Origen, *Princ*. 3.2.2.

[98] Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 6.14 (Hammond Bammel, 33:539; Scheck, 104:58).

[99] Ibid. 9.34 (Hammond Bammel, 34:761; Scheck, 104:233). Here Origen once again uses "flesh" in an equivocal manner denoting both "body" and "flesh." For more on excess and moderation, see ibid. 1.21; 2.1.

[100] Origen, *Princ*. 3.2.2.

[101] Lorenzo Perrone, "Peccato," in *Origene. Dizionario la cultura, il pensiero, le opere* (ed. Adele Monaci Castagno; Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 2000) 346: "Soggiacendo agli impulsi della carne, l'uomo soddisfa in eccesso i propri bisogni naturali (*Prin* 3, 2, 2), come più in generale il peccato s'identifica con l'abbandono del 'giusto mezzo' virtuoso (*CRm* 9, 2)." See also Teichtweier, *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes*, 183–84.

[102] Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 6.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:485; Scheck, 104:21). Cf. 2.5 for an exception to this rule.

[103] Ibid. 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:510; Scheck, 104:38); 5.2 (Hammond Bammel, 33:398; Scheck, 103:333), respectively. See also 5.3, 10.

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is present but considerably weakened.[104] Thus the will's inability to choose virtue consistently, in true Aristotelian fashion, stems from its lack of habitual training.[105] The soul in the habit of practicing vice finds it difficult to eschew its former life and turn to the practice of virtue.[106] Furthermore, any struggle to maintain the "golden mean" is a struggle always related to the vicissitudes of the body. The ideal is always in jeopardy because the struggle to survive necessitates subjecting the soul to testing on a regular basis. The *hegemonikon* is incessantly active in making ethical decisions, for "it is impossible that a soul exists at any time without having a ruler."[107] Just as the advanced climber continuously makes decisions and transmits those decisions—almost unconsciously—to the arms and legs, so also the advanced soul is characterized by the filling of the mind with virtue and Christ in order to ward off the continuous impulses of the body that would suggest contrary behavior.[108]

Origen is, however, always cognizant that God's purpose for our terrestrial life is to train us in the virtues and unite us with him.[109] Spiritual progress is realized when the soul brings these impulses into conformity with the law of God. Once the soul is "converted to better things," the "will for the good is (now) present in him."[110] When one is circumcised in the heart, Jesus "cuts off the habits and passions of the old man and the vices of the flesh."[111] Such progress finds further expression in the filling of the individual with the Spirit, a process that puts to death the deeds of the flesh. While Origen stresses the importance of individual repentance in this process, he recognizes that the "golden mean" is made possible through grace.[112] This also leads us to a critical difference between Origen and

[104] Ibid. 6.9.

[105] Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 2.1.3; 7.10.4.

[106] See Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 6.9–11, where Origen admits that the will struggles to choose the good in the early stages of conversion because it is not in the habit of practicing virtue.

[107] Ibid. 5.6.

[108] Ibid. 4.9; 5.6, 10.

[109] "The clothing of the fallen rational beings in bodies could be an expression of God's mercy towards the fallen beings, because the bodies seem to be necessary for the return of the beings to their former condition" (Jacobsen, "Origen on the Human Body," 649). Henry Chadwick notes, "Origen begins from the basic fact that the nature of σῶμα is impermanent; it is in a continual state of change and transformation, caused by the food which is eaten, absorbed by the body, and turned into tissue" ("Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body," *HTR* 41 [1948] 83–102, at 86). See also Origen, *Comm. Cant.* 6.1, where he refers to our bodies as "in a state of flux and . . . wasting away" (as translated in *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers* [trans. Rowan A. Greer; CWS; Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1979] 93).

[110] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 6.4 (Hammond Bammel, 33:471; Scheck, 104:12); 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:515; Scheck, 104:42), respectively. In *Comm. Rom.* 5.9 Origen draws the distinction between the old man and the new man, the former characterized by members that were enslaved to sin.

[111] Ibid. 2.9 (Hammond Bammel, 16:168; Scheck, 103:158). Margeurite Harl observes, "Origène est un optimiste, pour qui la lutte contre les passions est une première étape, vite dépassée, de la progression intérieure" (*Origène et la fonction révélatrice du Verbe incarné* [Patristica Sorbonensia 2; Paris: Seuil, 1958] 321).

[112] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 6.14. See also Origen, *Princ.* 3.2.2, where he says that mere human

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his predecessor. Clement follows the Stoics in seeing the goal of progress in this life as achieving *apatheia* (ἀπάθεια), freedom from the passions. Origen, on the other hand, urges *metriopatheia* (μετριοπάθεια), a restraint to be imposed on the passions.[113] One does not therefore find any references to the eradication of the passions in the *Commentary on Romans*. Rather their existence is assumed and their restraint is exhorted.

His final exhortation to the life of moderation provides Origen the opportunity to situate his argument within the context of our created identity. His comments on Rom 13:13 reveal that "excess and debauchery" are more "befitting of wild animals and beasts than rational [rationabilibus] human beings."[114] This reveals how Origen considers a lack of moderation to be a denial of the image of God in the person. Being "rational and intellectual" (rationabilis et mens) the "inner man" is able to have knowledge of God and has the capacity for receiving the Holy Spirit.[115] Therefore a lack of moderation runs counter to one of the defining characteristics of humanity: rationality. The body's natural desires are variegated and impetuous—indeed often irrational—unless controlled by *intellectus* and *prudentia*.[116] Therefore,

will is incapable of completing the good act, for it must be brought to perfection by divine help.

[113] "While Clement always speaks of *apatheia* as the essential virtue of the spiritual man, occurrences of *apatheia* and *apathes* in Origen's writings can be counted on the fingers of one hand and his teaching is nearer to *metriopatheia*, the restraint to be imposed on the passions, rather than *apatheia* itself" (Crouzel, *Origen*, 7). Johannes Quasten, perhaps laying more emphasis on the ascetic program per se, is not sufficiently judicious in evaluating Origen's material when arguing "the goal is the complete freedom from passions, the ἀπάθεια, the total destruction of πάθη. In order to reach it, there must be a perpetual mortification of the flesh" (*The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus* [vol. 2 of *Patrology*; Utrecht: Spectrum, 1953] 96). See also, e.g., Clement, *Strom*. 3.7.57; 4.23.152 and Origen, *Cels*. 1.64. Marcia L. Colish notes Jerome's characterization and vitriolic critique of Pelagian sinlessness being an outcropping of the Stoic idea of *apatheia*. Colish calls into question both Jerome's understanding of Origen as a proponent of *apatheia* and the general teachings of the Stoics and Pelagians in this regard (*Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century* [vol. 2 of *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*; Leiden: Brill, 1985] 77–78). See also J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 315.

[114] Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 9.33 (Hammond Bammel, 34:760–61; Scheck, 104:232). See also Clement, *Paed*., 1.13.

[115] Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 7.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:565; Scheck, 104:69). For rationality as integral to the image of God, see ibid. 1.19; 7.2; *Princ*. 1.8.4.

[116] Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 9.23 (Hammond Bammel, 34:746). In *Comm. Rom*. 1.20 (Hammond Bammel, 16:86; Scheck, 103:92) Origen says some have "destroyed the image of God within themselves" (ipsis Dei imaginem perdiderunt). For a thorough discussion of this in Origen's theology, see Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image*, 206–11, and for its influence in subsequent thought, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992) 43–84, 101–2. Origen notes that another effect of sin is that it ruins the spiritual senses (*Comm. Rom*. 4.5). For more on the spiritual senses in Origen's theology see John M. Dillon, "Aisthêsis Noêtê: A Doctrine of Spiritual Senses in Origen and in Plotinus," in *Hellenica et Judaica* (ed. André Caquot et al.; Louvain: Peeters, 1986) 443–55; and Karl Rahner, "The Spiritual Senses in Origen," in *Theological Investigations 16: Experience of the Spirit* (trans. David Morland, O.S.B.; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979), 81–103, esp. 90–91 (originally published in expanded form as "Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels

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sin is to favor the irrational, indeed it gives credence to that which is irrational and disorderly, and the soul is characterized as fleshly when it gives its assent to that which is fluctuating and ephemeral. Having done so the soul now wishes to be identified with vice, irrationality, and death. That the soul associates itself with that which is irrational, ephemeral, and excessive explains the notable absence of any mention by Origen of the human spirit. As I stated earlier in this study, when the soul does not follow the spirit's persuading influence, the latter simply recedes into the background and remains in a state of dormancy.

But does such an emphasis on the abiding existence of the passions lead Origen to a disparaging theology of the body akin to those of the very adversaries he seeks to challenge?[117] Select passages may suggest there is something inherently wrong with the body. Unqualified remarks creep into the commentary where Origen seems both to affirm and deny what nature dictates with regard to sexual reproduction.[118] But this is not the whole picture. Origen's rhetoric often betrays his intent. So while he at times agrees with the Stoics that some matters pertaining to the individual are "indifferent,"[119] many of the very needs of the body that sustain life are also a vexing reality of life in this world because the body must always be kept within certain limits. This is a standing temptation insofar as the complete elimination of sin and death in the believer is an expectation only of the future kingdom.[120] Furthermore, often he employs rhetoric to indicate a body that has already committed sin, and is therefore understood as flesh. But this rhetoric does not betray a basic fact: sin derives not from the body, but from the heart.[121] There are, in fact, several positive affirmations of the goodness of the body.[122] But insofar as he is fully aware that "all creation groans," this goodness can, admittedly, be difficult to see without the eyes of faith. We are reminded that the body is a gift of God to unite us with him and is therefore necessary for this pilgrimage. If bodily existence emerges as a source of

chez Origène," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 13 [1932] 113–45).

[117] Blanc notes, "Il arrive cependant à Origène de manifester à l'égard du corps et de la chair un mépris qui peut être dû à la fois à l'influence des gnostiques *et* à sa lutte contre eux" (L'attitude d'Origène," 848) [italics in original]. Blanc, however, provides little evidence for this claim.

[118] See Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 7.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:566; Scheck, 104:70), where he also laments, "What great futility is contained in these things." For more on the exegesis of this section, see Paul Lebeau, "L'interprétation origénienne de Rm 8. 19–22," in *Kyriakon. Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (ed. Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann; 2 vols.; Münster: Aschendorff, 1970) 1:336–45. For this same tension in Clement, see John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 148.

[119] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 4.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:338; Scheck, 103:287): "Other things, however, are indifferent [indifferentia], that is to say, they are to be designated neither good nor evil, as are wealth, physical beauty, strength, height, and those things which serve the needs of the body." See also Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 4.9; 6.6; 10.3; *Cels.* 4.45; and Teichtweier, *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes*, 176–85. For more on the Stoic conception of *indifferentia*, see, e.g., Arius Didymus, *Ecl.* 5a; 7a; Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.30.3; 2.9.15; and Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 6.45; 11.16.

[120] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 5.3, 9, 10.

[121] Ibid. 2.9.

[122] E.g., ibid. 1.14; 6.9; 9.42.

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frustration, it is also a challenge, for as Peter Brown remarks, it is "a frontier that demanded to be crossed."[123]

So the body is no more culpable than anything else that lacks rationality or free will. The decision to sin belongs to the soul. The soul, as it were, allows access for the body to exceed the bounds of nature. Original sin produced instability through corruption and death. Recalling Crouzel's observation that the soul is in league with both sides, we can deduce that it is therefore no neutral bystander. Its inherent instability makes it both an advocate for virtue and a willing partner for vice. Despite its instability and repeated failure to do the good, Origen often emphasizes the desires of the body over against the soul in order to avoid any denigration of the latter that may have a familiar ring to his deterministic adversaries. Although the "noble and rational" soul is subjected unwillingly,[124] it nevertheless implicates itself through its choice to acquiesce to the irrational impulses of the body: "It is the thought and the mind that fail to perceive correctly what defiles the man."[125] The soul must therefore make provision for the body without validating these irrational impulses that seek to bring the individual into disrepute.

Conclusion

The text of the Epistle to the Romans and the immediate concerns of his audience shaped Origen's theology of sin in his commentary. I have shown that this conception of volitional sin lends itself to three dominant emphases. God's law is the perfect and discernible standard that humanity is not to contravene. Such a contravention occurs when the lower element of the soul and the irrational impulses of the body gain favor by the soul's higher element. This usurpation of the soul is characterized by a failure to practice moderation insofar as the soul has chosen that which is excessive or deficient rather than following God's law. This understanding of the apostle's thought proved to be a substantial contribution to Christian identity in the third century. Evincing a balance and sensitivity to the needs of his audience, Origen bequeathed to the church an interpretation of the apostle that may have elicited a reading by both Augustine and Pelagius.[126] The present study has sought to fill a critical lacuna in contemporary scholarship addressing Origen. But the work is far from complete. Considerable work remains to be done on his *Commentary on*

[123] Brown, *The Body and Society*, 164. See also Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 3.2.

[124] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 7.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:566; Scheck, 104:70).

[125] Ibid. 9.42 (Hammond Bammel, 34:785; Scheck, 104:252).

[126] The most relevant studies are Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, "Augustine, Origen and the Exegesis of St. Paul," *Augustinianum* 32 (1992) 341–68; eadem, "Justification by Faith in Augustine and Origen," *JEH* 47 (1996) 223–35; eadem, "Rufinus' Translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* and the Pelagian Controversy," in *Storia ed esegesi in Rufino di Concordia* (Udine: Arti grafiche friulane, 1992) 131–42; Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008) 63–103; and Alfred J. Smith, "The Latin Sources of the Commentary of Pelagius on the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans," *JTS* 19 (1917–1918) 162–230; 20 (1918–1919) 55–65, 127–77.

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Romans. There are, however, encouraging signs that Origen's wider reading of the apostle has gained traction in the scholarly community. This promises to provide much insight into the great Alexandrian's thought.

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