

# On a Body-Switching Argument in Defense of the Immateriality of Human Nature

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## 1- Introduction

It is not easy to find an uncontroversial example of a medieval Latin thinker who conceives of the human person in *purely* material terms without any immaterial element or aspect.<sup>1</sup> Because they were nearly all Aristotelians, they did not believe that humans consist of matter alone. Their Christian faith in resurrection of the dead also gave significant motivation for believing in the immateriality of at least the

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<sup>1</sup> There were indeed a number of Christian thinkers in the patristic period (through the sixth century AD) who held that the human soul is material. As Marcia Colish points out, “they did so influenced by the Stoic principle that everything that acts is a body (which includes God as well as the human soul); among these early Christian thinkers are: Tertullian, Lactantius, Cassian, Hilary of Poitiers, Faustus of Riez, and Cassiodorus,” (personal communication, October 22, 2012); cf. also her discussion of this topic in Colish (1985, pp. 24, 43, 121-124, 128-129, 249-252).

intellectual soul (though they did disagree about whether this immateriality could be proven by reason<sup>2</sup>). In medieval Islamic thought, however, the situation is different. A great majority of the medieval Islamic theologians, i.e., *Mutakallimūn*, (or classical *kalām* theologians), in their answers to the central question: “what is the true reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of man (*insān*)?” hold a materialist theory of human nature, in one form or another.<sup>3</sup> For them, although immaterial beings are conceivable, every

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<sup>2</sup> John Buridan (d. c. 1361) “thinks the intellective soul is immaterial,” however, “he argues that this is not a demonstrated philosophical conclusion, but rather an article of faith” (Klima, 2017, p. x). A similar line of thought can be found in William of Ockham (d. c. 1347), see Pasnau (2012, p. 495).

<sup>3</sup> There are two major groups of classical *kalām* theologians: Mu‘tazilites and Ash‘arīs, and most of both groups do not believe in immateriality of human nature. On Mu‘tazilites’ view, see Madelung (2012), and Vasalou (2007). For Ash‘arīs’ view, see Shihadeh (2012). In relation to this, it is worth noting that the Mu‘tazilite theologian Mu‘ammar ibn ‘Abbād (d. 830) and Shī‘ī theologian al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1032), among classical *kalām* theologians, were two exceptions who believed in an immaterial conception of the human soul. (McDermott, 1978, p.223 and Van Ess, 1992, p.84).