In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, a number of ‘liberal Jesuit scholastics’ produced the last great synthesis of Aristotelian psychology with Christian theology. In this magnificently sympathetic reconstruction of their systems of the soul, Dennis Des Chene rescues Toletus, Suarez, and the other ‘schoolmen’ from neglect which resulted from scornful dismissals by Descartes and his fellows. Deliberating bypassing the political and medical contexts of their work, and focusing almost exclusively on Jesuit rather than other, ‘dissident’ Renaissance Aristotelianisms, Des Chene focusses intensely on intellectual history, what he calls at one point ‘the flurry of subtleties’ of these astonishing systematic commentaries on Aristotle.

Folk everywhere, according to persuasive cross-cultural studies, tend to use hierarchical biological classifications, which are much closer to Aristotle’s hierarchical taxonomy of the parts of the *psyche*than to modern systematics. It’s not surprising, then, that the sophisticated philosophico-religious hybrid so deeply embedded in pre-modern Western culture still has intuitive appeal: ‘by shedding heresies and resisting the allure of pagan revivals’, Des Chene argues, the Church had ‘arrived at a phenomenologically plausible and philosophically defensible position that balanced the claims of soul and body’. In the weight of detail, it’s almost possible to forget the tension between Aristotle’s naturalism and the individual incorporeal soul required by Christian metaphysics and morality. Des Chene does note, in a brief chapter on ‘propositions to be held by faith’, the tendency of textbooks and commentaries to pump up the confident rhetoric as they near ‘the loose bricks in the edifice’.

In his long first chapter, ‘Facts and Texts’, Des Chene presents the data of the ‘science of the soul’ (*scientia de anima).*This exposition is a brilliant success, immersing the reader in rich descriptions of ‘the powers and forms that populate the Aristotelian world’. We are to study both what is in common to all living things, and the idiosyncrasies of particular plants and animals. Framing the study of life neatly within a coherent general natural philosophy, the Aristotelian draws on common experience and tradition to delineate the nature of vital operations, from vegetation through sensation, appetite, and local motion, to intellection.

Generation can be by putrefying matter acted on by the sun (worms), by birth (horses and humans), or both (wasps and ants): Des Chene works hard to help us ‘recover that sense of the ease with which nonliving and living could exchange places’. The ceaseless interchange in nutrition between body and world means that creatures are tightly coupled, by way of the vegetative soul, with their environment. (It is odd that here and elsewhere Des Chene says little about the practical and medical implications of Aristotelian physiology, which often merged with other ancient medical traditions to drive radically holistic therapeutic regimes). A concise account of debates about sensation and memory in animals leads in to a powerful comparison between perceptual illusions and monsters as abnormal data.

Anatomy and function are tightly linked in, for example, Aristotelian views of hearing, voice, and speech. Des Chene is willing to offer illuminating modern comparisons, drawing on 20th-century physiology in asking whether the sense of touch is a single sense or not, or linking the Aristotelian variable ‘corpulence’ in describing sound and voice with our notion of ‘fat’ analog sound. In their interest in the diversity of forms, as on many other topics, the Aristotelians are favorably compared with Descartes, to whom, Des Chene judges, ‘the variety of the living world matters little’: ‘ever in a hurry’ to reduce and explain away organic powers, Descartes would offer mechanical accounts or imitations of animals in order to eliminate the category of the living. In a companion volume, *Spirits and Clocks: machine and organism in Descartes*(Cornell University Press, 2001), Des Chene expands on this interpretation and assessment of Cartesian physiology: here he is concerned more to show us the richness and sophistication of what was lost.

The later parts of the book, which address internal disputes between Thomists and other Aristotelians about the soul’s distinctness from its parts, how to count powers, and whether souls are divisible, may be of less general interest. One intriguing controversy concerned the boundaries of the body. Most authors agreed that milk and seed, like hair and nails, are not themselves animated, but there was considerable doubt about the blood.

I expected more detail here on Aristotelian treatments of the psychophysiology of the internal senses (memory, imagination, and the ‘common sense’), discussed in commentaries on Aristotle’s*Parva Naturalia:*but Des Chene says nothing about sleep and dreams, or about the brain and the nervous system. How did the late Aristotelians deal with Aristotle’s own cardiocentrism, and how did they update his sketchy accounts of the transmission of information to the heart in eddies of *pneuma*roiling through the blood? Did they deal with psychological disorders in any depth? How did they interpret the passages in which Aristotle seems to acknowledge severe bodily constraints on the purity and stability of thought? Did they connect their views on the metaphysics of mixtures with their accounts of the proper blending (*krasis)*of bodily fluids?

One source of the appeal of the Aristotelian soul is that it covers a continuum between reason and life, such that students of the soul must attend to the concrete material realizations of deliberative and rational operations. Des Chene acknowledges that this tradition may appeal to ‘those philosophers now who find the project of “embodying” the mind attractive’. Yet, as his sad conclusion acknowledges, contemporary versions of embodied and ‘situated’ cognition, whether faithful to Aristotle himself or not, seek to reunite ‘vitality and cognition’ at a price ‘that neither Descartes nor his Aristotelian predecessors would have been willing to pay. The mind will live, but it will also die, with the body’. Cognition and emotion are embedded in the mortal body and the changing world even more thoroughly than the brave Jesuits could accept