



Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists
Paderborn University, Germany

Hylomorphism in Oliva Sabuco de Nantes (1562–1626?)

Steven Barbone
San Diego State University

Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera applies hylomorphic principles to human nature. Sabuco's human being is not two separate and distinct substances but one substance, a "psycho-corporeal unity" (Talmano 2002: 202).

Hylomorphism (hylemorphism), 19th-century neologism from the Greek ὕλη *hyle* (wood, matter) and μορφή, *morphē* (form), stipulates that every living substance is "composed" of two principles: the material (body), and the formal (living principle, identified as soul or mind). Neither body nor mind can exist alone. Attributed to Aristotle and tweaked by mediæval philosophers (notably Thomas Aquinas) so something of the human soul might survive the body's death, true human nature requires both the original body and soul. Hylomorphism fell out of favor in the early modern period, especially after René Descartes' (re)introduction of mind-body dualism.

Sabuco offers a mechanical view of the world and human workings. An organic relationship between the body and its emotional and mental states occurs through a physical medium called "*chilo*," the cerebrospinal fluid produced in the spinal column. The brain regulates the flow of *chilo* through the pia mater, "the brain marrow membrane" (Sabuco 2007: 254). The mind affects and is affected by this constant flow so that in proper amounts, we are happy, healthy, but when the flow is dried up, we are sad, sick, dying (Waithe 1989: 275). A matter of hydraulics, Sabuco prefigures Descartes and others with this mechanical overview of the functioning of the human body as well as in placing supposed mind-body interaction in the brain rather than the heart. The mind and the body are not separate substances between which interaction is metaphysically impossible. We are neither a mind that happens to be embodied nor a body that happens to be animated: we are a psycho-corporeal unity, an extended mind, a thinking body.

Further Reading:

Talamo, P. 2002. "Passioni e malattie nella *Nueva filosofía* di Oliva Sabuco de Nantes". *Bruniana e campanelliana; ricerche filosofique e materiali storico-testuali* 12/1. 201-6.

Primary Sources:

Sabuco de Nantes Barrera, Oliva 2007. *New philosophy of human nature neither known to nor attained by the great ancient philosophers, which will improve human life and health*. Trans. with introduction by Waithe, M. E.; Vintró, M.; Zorita, C. A. Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Sabuco de Nantes Barrera, Oliva 1981. *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre y otros escritos*. Tomé, A. M. (ed.). Madrid: Editora Nacional.

Sabuco de Nantes Barrera, Oliva. *The true medicine* 2010. Pomata, Gianna (trans. & ed.). Toronto: Iter Inc.

Secondary Sources:

Barbone, Steven. 2015. Oliva Sabuco and the matter of the matter, in: *Society and politics* 9 (1), 25-37.

Barona, J. L. 1993. The body republic: social order and human body in Renaissance medical thought, in: *History of philosophical life sciences* 15 (2), 165-80.

Vintró, Maria & Waithe, Mary Ellen. 2002-03. Fué Oliva o fué Miguel: el caso del Sabuco, in: *Boletín de biblioteca nacional de México, (Ciudad México) primer y segundo semestres de 2002 nueva época* 1-2, 11-37.

Waithe, Mary Ellen 1989. Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera, in Waithe, Mary Ellen (ed.): *A history of women philosophers. Volume 2, 500-1600*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 261-83.

Waithe, Mary Ellen & Vintró, Maria 2003. Posthumously plagiarizing Oliva Sabuco: an appeal to cataloguing librarians, in: *Cataloguing and classification quarterly* 35 (3-4), 525-40.

Keywords:

hylomorphism, mind-body interaction, chilo, pia mater, Aristotle, René Descartes, Thomas Aquinas