

Theories of Biological Generation in Late Antiquity (abstract)  
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While there are no known commentaries on Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* in late Antiquity, many Neoplatonists addressed the topic of embryology at various points in their writings because it offered a clear case of intelligible principles being introduced into the sensible world in a very concrete manner. In doing so they show relatively little interest in empirical and anatomical details, focusing instead on the metaphysical side of the process. Here one can see how, just as the metaphysics of hylomorphism determined the outline of Aristotle's embryology, so too did the Neoplatonic metaphysics of procession and reversion lead Neoplatonic philosophers to the core of their own embryological theory, which departs significantly from those of the Hippocratics, Aristotle and Galen. One of the particularly striking features of this theory concerns the near reversal of view that the female has a much more passive role to play in the formation of the embryo. For following the model of procession and reversion, Neoplatonists viewed the male seed as containing intelligible principles that are still in a state of potentiality and that require an external agent for their actualization, and this agent was identified by some with the mother.