Matter and Minds:

Examining Embodied Souls in Plato’s Timaeus and Ancient Philosophy

By

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Abstract

With the rise of Platonism influenced by Plotinus and Descartes, philosophers have largely overlooked the fact that Plato directly acknowledges that there is a practical and valuable role for the body. The *Timaeus* clearly demonstrates that Plato took the idea of embodied minds seriously, not just as an afterthought of the immortal soul. Ultimately this research demonstrates that Plato did not fundamentally have a problem with the mind-body relationship. In offering an argument for Plato’s positive ideas of embodied minds and the necessity thereof, I will also demonstrate, through a historical comparative, why I think the emphasis on mind rather than on embodied mind might have occurred.
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Introduction

Having begun my studies in religion and classics, where we are told to start with the ancients, it came as a bit of surprise to me when I transitioned to philosophy, as certain views from our philosophical heritage are seen as more of a burden rather than an intellectually fruitful. I believe this is particularly true in the analysis of mind, where Platonic and Cartesian ideas are treated rather dismissively. It seems to me that in an effort to shed the baggage of potentially unproductive byproducts of dualistic views, the valuable content of these so-called dualistic systems goes unrecognized. This is particularly true of the current discussions of philosophy of mind and embodied cognition. Philosophers seem so concerned with trying to overcome the dualistic systems of Plato and Descartes that often the discussion of what these systems and their methods have to offer contemporary analyses of the body-mind relationship is overlooked; resulting in philosophical caricatures of Plato and Descartes.

When we think about ancient philosophy and philosophy of mind, I think some philosophers are very concerned with getting out from underneath the burden of the transcendental soul and idealistic content. As a result, I have found that I knew very little about what the ancient philosophers actually said about our physical selves and what role they believed embodiment had in relating to our intellectual selves.

*Apeiron* (ἄπειρον) expresses the Greek idea of a boundless potentiality of mind. Contrasted with this infinity is the finite nature of the body, which at times, seems to have nothing but limitations. One of the challenges in understanding
contemporary embodied consciousness is trying to understand what the relationship between the physical and the psychical world is. On the one hand we have the mind which seems limitless, as imagination is not necessarily hampered by the actualization of our ideas. I can imagine that I am six feet tall, but all of my wishing and intellectualizing will not actually make me any taller than five-foot-two. So I can imagine a way to obtain objects up high, like by climbing or using stepladders, but neither my imagination nor ingenuity actually makes me any taller.

As it turns out, examining what mind is and giving it a physical location is a more difficult task than it seems it should be. I think: surely I have a mind, surely it is part of my body, and surely my mind has something to do with what makes me me. But placing my mind in the world ends up being not simple at all. I must ask questions like: Is my mind only my brain? Does mind have a more ubiquitous presence throughout my whole body? If my mind is only one part of my body, then why do they each appear to have distinct and sometimes very separate roles?

The mind and body often appear at odds with one another as it seems like they are designed to serve separate functions; the one has expansive potentiality of the imagination, while the other is the crude subject of natural laws. This is concerning for some because it seems that as we get closer to knowing what makes human minds unique, the more our biological nature comes to the fore. By examining our selves through physical laws we begin to show more similarities to our non-human animal neighbours.¹ I suspect the distinction between us and other

¹ Tomasello, Michael. A Natural History of Human Thinking, 2014. His work on primates and cognitive capacity explores the potential and limitations of the
living creatures keeps many philosophers awake at night. Appearing too animal worries some philosophers and theologians more than others. What I suspect underlies much of the concern for a purely biological or physicalist explanation of consciousness stems from the concern for degrading the seemingly limitless nature of our minds. At the core of the problem is a very real concern: what makes our human minds distinct from other minds? We may learn one day soon that there is very little difference between us and primates or cephalopods for instance.\(^2\) However, one thing is pretty clear; no other animal does philosophy or thinks about thinking in the very same way that we do. This alone is enough to continue to investigate the nature of embodied consciousness and the concept of mind.

I am not particularly worried about the physical distinction between human and non-human minds, nor do I think it is at all threatening to believe that other creatures have minds like ours. I do however sympathize with the instinct to make the distinction between mind and body in order to try to understand why we are the way we are. Plato had a very similar concern for understanding our uniqueness. In some ways his answer was quite clear: the immortal soul provides us with knowledge by way of the intelligible forms. But this is only a rudimentary summation of the insights that Plato offers contemporary philosophers of mind.

\(^2\) Godfrey-Smith’s 2017, *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness*, draws on new theories of convergent evolution, he examines the evolution of cephalopods and emphasizes that there are many similarities between the independent development of primate minds and cephalopods. One of his suggestions is that due to a similar amount neocortical capacity, human brains and cephalopod brains are more alike than not.
Still, few philosophers today would be comfortable with promoting the view that the mind is in any way analogous to the soul. We can no longer take seriously philosophy that places the soul at the center of consciousness and knowledge, so instead we have put the mind in its place. As we elevate the importance of the mind we attempt to demystify its nature without overlooking its startling abilities. So in some ways, rather than dissect the nature of the soul, philosophers study the mind and consciousness, while much of the original psyche remains ever part of the investigation.

I am not making the assertion that the soul and the mind are exactly the same thing, nor that any philosopher believes as much. I am instead interested in where the concepts of the soul and the mind intersect and overlap. I believe that both concepts stem from a similar concern: an effort to understand how human animals have minds like ours.

Rather than attempting to understand the nature of transcendental souls, philosophers of the present see our job as trying to return the mind to the world, something that was made terribly difficult by Platonic ideals, or Kantian transcendentalism and extreme Cartesian scepticism. Moreover, if we work our way through ancients like Plato and Plotinus, we will find that philosophers have been thinking about the mind and soul as embodied a great deal longer than I have found is often acknowledged in many philosophical discussions.

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3 I believe this is particularly evident in McDowell’s *Mind and World* (2003), which emphasizes his concern for *bald naturalism*, which expels the humanity from mind in an over zealous account of scientism. Part of his a solution calls on a *naturalized platonism*. This is his effort to regain some of the awe that Plato’s transcendental realm offered the mind, without depending on an actual transcendental realm.
Indeed the mind/body relationship has not been straightforward for Descartes, or Augustine of Hippo, nor was it for Plotinus or Plato. What’s more, it has also been my experience that certain philosophical conversations take these problems of mind for granted. Instead of grappling with these presuppositions, it is assumed that we understand where this mind v. body philosophical baggage comes from. I have found that considering ancient ideas of embodied cognition offers a productive philosophical historical timeline and comparative analysis that helps to make sense of our current ideas and confusions about minds and bodies, one that I think warrants moving through a bit more slowly.

With the rise of the influence of Plotinus and Descartes, we begin to overlook the fact that Plato directly acknowledges that there is a practical and valuable role for the body. The *Timaeus* clearly demonstrates that Plato took the idea of embodied minds seriously, not just as an afterthought of the immortal soul. In offering an argument for Plato’s positive ideas of embodied minds and the necessity thereof, I will also demonstrate, through a historical comparison, why I think the emphasis of mind over body might have occurred.

Following a reading of the *Timaeus*, I consider Plotinus and his treatment of matter in an effort to demonstrate how a schism between body and mind might have begun to become an entrenched conceptual schema. I conclude with an examination of Stephen Menn’s work to offer insight into how the dualistic systems of the ancients influenced Descartes as an early modern thinker.

My examination of the *Timaeus* and Descartes’ *The Passions of the Soul*, asserts that embodied minds are a very serious interest to both philosophers, and
that it is largely because of Plotinus’ influence on the Christian world that we simplify Plato and Descartes the way that we do. I argue that the emphasis, and now present day concern, for a dualistic vision of the body and mind occurred, at least in part, as a result of Plotinus’ *Enneads* and the emphasis he placed on the his three hypostases and the inherent evil of matter. Descartes who interpreted Plato and Plotinus, via Augustine, would adopt the same emphasis. The separation of mind and body would then become central to Christian doctrine. Likewise the schism which endorsed the distractingly nature of the body and the esteem of the divine mind (soul) also became a central doctrine of the intellectual world. As a result of this shift in thought, the intellectual realm is placed above the physical world and we at present are left with the task of trying to place consciousness back in the physical body.

When dealing with dualisms it may seem obvious to start with Descartes, but we must go further back to uncover earlier dualistic methods; and I always enjoy beginning with Plato. In terms of ancient philosophy of mind it is likely that Aristotle first comes to mind. Many are likely to see his ideas of hylomorphism and the rational soul as the beginning of philosophy of mind. It is less likely however, to read Plato as an early (or proto) philosopher of mind or to examine his dialogues with a focus on embodied cognition. Fortunately, the *Timaeus* makes this possible. For many ancient philosophers, it is an unquestionable circumstance that the body is a hindrance to achieving one’s full intellectual potential. To discuss the idea that the body interferes with the intellect I will emphasize the philosophical traditions of the Platonists and the scholastics, which heavily influences Descartes’ work. We can
certainly hold the influence of Descartes’ dualisms and the extreme skepticism of the *Meditations* partially responsible. Much like Plato, Descartes’ ideas are given short shrift. For better or for worse, we most often access the interpretations of the philosophers that these philosophical giants have influenced, rather than take on the original material.

This project is organized as follows: In *Chapter One*, I begin with an explanation of my methodological approach for reading the *Timaeus*, followed by a discussion of Platonic concepts of soul. In *Chapter Two*, I make a close reading of the *Timaeus*, focusing on Plato’s description of the mortal soul and the body’s design. Next, in *Chapter Three*, I turn to Plotinus’ three hypostases and his ideas of matter. Finally in *Chapter Four* I consider Descartes’ treatment of the body from *The Passions of the Soul*. I then conclude with my analysis of embodied minds in the ancient and modern world.

Before I go any further, I have two housekeeping notes: first, I rely on the translations of R. G. Bury Loeb Classical Library 1981, none of the translations are my own. Secondly, in light of the texts I use for this analysis, I use the terms *mind(s)* and *soul(s)* as essentially interchangeable. I have tried to make it clear when I thought that a more specific distinction was necessary.
Chapter One: Plato’s Embodied Soul

i. Plato and the Timaeus

In my investigation of Timaeus, I have found that in some ways, contemporary ideas of embodied cognition have come full-circle, as the ancients were indeed interested in how having physically embodied minds affects our intellectual capacity. In order to demonstrate why Plato’s ideas of mind are often overstated and generalized, I will point to several moments in time by drawing on Plotinus and Descartes.

I am not making the claim that “the ancients got it right!” and that philosophers have been treading water ever since. My idea is much more modest: If we look at the ancients, we will find that they have plenty to say about how our physical and psychical worlds interact. The result of this project is thus one that contributes to a philosophically-historical understanding of what it means to us to be minded creatures within the confines of physical forms.

Before I begin a detailed examination of embodiment in Timaeus, I am aware of the fact that Plato’s intellect (νοῦς/λόγος) and the soul (ψυχή) hold a place of ultimate primacy. I do not believe that Plato gives the equivalent value to the body as he does to the soul or mind. This is why the Timaeus is such an excellent investigation of Plato’s ideas of embodiment. As one of the longer dialogues, the Timaeus is Plato’s treatment of the creation of the world and of individual souls (minds) told in the form of a myth. Within the dialogue few references are made explicitly to the forms or even the mind. Instead the relationship between the mortal body and soul and the immortal soul is given focused attention.
Reading *Timaeus* with a focus on embodied minds highlights the treatment of our physical selves in Plato’s world-view. In doing so, I have been better able to understand why we might have begun to emphasize the mind as an independent thing, perhaps to the detriment of thinking about embodied cognition. I believe that the *Timaeus* offers contemporary ideas of philosophy of mind fertile grounds for the discussion of present day concerns for the analysis of the mind-body problem.

**ii. Reading Platonic Dialogues**

The dialogues concerning the soul are sometimes referred to as the *middle dialogues*, so-called for their chronology; they follow the earlier *Socratic dialogues*, but are also grouped together for their content, which is often, by and large, a concern for the nature of the soul. My understanding is that such chronological designations (early, middle, late; or Socratic, Middle, Platonic), meant more to philosophers of about forty or fifty years ago. Along with instituting categorical designations of the dialogues came the implication that some were more philosophical than others. This often meant that the earlier *Socratic dialogues* were thought to be more philosophical than the later *Platonic dialogues*. Such descriptions have since come under scrutiny by contemporary scholars, such as Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe.⁴

As a spillover from organizing the dialogues by theme or Platonic era, there are also different camps of Plato scholars. There are those who might be considered


doctrinalists, as they aim to emphasize dialogues that promote clear doctrines of the
Forms and the soul, often citing the Republic as the definitive dialogue. Similarly,
there are those who take a developmental view, and emphasize Plato’s changing
ideas. Which Plato is “better” is a source of endless debate.

When reading the dialogues I think that it is best to assume that Plato always
knew what he was up to. Therefore my approach considers his ideas on the subject
matter within the given context of a dialogue. All ideas presented by the dialogues
are legitimate contributions to his overall philosophical project. I do not believe that
some dialogues more than others are more philosophical or that any present a
“truer” Plato.

If we are to accept that Plato authored all of the dialogues, the idea that some
dialogues are more Platonic than others strikes me as an impossibility. I am most
sympathetic to Christopher Rowe’s approach to the dialogues as he asserts that
neither the doctrinalist nor the developmentalist give the dialogues enough credit.
Such approaches often end up downgrading certain qualities of a given dialogue in
an effort to emphasize another. As a consequence, individual dialogues do not get
due credit.

I am interested in investigating the individual dialogue holistically,
considering the narrative development as well as the philosophical themes that
emerge. Most importantly, I read Plato to consider contemporary philosophical
concerns, and the historical progression of a community of ideas. In this case,
Timaeus presents an opportunity to examine several concerns: The Timaeus takes
on the development of ideas surrounding embodied minds, the progression of philosophy of mind, as well as the treatment of our predicament of corporeality.

I read the *Timaeus*, and what the dialogue has to offer on the nature of the body and soul, as one dialogue of many Platonic texts. The *Timaeus* is a dialogue in which Plato chose to examine the relationship between the cosmos and our existence as rational creatures. I do not believe that the *Timaeus* lays out a specific Platonic doctrine of the material world; is one of many philosophical contributions to the broader Platonic world which is representative of Plato’s desire to investigate the nature of things, and pedagogical objective to inspire others to their own philosophical reflection.

**iii. The Timaeus and Platonic Soul(s)**

In 1916, classicist John Burnet published his “core doctrine” of the Platonic soul. Burnet claims the *Apology* offers the definitive view on the soul, which is that the soul is a necessary condition for the body’s life as well as the moral self. In 1962, Crombie argued that there was no stable idea of the Platonic soul presented by the dialogues; *Charmides, Phaedo* and *Timaeus* present versions of a Pythagorean inspired soul. Annas (1981) insists that the soul is discussed in terms of a complex nature which is neither spatial nor temporal, so on her view, Plato is intentionally vague about what exactly these complexities are. And MacDonald claims Plato’s soul has stages of maturation.\(^5\) I do not see the various readings of the soul as a conflict.

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in Plato’s overall views or problematic for the portrayal of the soul between the
dialogues. Rather I think variation is indicative of a change of focus relative to the
context of the dialogue and its interlocutors, a similar approach to that of
Christopher Rowe’s (2010).

Throughout the many dialogues, Plato does not offer one specific description
of the soul, nor does he have one definitive dialogue explicating its nature. In the
Phaedo the soul is described as a unit which is affected by its worldly education and
resulting character. This soul is destined for the underworld of Tartarus and its
ultimate rebirth, which is an influence of the Pythagoreans (Phaedo 113a-e). The
most popular description of the soul is likely the tripartite soul of the Phaedrus, the
Republic and the Timaeus.

Unlike the Phaedo, the Timaeus, the Phaedrus and the Republic present the
soul as a composite of parts: reason (λόγος), spirit (θύμος), and appetite (έπιθυμία).
The Timaeus offers a tripartite soul that is different from the soul of the Republic.
One of these differences is that the Republic stresses the irrationality of the body
and its physical desires, while Timaeus stresses the necessary and practical qualities
of the body. The Phaedrus discusses the soul primarily in terms of its transcendental
existence before entering a human form, where embodiment is the inevitable cause
of imbalance and loss of rationality.
Chapter Two: The Timaeus Commentary

Plato’s rendering of creation offers an examination of the role of the material body, which aids in achieving rationality, as well as suggests that embodiment is actually necessary for rationality. Although the intellect and immortal soul are Plato’s principle concerns, the Timaeus offers an account of rationality that is not simply hindered by the embodied soul. Rather, this dialogue offers an idea of soul and rationality that depends on functions only possible because of an embodied soul.

There are two major stages of creation: the first is the creation of the heavens and soul of the world, the Demiurge (Timaeus, 27c-69a). The Demiurge is the divine creator (sometimes referred to as God), intelligent and immortal. The Demiurge brings order to an otherwise disordered universe, which includes the material world (30d). It has no sense organs of its own (33c). All subsequent creations involving matter are made possible because of the Demiurge (36e). The second creation is of man’s soul and body (69a).

The way that Timaeus describes the relationship between the soul and the body’s organs suggests to me that Plato might be trying to reverse engineer from our given circumstance of embodiment. So, we need not, for the purpose of the Timaeus, worry about an alternative to embodied immortal souls. Rather effort should be made to come up with an explanation for, and the potential advantages of, human limitations in an infinite universe.

I draw two primary conclusions about embodiment from the Timaeus. The first is that we can assume that a better design for humans was not possible. Even
though the cosmic soul is immortal, there was no way around the fragile and mortal design of the body. The next is we are to believe that corporality is necessary to explain human capacity for rationality. We have a dual nature that is made up of an abundant mind and a limited body. The philosopher is thus responsible for making the best out of circumstances that Plato either sees no way around or for which there is no need to offer an alternative possibility.

Despite the powers of the Demiurge, Timaeus assures us that even with the frailties of the human body, it is designed in the best possible way. I will highlight the advantageous design of the body using themes of *necessity* and *symmetry*. The body proves to have a necessary role in sense-perception and in achieving harmony. The result of symmetry in the whole human is demonstrative of a rational soul. Moreover, Timaeus does not offer an alternative to the immortal human soul in mortal material bodies; we can assume that at least in this dialogue, Plato wanted to investigate the nature of the relationship between the immaterial and material.

*Sensibila* (sense-capacities) were created even before the cosmic body (31b-32c), and as Broadie asserts, perception can be understood as fundamental to the order of the cosmos. Because the body and sense-perception are necessary, reason is not possible in spite of the body. Rather, reason is dependent upon a mortal body. For starters, the body offers the soul the ability to experience sense-perception. The design of the body is thus a necessity for us to maximize our rational capacity, while
the disembodied soul might not be able to conceptualize the physical world adequately.\(^6\)

Nature is the result of the *All*, which is a mixture of all physical elements and divine rationality. The mortal world offers the possibility of physical animals with perception, while the immortal makes thought and inquiry of the physical possible. Broadie argues that human reason is not a purely transcendent quality. Human reason relies on the physical world and embodiment.\(^7\) (42a-e):

> And when, by virtue of Necessity, they [souls] should be implanted in bodies, and their bodies are subject to influx and efflux, these results would necessarily follow, —firstly, sensation that is innate and common to all proceeding from violent affections; secondly, desire mingled with pleasure and pain; and besides these, fear and anger and all such emotions as are naturally allied thereto...

The rational/immortal part is necessarily blended with the physical/mortal in order to give rise to sense-perception and passion. This, is in part, because passions and perceptions are part of the ingredients of the mixture of the *All* from which the body is constructed (31b). So, the immortal and mortal compose a natural unity and give us a capacity for rationality that we could not have had any other way.\(^8\)

After the Demiurge created the cosmic soul, using the remaining materials from the All, he passed the responsibility of the design of humans on to the younger gods. Given the materials of the universal mixture and their abilities these less

\(^6\) Vision, is the greatest gift of the senses to philosophy. Vision makes it possible for us to observe the stars and the universe which inspires inquiry. Vision makes observing the harmonious revolutions of Reason possible (47a-b). And so through observation the individual soul is able to mimic the world soul (57d-61c).


experienced gods did the best they could in their design of humans. The gods made us in the fairest possible way (42 d-e), the nature of the soul is such that affections such as perception, desire, fear and courage are useful. Thus in the first stage of soul-creation the lesser gods create affections, and in the second stage affections are put to good use (69d).\textsuperscript{9}

The body is the soul’s vehicle and is designed to service the intellect (and soul), as well as enabling the intellect’s sensuous experiences, such as perceptions and emotions (69c-b). Each organ and sense faculty has value because each is endowed with a unique capacity to aid the soul in navigating the physical world, all with the ultimate aim of achieving rationality.

The corporeal, as part of the mixture of the All; it is not accidental or an unfortunate inconvenience. Human reason requires the necessary functions of body. Given that embodiment is necessary for reason, the body’s design works congruously with the tri-section of the soul, (68e-69a):

Wherefore one ought to distinguish two kinds of causes, the necessary and the divine, and in all things to seek after the divine for the sake of gaining a life of blessedness, so far as our nature admits thereof, and to seek the necessary for the sake of the divine, reckoning that without the former it is impossible to discern by themselves alone the divine objects after which we strive, or to apprehend them or in any way partake thereof.

Physical bodies are necessary in order to experience one another so that a certain kind of reflection and philosophy can transpire. The Demiurge could not perform

this kind of self-reflection on its own, and in this way physical bodies facilitate reason.\textsuperscript{10}

As well as providing an explanation of their physiological functions, Plato attributes emotions and reflective rational capacities to the organs. The design of the body is as follows: The organization of the body is meant to serve the immortal soul and intellect. The body is therefore the servant of the head, as the head is the most divine aspect and reigns over the body. The head being spherical, would roll around were it not attached to a body. Likewise, limbs and organs serve the head and make transportation easier (44b-45c).

Timaeus makes a detailed description of the specific functions of the body. This includes organs, extremities, and even hair and fingernails (76e). The value of these descriptions is not in the accuracy of contemporary biology or physiology. Rather, they emphasize that Plato’s real interest in the role of the material body is the value of its physiology of the soul.

The soul is anchored throughout the body, and bound within the marrow (73b-e). As such, reason is a \textit{bodily} function, as well as a divine gift. Considering the organs below the head: The heart, separated by the neck, leaps at signs of danger (70b-c). The spirited soul, located in the heart, needs to be close enough to hear the rational soul and has the job of communicating with the intellect as well as the entire body by way of blood circulation (70a). The stomach, responsible for basic nutritional needs, is positioned further away from the head, so it is less able to

interfere with the reasoning potential of the head (70e). The lungs use air to cool the heart in times of distress so that the spirited soul can better see reason (70d). The liver has a smooth reflective surface and acts as a mirror, in order for this organ to be able to see reason, as the intellect can be reflected on its surface (71b). And the spleen cleans the liver so that it is always ready to receive messages of reason (72c).

The head’s design is best to house the intellect. The skull, flesh and hair all make perception and intelligence more possible; any other features would have been too cumbersome, and, as a consequence reason would have been more difficult (75a-76d). In this way, flesh is limited on the head because bone has more soul in it than flesh or muscle does. Flesh however is more resilient. If the body were a greater proportion of flesh, bodies would live longer. A greater proportion of flesh on the head would make reason more difficult. As a result, it was more sensible to have bodies that are less durable with a shorter life span for the sake of reason (73d-74e).  

It might be tempting to want for a Platonic world-view where the cognitive has so much importance that the corporeal is only ever a hindrance, as one might interpret from the Phaedo or maybe Phaedrus. However, along with the necessary nature of the body, Timaeus emphasizes that harmony is achieved through a symmetry of body and soul. To be in a harmonious state is our nature, and with good nurturing this is possible. Harmony is a gift from the Muses, and this is one of

11 Plato’s conjecture about flesh getting in the way of rationality is striking if we are to consider the design of dinosaurs. While their rationality is open to speculation, their brains were remarkably small, their bodies colossal, and many of these large prehistoric creatures did indeed, have a very long life span.
the reasons that we have the ability to hear. We can use rhythm in speech most importantly, but also from music to access rationality. Rhythm and symmetry also express the best movement of the soul, which is even and circular (47c-e). In contrast to harmony, disease and vice are the result of disturbing our nature by neglecting the health and balance of the body and soul (87c-d):

For with respect to health and disease, virtue and vice, there is no symmetry or want of symmetry greater than that which exists between the soul itself and the body itself.

It is in the concluding section of the dialogue that Plato considers both the nature of disease and wickedness in the most detail. Health is harmonious and symmetrical, while disease is the opposite. The body and soul therefore, need to be evenly matched in order to have the best possible chance of acquiring reason. A mind that is too strong will destroy a weak body, while an overbearing [fleshy] body will make reason more difficult (86b-c). Wickedness is attributed to a dysfunction originating within the body (86e). Thus the body needs to be nurtured and cultivated in order to avoid wickedness in the soul (87a).

Because the sphere is divine, circular movements are preferable. Several physiological parts, such as the head, which is spherical, as well as the marrow which winds throughout the body, demonstrate the significance of circularity. Marrow was created by God in order to frame the body, and is the location where the soul and body are tied together (73c-d). Like the brain, which under the right conditions experiences circular motions a la the intellect, the marrow promotes

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12 Wickedness and the evil as a result of matter is an idea I explore in the following section on Plotinus.
round and circular movement, given its shape, while the rest of the body is inclined to rectilinear movements (44d).

There are two primary motions of living beings: the immortal and rational make curvilinear motions, while embodied motions are rectilinear as they are primarily subjects of necessity not rationality. Johansen draws attention to symmetry and harmony in regards to the movements of the soul. In Timaeus’ system the body is designed to serve rational ends. As such the curvilinear structure of the head and the marrow is part of the advantageous design (89e-90a).

Spherical objects revolve in circular motion; thus, in order for individual souls to seek reason, they must mimic the revolutions of the perfected soul. This is challenging for the newly embodied soul, as its beginnings are irrational, so it must look to the Demiurge for rationality. By observing the revolutions, the soul can become more harmonious, which is why humans also have the ability to see and hear. Accordingly the Muses, music and harmony are important in this way.

Humans are a compound of body and soul, and must maintain harmony for the health of both the mortal and the immortal parts (88a-c). Although the most divine aspect of the soul is housed in the head (90a), it is still worth Timaeus repeating throughout his monologue that balance must exist throughout the whole mortal form (89a).

The body is designed to serve reason. Even if it is not a perfect design, it is as good as it could be. Hypothetically, a soul that could reflect upon reason all on its own might be a superior model to one that needs a material body for sense-

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perception. However such a version of soul is not the circumstance that is illustrated in the *Timaeus*. As a result of the benefits provided by the soul when embodied, the necessity of body and the goal of reason have nearly equivalent value; the body is capable of things the soul is not (41d-42e). Thus the corporeal body, though imperfect and often a distraction, is the best way that Timaeus can devise in order for the soul to actualize reason.

In this way, Timaeus’ account of the human soul’s tripartite physiology is presented as the best design to promote the primacy of rationality. The body is composed so that each part of the soul can best serve the whole in order to aid the intellect and immortal soul, all the while maintaining control over the mortal aspects of the soul. The tripartite design of the soul gives primacy to the development of one’s rational and cognitive capacities, while acknowledging the necessary relationship of the parts for the sake of the mind. Johansen describes living beings as *psychosomatic wholes*, as the body is an aspect of an ordered cosmic teleology, arranged to promote the greatest possible good which requires both mortal and immortal parts (42a).\(^\text{14}\)

Thus the body need not contrast with the soul’s desire for truth and rationality. Instead, the body, with its own rational aims aids in the overall endeavor. The spirited soul in the chest listens to reasons of the head and mind and

\(^{14}\) Johansen, 2004, 137-159. The human form thus harnesses and applies what Johansen refers to as the “less-rational” capacities, rather than strictly “irrational” aspects. Johansen asserts that it is more accurate to see the body in terms of *less-rational* rather than *irrational*, given that the order of the body can make rationality more or less possible depending on the quality of all of his parts functioning harmoniously.
then carries out necessary demands for nourishment and survival. Even the appetitive has access to rationality via the images projected on to the liver from the intellect. In light of the reliance the mind has on the body in Timaeus’ account, the resultant view is that our nature is to desire both the wisdom of the divine, as well as nourishment for the body (88a-b).
Chapter Three: Plotinus on Matter

In the third century, being ashamed of the material body was a shared belief of Christians, Gnostics, Porphyry and Plotinus. Plotinus’ interpretation of the *Timaeus* emphasized that the material realm was without qualities of its own, so the sensible world was completely reliant upon the intelligible world for its Forms to impress themselves on matter, as seals imprint themselves in wax. He also objected to the idea that the senses offered any knowledge of the self (or soul). The body is a prison, and with discipline one could turn away from the body towards the soul.¹⁵

By the time Plotinus is the head of the Academy, I observe a cultural shift in the treatment of the human physical form. The *Timaeus* and the Stoic pneuma are evidence that philosophers had begun to take ideas of embodied minds seriously. However, Plotinus, perhaps influenced by burgeoning Gnostic and Christian sympathies marks an increasing concern for conceptualizing souls as exclusively immaterial. The immaterial therefore becomes equated with the mind/intellect much more than might have been the trend during Plato’s time. I am not asserting that Greek intellectualism of the fourth century BCE *en masse* took the body more seriously, rather that Plato believed that the body was endowed with a certain amount of valuable rational potential.¹⁶

¹⁶ Raydams-Schils, 2003. In the second century, Plotinus (and Porphyry) will emphasize the body’s ability to interfere with the soul’s rationality. In the third century Augustine of Hippo will use Plotinus’ *cogito* argument against the view that the soul is a *body* at all (this argument is later made famous by Descartes). Into the fifth century, the Christian Calcidius, commenting on the *Timaeus*, will allow that only in childhood is the soul pliable and easily influenced by the body. Following
Although self-consciously a part of the Platonist school, Plotinus was an original thinker. The *Enneads* assert a radical view of Platonic dialogues and emphasize the view that the body’s effect on the intellectual is a necessarily problematic, rather than even a practical necessity (a necessity which even Descartes will acknowledge in *The Passions*). Ideas later attributed to Plato are not wholly accurate, in part because the nuances of individual dialogues are not obviously demonstrated by such interpretations.

The three hypostases that Plotinus develops in the *Enneads* assert several ideas about the problem of embodied souls. He sees his system as advancing Platonic ideals of the forms and the immortal soul. Thus the One is the eternal underlying cause of all things. Essentially, Plotinus maintains that all real things (*i.e.* Platonic forms) are a part of the unity the One (and/or the Good), and there is only a *seeming* plurality which is made up of matter. It only *seems* to be, because matter is not part of the three hypostases and therefore it is not a real substance, but a pseudo-substance.

The three hypostases are the soul, the intellect and the One. The One is purely good and all things emanate from its unity. These hypostases make up a hierarchy where the One is the primary substance and the intellect and world-soul emanate from the unity of the One. While the intellect directly relates to the One, it

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Calcidius, fifth century Pagan Neo-Platonist Proclus will allow that while education can help the soul, the body is only ever a hindrance to this process. Then in the sixth century, Christian Neo-Platonist Philoponus, in his commentary on *De Anima*, will allow that the soul is affected by the elements that compose the body. Philoponus will suggest that philosophy will make the body “lean and dry” which is the ideal physiological state for the soul; thus the effects of education of the soul are physiologically demonstrable.
also provides souls in the material world (world-souls) with the knowledge of the forms. The relationship between the soul and intellect is such that the intellect provides the soul with the capacity to reflect on the knowledge that the intellect possesses about the One. The soul, which animates matter, is the way in which the intellect interacts with the material world.\textsuperscript{17}

Following Plato’s intelligible realm of the forms and the problematic appearance of the material world, the \textit{Enneads} emphasize the significance of the forms and the problem of embodied souls. Plotinian metaphysics asserts that living bodies are completely dependent on the soul as a source of life, as the soul embodies and animates matter. Only the soul and the intellect are in contact and part of the One; matter is not. Like Plato, Plotinus takes genuine knowledge to be possible only for the soul by way of knowledge of intelligible forms. The body alone is not responsible for perception, but merely receives images by way of the soul’s communication with the intellect. This we experience as sense-perception (\textit{V.1}).

Real things are not accessible through sense-perception of the physical world. All the senses are able to perceive are appearances of the forms as provided by their archetypes in the sensible realm. It is only because of the connection the embodied soul has with the intellect that the senses are able to recognize things as they appear to be.\textsuperscript{18} Cognitive capacities are the function of the intellect which the

\textsuperscript{17}The plurality of forms and the unity of the One is another complicated issue that Plotinus puts on the table, but I will have to put this issue aside for this paper. I will not deal with how Plotinus argues for pluralities within the primary unity however.

soul participates in. The soul facilitates and gives meaning to these perceptions because of its embodied form.

Significantly, on a Plotinian view, evil (τὸ κακόν) is the result of want or depravation of the intelligible forms, and occurs by way of an unregulated relationship between the soul and [any] matter.¹⁹ Evil is not a part of the One, the intellect or the soul. Evil arises from matter alone, as matter is absolute deficiency. Bodies then are an evil of a second degree because they are made of matter, as matter is the truly problematic partial substance. The only real substances are the hypostases. The results of matter taking shape are a secondary problem. The first problem is that matter needs to be explained as separate from the One due to its corruptible nature.

It is by emphasizing evil in Plotinus’ worldview that I believe creates an irreconcilable problem for embodied souls. Plotinus’ ideas of evil are distinct from Plato’s (or Aristotle’s for that matter). For Plato something that is “bad” is the result of a lack of knowledge or correct understanding of what is truly virtuous or good. Bodies are indeed a limitation for both philosophers; however, matter is not emphasized as the root of misunderstanding necessarily, but more likely a contributing factor. One of the primary efforts of the Enneads seems to be a project in understanding the evil qualities of matter.

Plotinus relies on the Platonic dialogues to demonstrate the problem of embodied souls. Based on ideas of soul from Phaedo and Phaedrus, once the soul is

released from the fetters of the material world, it can move on to the intelligible realm (*IV.8.1*). The body [made of matter] is a hindrance to the soul’s intellection as it is the material that burdens the soul with pleasures desires and grief. The body is the possession of the soul. The soul always aims higher, at the intelligible realm (*IV.8.2*). To try to cultivate the material world will do little to improve the soul and its relationship with the intellect.

Because matter is secondary, the material world is corruptible, which unfortunately and frequently influences the soul. It is only by turning away from the body and towards the mind that it is possible for the soul to perfect itself. Humans are a combination of body and soul (the eternal and the material). But because Plotinus maintains that the soul and intellect as part of the One are not directly corruptible, the soul and the intellect are only ever incorporeal as they are part of the unity of what is really real. Contrariwise all material objects are less real as they are only in the world apparently (as made possible by the forms).

Because the nature of matter is one of insufficiency and this lack is responsible for illness, ugliness and poverty, all afflictions are due to the deficient nature of matter (*I.8.5*). And because there is no form in matter, it can only ever be a privation of the form that it attempts to appear as; this is why, for example, some faces are ugly, as they fall short of the archetype of the ideal face. Beautiful images are better manifestations of the forms in matter; thus evil is explained by the formlessness of matter (*I.8.10*). Evil is a non-substance because it is contrary to the substance of the Good. Therefore, evil cannot come from the One directly, as it is a non-substance or false being and is the opponent of the divine (*I.8.6*).
Matter is evil because it is the pseudo-substance that is responsible for the deterioration of bodies. And although matter is real enough to allow for the embodiment of souls and sense-perception, it is not as real as the hypostases. Plotinus claims that had there only been the three hypostases, evil would not even exist (I.8.2).

I suggest that Plotinus’ interpretation of the Platonic dialogues is quite radical because of the emphasis that he places on the evil nature of matter and his deep aversion to the idea that the hypostases are tainted by matter. While I grant Plotinus is attempting to establish his own doctrine of the soul rather than attempting to assert the “true” doctrines of the Platonic dialogues, he is self-consciously engaged in Platonic ideals as the head of the Academy, and, as a result, the comparison to the dialogues is not unwarranted.

By emphasizing the One alongside the contamination of the material world, I believe that Plotinus fails to address the issue of why souls come to be embodied at all. One wonders why we have bodies if matter is only ever a hindrance? Moreover, how do Plotinus’ worries about matter take into account his views on information received via sense-perception? Emilson’s work on Plotinus demonstrates that despite Plotinus’ aversion to the material, he remains a direct-realist. I detect two irreconcilable systems that Plotinus developed in the Enneads. One system insists on the unity of the three hypostases, while the other recognizes that the world-soul, which is somehow housed in matter and is consequently responsible for evil.

I cannot speak very knowledgably on the subject of Plotinus and his ideas concerning direct realism. I am therefore inclined to accept Emilson’s view on the
subject. However, if Emilson is correct and Plotinus is a direct-realist and so material bodies are actually being perceived (that is objects are there and interact with sense-perception), objects are not mere illusions. Thus the *Enneads* put us in an uncomfortable place philosophically. That is the hypostases comprise reality (the One, the Intellect, the Soul), while matter, which the soul embodies, is its antithesis. Plotinus’ system then tries to account for the apparent relationship between things of real substance and material objects that have no reality at all.

For Plotinus, matter is the problem. The soul is jeopardized because of the nature of matter that clings to the soul. On Plotinus’ view, the soul does not seem to need the body at all. In fact, it seems quite clear that the soul would be better off on its own from the start. It is the soul that perceives, and the soul that communicates with the intellect. Plotinus leaves us with a complex metaphysical system which acknowledges the reality of the material world but does not make clear why the One would allow a depraved substance to exist, nor why the soul would bother to interact with matter at all (unless the One is not perfect after all.)

It may be that embodiment is simply the problem we are dealt. Plotinus may want to find an explanation for our fragility, and sees Plato’s dialogues as an insufficient contribution on the subject. I have a suspicion that Plotinus wants to place soul, along with the Platonic forms, in a hermetically sealed transcendental realm by emphasizing the problems of matter and its changeful and corruptible nature. In doing so I am not sure he sufficiently establishes a connection between the necessities of embodied souls and the need to understand the sensible realm. Thus the problem of matter/evil appears more potent than any Platonic suggestions
because of the emphasis that is placed on matter as the source of evil. Once Plotinus ties himself to a theory of evil I believe he encounters the unsolvable problem, and as a result, embodiment becomes the target of his criticisms.
Chapter Four: Descartes’ Treatment of the Embodied Soul

By stressing the influence of Plotinian views of the soul, an important heritage is illuminated; a dualistic world-view that works to separate the mind (or soul) from the body as a method of analysis. The separation of the soul from the body for philosophical examination in a Platonic context is a methodological necessity. Descartes’ ideas are directly influenced by Augustine; however, I am only concerned with his ancient Greek influencer, Plotinus. These philosophers emphasize that the mind is seemingly infinite; as such, the mind, for purposes of rigor, should not be directly associated with its material form, which is extremely corruptible and fallible. Moreover, for these three thinkers, only the soul is intrinsically rational and responsible for the intellect. Once a soul inhabits a body, the body’s corporality becomes responsible for a great many actions that are not always clearly attributed to the soul (or mind).

Like the mature Augustine, Descartes rejects a Platonic theory of recollection of the Forms, as well as the idea that knowledge originates from eternal Forms and is separate from the mind. Knowledge for Descartes is indeed discovered because of the mind, but it is not manifested from within the mind. Moreover, Descartes does not accept the same Platonist belief that the soul exists prior to the body, nor does he endorse the idea that the mind possesses preeminent powers of intellect independently. His soul is in charge of rationality. It is therefore the soul's responsibility to discern the sensory qualities of bodies when attempting to cognize their extended properties.
It is from Plotinus via Augustine that Descartes inherits both his concern and skepticism of the corporeal world and primacy of the mind. Following Augustine (and Plotinus), Descartes adheres to the hierarchy of the immaterial mind above the body. By Meditation Six, we are more certain of the mind (or God) than we are of the nature of the mind’s relationship to the body (AT VII, 16). Accordingly, knowledge about the soul cannot arrive from the senses, as sense organs and perceptions do not have thoughts or the capacity to reason. Thoughts are self-reflexive and rational and so are activities of the soul. In The Passions of the Soul, Descartes attempts to satisfy several concerns surrounding the nature of bodies and their role in perceptions and knowledge.

Like Plotinus, Descartes believes that our physical nature serves a purely practical function. The operations that are a part of the material or natural world are valuable only in terms of refining the mind’s understanding of the composite nature of mind and body. Alone the physical world cannot offer truth or knowledge of the soul’s nature or potentiality. The intellect is charged with knowing and understanding. As such, the only proper use of the passions is practical, not theoretical.20

Without the mind, we are merely animals or machines. Therefore the mind is not only our source of knowledge but is the seat of our humanity. While the body could not act rationally independent of the mind, the mind is dependent on

embodiment only in very specific ways. The body allows the senses to experience the material world and then the mind gives meaning to these experiences.

There are essentially two separate functions that occur: the perceptions of the body, which are physical in origin; and the functions of the mind (or soul), which are conveyed more obviously as emotions (and sometimes passions). The body, however, is foremost a physical circumstance that the mind participates in, in order for the mind to reflect on the body's sense-perceptions.

Descartes echoes the Plotinian and Augustinian “total mixture” of the mind and body. The mind is indivisible and unextended, and yet it is united to all parts of the extended body. There are no parts of the soul, while the body depends on the animation and unity of the soul. But the soul has no relation to extension, nor the properties of the body (Passions Art. 30). Nevertheless, it resides within the body and exercises its functions from within the pineal gland located in the brain. Therefore, when the soul moves the gland there are corresponding physiological responses (Art. 34).

In The Passions, Descartes describes the separate physical functions of the mind and the material body. In this text he demonstrates the independence of each. In his view, the mind and body govern distinct realms. The first is intellectual and the latter is secondary, as its role is only practical. Descartes does admit that the body and mind have points of overlap. It is at these points of intersection that confusion arises.

Contra Plato, Descartes takes the Aristotelian view that the soul is not responsible for physical or muscular motions of the body. The body is much like a
watch. It functions well when the mechanics are well maintained, but will inevitably stop operating (Art. 6). The body moves because of the presence of animal spirits, which flow through the internal pores through various channels to the brain (Art. 12). Movements produced by the animal spirits, without the intervention of the soul, are purely mechanical, such as breathing, walking, or eating. Animal spirits are active in all living creatures; therefore, physical functions are not a distinguishing feature between human animals and those of non-human animals (Art. 16, 18).

In this way, the mind is not a material substance because there are discrete differences in nature and purpose between the mind and material bodies. As a consequence, what constitutes the whole human is not only the corporeal. The body is matter, while the mind is superadded to the body. Descartes is not interested in maintaining that there are degrees of reality like Plotinus' hypostases. But, like Plotinus, Descartes believes that his opponents have failed to maintain the distinction between bodies and their superadded qualities. That is, on Descartes' view, perceiving an object does not mean I know anything about the object other than my own thoughts about it; what I am experiencing are my perceptions of the object.21 Thus one of our central challenges is that it is not transparently obvious to us what experiences are the result of the body, or of the mind. The Passions elaborate on the processes of the nature of passions, or what perceptions and volitions are correctly ascribed to the body rather than the mind and visa versa. Descartes does not believe the ancients spent enough time writing about the

21 Ibid. 369-375.
nuances of actions and passions.\textsuperscript{22} I suspect this is in large because Descartes’ primary ancient influence is Augustine. Had Descartes been given the opportunity to study the \textit{Timaeus}, he might have felt differently. While the \textit{Timaeus} does not take on the passions of the soul in the same detail, the discussion of the functions of the organs and the mortal soul might have been more satisfying for Descartes.

Continuing, we do not perceive bodies in extension directly; a point Plotinus and Descartes would disagree on.\textsuperscript{23} Objects of representation are not seen directly by the eye, nor does any other sense perceive independently of the mind. Rather the brain is stimulated by the senses, and these senses, mediated by the brain, produce sensations within the soul. Muscles are moved by nerves, and can move without the intervention of the soul. The soul is moved by will, so acts from pure intelligence (\textit{Art. 13}). The soul gives the passions and sense-perception meaning; but the soul is not responsible for the manifestation of the passions or senses that are bodily in origin (\textit{Art. 17}).

The soul’s primary role is to govern acts of will, imagination and thought. Thus there are two kinds of perceptions: those of the body and those of the soul. Although perception emanates from the soul, the passions can inspire and mediate perceptions. As a result, perceptions are useful to activate the will of the soul (\textit{Art. 19}). Perceptions can be referred from the body as well as the soul. The body’s

\footnote{\textsuperscript{22} Descartes, René, Michael Moriarty, René Descartes, René Descartes, and René Descartes. \textit{The Passions of the Soul: and Other Late Philosophical Writings}. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2015. \textit{Art. 1-5}.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{23} For a detailed discussion of sense perception a le Plotinus see Emilson 2007.}
perceptions, such as hunger or pain, are natural (Art. 24). Passions, like joy or anger, referred from the soul, are experienced as emotions (Art. 25).

Senses primarily perform the practical function of guiding our reactions to the bodies in space. Nature urges us to preservation; as a rule, pleasure inducing bodies tend to preserve the mind–body composite, while painful episodes tend to damage it. The intellect then employs its judgment to distinguish between bodies, perception, and senses. Understanding the composite form of bodies offers us the potential to indicate how errors caused by the senses can be corrected. It remains the responsibility of the intellect to analyze the information received by the senses. The mind then compares the data from the senses to what is known through memory and understanding via the intellect. It is when the intellect checks the senses against the memory and the other sense experiences that the intellect can use this kind of practical knowledge from the senses to obtain knowledge about bodies.

Alas, for Descartes, while the philosopher seeks knowledge of the material world of bodies, knowledge is only possible through theoretical inferences of material bodies. Although impressions from the natural world are inferior to the capacity of the intellect, the operations of the senses are a practical necessity. The mind does indeed need to attend to them. The intellect alone is not capable of processing knowledge of all the things that might affect us. Sensations therefore, can be a beneficial guide and substitute for the intellect. For example, pleasure and pain can provide practical knowledge that is helpful for mediating on extended bodies.
By drawing distinctions between the body’s capabilities and those of a separate mind, there might be greater potential for understanding the complexities of the mind-body relationship. This does not imply that Descartes’ treatment of the body is equivalent to that of the *Timaeus*. I believe The *Passions* demonstrate Descartes’ struggle to maintain the primacy of the mind, which is unfortunately embodied, a result of his Plotinion sympathies.

It is my suspicion that where there is uncertainty about the mind in the ancient world, a concern that has persisted into the early-modern period, the soul is often used as a placeholder. This is not an attempt to rewrite a naturalized history of philosophy and make unsubstantiated claims about views that the ancients might have held about the transcendental and material world. It is my aim to acknowledge an unshakable interest in the nature of the connection between the physical and intellectual worlds. At times the limitations of the material world make neatly marrying the mind to the body difficult, encouraging a method that divides in order to conquer.

Descartes’ *Passions* acknowledges that he took into account the material body in his analysis of mind’s relationship to objects in extension. His work also acknowledges the ancients like Plato and Plotinus, who first wrote of the significance of reflecting on the seemingly separate nature of the intellectual and the material world. Problems arise when we credit the senses for revealing reality; we falsely identify what is *real* with the sensible world. Ultimately, for both Plotinus and Augustine the body is a false state of reality. As Menn affirms, Descartes
maintains the mind-body distinction while elevating the status of the body by way of its connection to the senses (or passions).\textsuperscript{24}

Most philosophers agree that we are born in a state of ignorance and become subjected to the sensations and passions we experience via our bodies and objects in extension. Plotinus pointed to the Epicureans and Stoics for a confusing stance on the corporeal, as they allowed too much confidence in the information supplied by senses. Augustine would have held similar concerns about the Manicheans, while Descartes’ were directed at the Aristotelian scholastics.

It is our senses that lead us to error, primarily because we misunderstand their correct function. The ability to distinguish body from mind is thus necessary in order that one can appropriately habituate her will, via the mind, and that one might better understand the superior part of herself – that is, the mind part.

Analogous to the ancients, Descartes separates the mind from the body in an effort to examine the role of each. Although the mind held a place of primacy, his treatment of the body is not one of ambivalence or degradation. Instead he takes into his accounts the persisting concern of how it is that we manage the natural and physical world when the life of the mind is the principal concern.

Concluding Thoughts

Many of my ideas about minds and mindedness came together when I was introduced to Andy Clark’s 2016 work on embodied cognition. A central idea emphasized by Clark is that in order to understand what mind (or cognition) is, the mind must be returned to the body. I then realized that I needed to sort out what philosophers mean when they talk about the minds. To begin this inquiry I decided to try to understand where some of the concerns about the mind originated.

The very idea that the mind needs to be returned to the body is a bizarre one – where did the mind go? What this illustration suggests to me is a deep and lasting dissatisfaction with identifying the mind as being part of, or identical with the body. Plotinus’ Enneads clearly demonstrate this very concern. It is the worry that the soul and intellect are related to a problematic thing like matter. I think this dissatisfaction has remained, not because we are still sympathetic to Plotinus’ views on the nature of evil; rather because we are hesitant to admit that the body and mind share the same origin and even share governance over certain phenomena.

The mind is able to observe much of what goes on in the body, while the body does not observe the mind’s functions in the same way. It is not always appealing to identify the mind or its products with the body. The body does suspicious and sometimes uncontrollable things. It ails and ages - it changes in distinct ways that the subtle mind is more alive to. Bodies are defined by their ephemeral qualities. They are things that need to be controlled and maintained. Consequently we would rather identify with something that has more substance, like the mind.
Plotinus’ concerns are apt. If we admit that the mind and body are unified, we may need to admit that we are purely material beings. By avoiding dealing with matter and the Stoic *pneuma*, Plotinus avoids acknowledging any virtuous qualities of embodiment. Moreover, as I discussed in my chapter on his work, he ends up with two systems that are not obviously cohesive. Still, even if we are convinced that Plotinus’ system(s) is (are) a bit of a blunder in terms of explaining the embodied soul, his system is a useful contrast with the earlier *Timaeus* and later Cartesian views.

Unlike Plato and Descartes, Plotinus does not try to work through the benefits of the physical body. For him, sense-perception is the process of the soul interacting with the object of perception. The role of the body’s intercession is of minimal interest to him; aside from its striking ability to get in the way. Descartes takes a similar view to Plotinus’ on sense-perception, although he acknowledges that the organs of perception have varying effects on the soul’s capacity of perception and its potential accuracy.

As all three philosophers would agree, understanding matter does not offer a substantive explanation of what it means to have a mind. It is not enough for them to say that we are merely animals or purely matter. This is why it is useful to compare the *Timaeus* to the *Enneads*, and then the *Enneads* to *The Passions*. Five centuries earlier Plato proposes a functioning dualistic system, following that Plotinus develops two separate systems, one of metaphysics and one of sense-perception. And finally 1200 years after Plotinus, Descartes tries to find a way to put Plotinus’ systems back together.
Both for Descartes and Plotinus, embodiment is problematic because makes us more like animals or mechanical things or pseudo-substance; we become reducible to corruptible matter. The mind is its opposite: pure intellect, endowed with the power of imagination and will. However, for these philosophers, the body offers more trouble than potential when it comes to obtaining knowledge. The body is mortal and fleeting and uncontrollable. Minds and ideas however have immortal qualities; we can preserve and improve them consistently, a practice which has no conceivable end. Ultimately, Plotinus and Descartes offer dualistic systems that do not take the physical seriously enough – and as a result they are confusing.

The *Timaeus* however is clear; we have bodies as a necessity of the soul, as such the material body is a necessary aspect of being human, not an ad hoc circumstance. The soul demands that it find a body. The body, the design of its organs, extremities and various fleshy bits then provide the intellect sense-perception and thus the ability to experience the material world. The soul may have existed first, and depending on the dialogue in question, will exist long after the body. Regardless, in the *Timaeus* the soul needs to take a material form. What’s more, the soul is not only the mind (or head, or brain), it is woven through marrow, it palpitates the heart, and it hungers and lusts. Although bodily qualities may not be the best qualities, they are a part of a process that aids the intellect. There are no brains in vats, the mind is part of the body. Thus the dualism of the *Timaeus* is not one purely of mind v. body, but perhaps more accurately one of mortal v. immortal.

These three philosophers draw attention to some of the problems of embodied minds we are still investigating. Due to our ignorance it seems perfectly
reasonable to want to separate the physical from the psychical or the mortal from the immortal in Plato’s case, for the simple fact that it is easier to understand the causation of an action that is materially demonstrable.

What is so aptly dealt with in Timaeus is that it is both the physical and psychical that give rise to experiences. Timaeus is striking evidence that Plato was very aware of the difficult relationship between mind and body. The body of the Timaeus is a real body. It is not a pseudo-substance or a mere representation of a thing, it has real qualities that are invariably and necessarily material.

Finally, had this been a larger project, I would have liked to explore the nature and development of concepts of evil, starting with Plotinus into popular doctrines of early modern theologians. By understanding the motivations for his concept of evil I think there is potential in understanding Plotinus’ system as well as further understanding why we have become so suspicious of our physical selves.


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