

SOUL AND BODY IN PLATO'S PHAEDO

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Evidence of a non-Cartesian, conscious body: 'the pleasures that come by way of the body' (65a7); 'the body and its desires' (66c7); the soul, bewitched by the 'passions and pleasures' of the body, may think nothing else real save what is corporeal (81b3-5); it may 'share opinions and pleasures with the body' (83d7), sharing its pleasures or pains, and 'taking for real whatever the body declares to be so' (83d6); the soul may comply with 'bodily feelings' or oppose them, e.g. hunger and thirst (94b7-10), but also 'appetites and passions and fears' as if they were 'a separate thing' (94d5-6). Thus the living body (i.e., body possessing a soul) is a subject not only of sensations, but of desires and beliefs. These must be noted by the soul, and may be accepted by it, voluntarily (cf. 84a4-5) or involuntarily (cf. 'is compelled' 83c5, d8). We may say, I think (pace Bostock, Plato's Phaedo, 26-7) that it is the living body that is the active subject of perceiving, while the soul itself is the passive recipient of perceptions (which ideally it doesn't fully accept, but either uses for its own purposes, 75e3-5, 79c2-5, or withdraws from so far as possible, 83a6-7). More exact than talk of the soul seeing or hearing is talk of its 'getting' or 'receiving a perception' (76a1-2). Indecisive in favour of this are the equation of relying on sight and hearing with taking the body as a partner (65a9-b2), and a remark that hearing, sight, pain, pleasure can bother the soul unless it disregards the body (65c6-8). Indecisive against it, I think, is talk of a single subject of perception, recollection, and pre-incarnate knowledge (74d9 ff.). But surely decisive is this thought: if the body is the subject of perceptual judgements (to the effect that things are as they appear), it must also be the subject that does the perceiving.

These mental states that start in the body and may or may not be accepted into the soul are also corporeal: that must be why the soul that is bewitched by them 'will have been inter-spersed with a corporeal element, ingrained in it by the body's company and intercourse' (81c4-6); 'this element is ponderous', heavy, earthy, and visible (c8-9). Plato implicitly holds a 'double-aspect' view of such states, whether they remain in the body (troubling the soul as if from outside) or are admitted into the soul (becoming a fifth column within its citadel), without a metaphysics (divorcing extended body from conscious soul) to make it evidently problematic how the two aspects can go together.

The wrong attitude of the soul towards the body is to think that only the corporeal is 'true' (81b4-5), or to 'take to be true whatever the body declares to be so' (83d6-7). The right aim is to 'release the soul, as far as possible, from its communion with the body' (65a1-2); the right attitude is to 'find nothing of that pleasant', to 'take no part in those things', 'to care nothing for the pleasures that come by way of the body' (65a5-7). For the soul to share in bodily pleasures is for it to welcome them, and indeed (if it is literally contaminated by the corporeal) to feel them itself.

Note that Plato does not permit the antinomian reaction of letting oneself go physically (e.g. sexually) while retaining a sense of mental distance: he holds that intense pleasure or pain compels the soul 'to suppose that whatever most affects it in this way is most clear and most real, when it is not so' (83c5-8);

when a bodily feeling is too intense, the soul cannot help being infected by it.

Not easy to reconcile are the soul's two roles in relation to the body: it animates the body (making it capable of, e.g., perceiving and judging); and it is the intellect within, besieged by the body. Indeed Gallop (Plato: *Phaedo*, p. 90) nicely notes three views dubiously consistent: (1) the soul 'brings life' to the body (105cd); (2) it 'rules and is master of' the body (80a, 94b-d); (3) it is a 'prisoner' within the body, perhaps co-operating in its own captivity (82e-83a). However, (2) and (3) are not deeply conflicting: cf. a mother both dominant over her child, and tied to it.

The *Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes*, ii. 253: 'The first lines of the *Iliad* tell that the anger of Achilles sent the souls of many brave men to Hades but they themselves were left for the birds to devour.' Plato's view is quite different from Homer's: see *Phaedo* 115de.

Excerpt from John P. Wright's review of Susan James, *Passion and Action* (OUP), *Times Literary Supplement*, January 29 1999:

'Hume's account of the views of his predecessors presupposes that they have an entirely dispassionate conception of reason. However, if Susan James is correct, this is a misleading characterization of Descartes, Malebranche, Hobbes and Spinoza ? as well as of Pascal and Locke. While not exactly passionate in Descartes's technical sense of the term, Cartesian reason generates "intellectual emotions" which can overcome negative passions. Moreover, due to the close link of the mind and body, these intellectual emotions can arouse positive and useful body-based passions such as wonder and curiosity. The result, according to James, is that Cartesian science does not involve "the transparent emotionless reasoning of a disembodied mind". If such stereotypes fail to apply to Descartes, it is even more clear that they fail to apply to his contemporary Hobbes or his successor Spinoza ...

While James's discussion of the relevance of Descartes's account of the passions to his account of the relation of mind and body will be no surprise to Cartesian scholars, it corrects misunderstandings that are still prevalent in contemporary writings in the philosophy of mind. James points out that an overemphasis on the *Meditations*, with its stress on the distinction of mind and body, has led to a distortion of Descartes's conception of the human soul. She acknowledges that he ascribed purely intellectual thoughts merely to the mind and rejected the Scholastic tripartite division of the soul. But his post-*Meditation* writings – particularly those on the passions – make it clear that Descartes retained a key feature of the Aristotelian conception of the soul, namely that most of its specific powers are to be ascribed to what he called the substantial union of mind and body. Neither passion nor sensation can be ascribed either to the mind by itself or to the body by itself. Moreover, his stress on the fact that the passions are by their nature suited to human survival indicates that Descartes retained Aristotelian teleological considerations in his discussion of the mind-body complex. Finally, James points out that Descartes's stress on the physiology of the brain and nervous system in his *Passions de l'âme* could have led "a less metaphysically rigorous defender of the Cartesian view of the soul to

conclude that the body thinks” – a view which is borne out by a study of materialistically inclined defenders of Cartesianism (as well as its critics) in France in the last seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.’