The Separation of Soul from Body in Plato’s Phaedo

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The view that the soul can exist separately from the body is commonly associated with dualism. Since Plato’s Phaedo (Phd.) argues that the soul is immortal and survives the death of the body, there seems to be reason to call Plato, in that dialogue at least, a ‘dualist’. Yet, as we know, there are many kinds of dualism, so we have thereby not said very much. Let me therefore start with some distinctions. First of all, we can distinguish between two kinds of dualism which say that the soul is a different kind of substance from the body. On one version, call it ‘strong’ substance dualism, no properties of mind can also be properties of body. Mind is defined as a kind of thing that uniquely has a certain property or set of properties, say consciousness, just as body is defined by its unique properties, say spatial extension. This would seem to be Descartes’ view. On another version, call it ‘weak’ substance dualism, no essential or defining properties of mind are also properties of body. This leaves it open whether the mind and body may share some accidental or non-defining properties. Finally, there is an even weaker kind of dualism which we may call property dualism. According to this view, there are mental properties which are distinct from and irreducible to bodily properties. However, these mental properties may or not be properties of an underlying substance that also has bodily properties. In other words, the same thing may have both mental and bodily properties, so having mental properties is not enough to make something a different kind of substance.

The position of Plato’s Socrates in the Phd. is often assimilated to that of Descartes. That is to say, it is thought that the dialogue advocates strong substance dualism. Yet this view of the Phd.

\[1\] It is a pleasure and honour to contribute to the celebration of Vassilis Karasmanis, who has done much to illuminate the Phaedo and other Platonic dialogues. A version of this paper was presented at Vassilis’ seminar at the Polytechnic University, Athens, in 2006, where as on many other occasions I appreciated his kindness, learning, and good humour.

\[2\] There might still be extrinsic properties that mind and body shared, for example, by their association.

\[3\] In his letter to Mersenne of 24 December 1640 Descartes writes, with reference to the Meditations, that ‘I could not prove that God could not annihilate the soul, but only that it is by nature entirely distinct from the body, and consequently is not bound by nature to die with it’ (my italics). However, the ascription of strong substance dualism to Descartes has recently been challenged by G.Baker and K.J.Morris, Descartes’ Dualism, London 1996.

\[4\] For a statement and defence of property dualism, see D.Chalmers, The Conscious Mind, Oxford 1996, 125, ‘Conscious experience involves properties of an individual that are not entailed by the physical properties of that individual although they may depend lawfully on those properties. Consciousness is a feature of our world over and above the physical features of the world. This is not to say it is a separate “substance”...All we know is that there are properties of individuals in this world – the phenomenal properties – that are ontologically independent of physical properties.’

\[5\] See, for example, Michael Pakaluk, ‘Degrees of Separation in the Phaedo’, Phronesis 48 no.2 (2003), 89-115, who argues for a correspondence between the dualism of the Phdr and that of Descartes.
is not without difficulty. Firstly, we saddle Plato with the familiar problem of explaining how the soul and the body can interact if they are entirely different kinds of thing. This problem is particularly pressing given Socrates’ emphasis on the soul’s ability to control or be corrupted by the body (Phd 94b-e). For example, Socrates objects to the theory of the soul as an attunement (harmonia) of the body that it does not allow for the soul to act on the body. But if so, Socrates’ own notion of soul had better be one that allows for soul-body interaction.

Secondly, there is a question concerning the consistency of Plato’s thinking about the soul-body relationship in the Phd. and the Timaeus (Tim.). The Tim. accounts for the soul-body interaction by ascribing spatial properties to soul and body alike, as several scholars have argued. According to the Tim., soul and body are both extended and move in space. Because of their spatial properties they are capable of affecting each other. Soul and body are ontologically independent in that soul existed prior to body and not all body was ensouled. Substance dualism is therefore a feature of the dialogue. However, the difference between soul and body is articulated within the category of spatial properties, and not across two fundamentally distinct ontological categories. Soul is capable temporarily of assuming the linear motions characteristic of body without losing its underlying and distinct rational nature. It is important for the dialogue’s ethical agenda that we can see both how the soul could take on the linear motions of body but also shed these by imitating the circular motions of the heavenly bodies. So an entire physiology is based on accommodating souls whose revolutions had, to varying degrees, been put out of shape.

Weak, not strong, substance dualism seems, then, to be the assumption behind the Tim.’s story of the soul’s struggle to conquer the effects of embodiment. We may of course take the Tim.’s avoidance of strong dualism as evidence of a development in Plato’s psychology: he might have started out a strong dualist in the Phd. and weakened his position in the Tim. Yet we may also take it as a point of methodology that a discrepancy between Plato’s dialogues should not be asserted without compelling reason. In this paper, I argue that the Phd. is fundamentally in agreement with the Tim. on the question of how the soul relates to the body.

Death and the separation of soul from body

The Phd. encourages us to do philosophy by arguing that it is only through philosophy that we

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can enjoy a happy afterlife. However, if are going to entertain this argument, we need to have reason to believe that there will be an afterlife in the first place. So Socrates sets out first to demonstrate that there is life after death. The way he does so itself assumes a distinction between soul and body. Death, by which Socrates seems to mean ‘dying’, is the separation of the soul from the body. Meanwhile, ‘being dead’ (literally, ‘having died’, perfect tense) is ‘the body’s having come to be apart, separated from the soul, itself by itself, and the soul’s being apart, alone by itself, separated from the body’ (64c). It is sometimes objected that this definition already predisposes us to accept the immortality of the soul. For when somebody has died his soul is said to be alone by itself. However, the parity with the body’s being alone by itself after death suggests that the soul whilst separate may continue to be only in an extenuated sense. Just as the body is not a functioning body when separated from the soul, so it may be that the soul no longer in functional terms is a soul when separated from the body. Moreover, just as the body (unless mummified, cf. Phd. 80c-d) soon decays when separated from the soul, so the soul may quickly be dispersed after death. It therefore seems wrong to say that the definition of death in itself assumes the immortality of the soul.

Yet the definition clearly introduces a duality between soul and body as separate subjects of predication. You can say things about the soul, for example, that it is in the body when we are alive, that you cannot say of the body. Nobody who is an eliminativist, i.e. who thinks that there is nothing properly to say about the soul apart from what you can say about the body, would accept this definition of death. But the definition not only suggests that you can say things about the soul that you cannot say about the body. It also implies that it is meaningful to talk of the soul and body as separated when we are dead. This talk suggests that the soul in some manner exists in a different place from the body, a notion that is likely to strike us odd today. For while we can readily grant that a corpse has a location after death, it is less obvious that the soul could be located anywhere else than in the body.

To understand this thought it helps to keep in mind that the Greeks talked of living beings as ‘ensouled’ (ἐν ζωή). This suggests that it is by the soul’s presence in the body that we are alive. Similarly, one might therefore come to think of death as the state we are in when our soul is no longer in our bodies but has left it, when it has become spatially set apart from the body. This notion of spatial separation is also borne out by the popular Homeric imagery of the soul leaving the body like a ghost upon death, an image to which Socrates refers (at 77d-e). Yet none

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of this needs to mean that the soul in any substantive sense continues to live in separation from the body. So while the definition implies that there is something there to talk about when the soul leaves the body, it need not be taken to mean that what is there qualifies as a soul of the sort we would be interested in when we ask whether our souls continue to exist after death. To get to this point we need to learn more about the nature of soul and how given this nature it could exist and function after the demise of the body. This is the project of the Phd.

I cannot hope to do justice to all of the arguments here. In fact, my treatment will only take us up to the so-called attunement theory at 84c. Nonetheless, what I have to say is meant to be consistent with the dialogue as a whole. Let us look at the first of these arguments, stretching from 64a to 69e. Socrates wants to show that philosophers will welcome death and that we can therefore tell the true philosopher, e.g. Socrates himself, from the bogus, e.g. Euvenus, who is afraid to die (61c). Here is his line of thought. As philosophers we are concerned to gain knowledge. But when we try to get knowledge, the body and the senses tend to confuse and distract us, or more properly speaking our souls. However, death (as we saw) means the separation of the soul from the body, and that suggests that we might be better able to get knowledge after death than during life. So the philosopher will welcome death.

What does this line of reasoning tell us about the relationship between body and soul? We are told (at 65a1) that the philosopher, more than other people, ‘releases as far as possible (ἀπολύων ὃτι μαλίστα) the soul from its communion (κοινωνία) with the body’. However, there is an ambiguity in the notion of loosening or separating the soul from the body. The soul could be seen as separated from the body in two senses. In the first sense, the philosopher’s soul is separate from the body in that it is not concerned with bodily matters. The separation here is, as we might say, ‘intentional’: it relates to what the philosopher has in mind, what he is thinking about. In another sense, however, the soul is separate from the body independently of the body. We might call this ‘functional’ separation.9

These two notions of separation are clearly distinct. Socrates could be saying that the philosopher separates himself from the body in the sense that he does not think about it. But in itself this need say nothing about whether the philosopher’s thoughts involve the use of the body. Similarly, someone might recommend that in order to play the piano well one should forget about the motions of one’s fingers and focus on, say, an image of the music, but this is of course consistent with playing requiring the use of one’s fingers. If we take Socrates just to be

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concerned with the intentional, philosophical thought could depend on bodily processes. But that would not be what Socrates was interested in when he talked about separating oneself from the body; he would want to say only that the body should not be the object of our attention.  

Yet I think it is clear that the separation of the soul from the body is not just intentional; it is also functional. Both notions of separation seem to be at play in Socrates’ talk of what the philosopher is ‘about’ (περί at 64e4-6: ‘the business of philosophy is not about the body (οὐ περὶ τὸ σῶμα) but, as far as possible, philosophy stands away from the body (ἀφεστάναι) and is turned to the soul’. This language is ambiguous between having the body as a subject of study and using or, more weakly, involving the body in the study. Similarly, when Socrates talks about the body as an obstacle to knowledge he may be taken to mean not just that the body presents us with concerns that pull us away from philosophy, though this is no doubt part of his point (cf. 66c-d). Socrates also seems to think that the body is a hindrance to knowledge insofar as the use of the senses causes confusion in the soul. And this is a point not about what the soul thinks but how it thinks. When the soul tries to grasp the truth by means of the body it goes wrong (65d-66a). The separation from the body that Socrates recommends is therefore two-fold: stop thinking about bodily matters and stop using your body when you think.

One could distinguish a third ‘ontological’ notion of separate whereby X is ontologically separate from Y if it can exist independently of Y. Such a notion might not always coincide with the functional separation, if one took functional separation to relate to what is directly or specifically involved in performing the function. For example, playing football might be thought functionally separate from the law of gravity, since gravity is simply a general precondition of all such physical activities. However, gravity would still be an ontological precondition of playing football: without gravity there will be no passing of the ball or scoring goals. However, in the particular case of the soul and body it is clear that Socrates takes functional separation to imply ontological separation. For he takes the soul only to work properly in the absence of bodily processes. So here functional separation of the soul from the body only obtains if there is also ontological separation. It is because Socrates takes the functional separation of the soul from the body to have the implication of ontological separation that he thinks that what happens while we do philosophy has implications for the soul’s possibility to exist without the body, that is, it

10 We could thus read the necessity of ἀνάγκη at 66b1 as introducing what a true philosopher has to do if he is going successfully to arrive at the truth. Similarly, the verbal adjectives at 66d, e1 (ἀπαλλακτέω, θεατέω) seem to be making a methodological point about what we should be thinking about when we do philosophy rather than what necessarily happens in such thinking. Again at 67d Socrates talks about how those who conduct philosophy correctly (ὁι φιλοσοφοῦντες ὥθεσι, 67d8; cf. ὥθησις φιλοσοφοῦσα, 80e6) desire to separate soul from body.
shows how the soul functions independently when the body no longer exists.

The separation of the soul from the body that happens in philosophy is both intentional and functional. In contrast, downplaying the functional aspect of separation in favor of the intentional may go with a particular view of the purpose of the dialogue. It may be thought that the main point of the *Phd.* is not really to tell us something about the afterlife, which for humans, as Socrates suggests in the *Apology* (29a, 40cff.), is a matter only for speculation (42a). Rather the point would be to emphasize how much better and happier we will be if we try to ignore the interests of the body in favor of more intellectual concerns. The separation of the soul from the body in death works as metaphor for the kind of mortification of the flesh that we need to practice in this life in order to be good. Plato, on this view, is not really concerned with eschatology other than as a tool of ethical instruction.

I think such a reading gets the point of the dialogue exactly upside down. Plato’s point is not to use the notion of the philosopher’s disembodied afterlife simply as an image of the life of virtue in this (or any other life), an image which we can accept or discard as long as we believe that we are better off disregarding the concerns of the body and focusing on eternal matters. Rather the point is that since the soul really is immortal the consequences of whatever harm or good we do now have to be borne, not just in this life, but for a very long time indeed. As he says, ‘if the soul is immortal, then it needs care, not only for the sake of this time in which what we call “life” lasts, but for the whole of time; and if anyone is going to neglect it, now the risk would seem fearful’ (107e2-5). If Socrates did not think he could show the immortality of the soul, then his exhortation to care for the soul would be much less urgent. Socrates views the stakes of living philosophically or not so to speak *sub specie aeternitatis*. We need therefore to take his attempts to show the immortality of the soul literally. And that involves understanding the separation of the soul from the body not just in intentional terms but also functionally and ontologically. For the soul’s immortality is a question of its continuing to function and exist apart from the body.

*The argument from affinity*

I turn now to the so-called argument from affinity. The argument in summary goes as follows. Only composite things are destructible. But the soul is not a composite thing since it belongs to the class of the invisible and eternal beings. For it, like them, is invisible. In contrast, the body belongs to the order of visible things and is composite and destructible. Because the soul is invisible it is like the immortal forms which are also invisible. Therefore, it is proper (προσήκει)
for the soul also to be immortal.

It is tempting to think that the argument from affinity implies strong or Cartesian dualism. Recall that we defined strong dualism as the view that soul and body were distinct substances with no properties in common. The argument from affinity gives us two lists of contrary attributes with no apparent overlap. Body is composite, changing, visible, destructible; the forms are simple, changeless, invisible, indestructible. However, Socrates is careful to say that the soul is only ‘like’ the forms. The soul is like the forms because it, like them, is invisible. But there is no guarantee, therefore, that the soul also shares other properties with the forms, most pertinently, that it shares with the forms the property of indestructibility. Socrates’ conclusion is therefore suitably guarded: it is ‘proper (προσήκει) for the body to be quickly destroyed, but for the soul to be altogether indestructible, or nearly so’ (80b). It is only proper, not necessary, for the soul to be indestructible, or nearly so.11

Notice secondly that Socrates describes what the soul is like in comparative terms and that he does so in two different ways. The first is that ‘the soul is more similar to the invisible than the body is and that the body is more similar to the visible than the soul is’ (79b16: ὀμοιότερον ἀρα ψυχῇ σωμάτως ἔστιν τῷ ἀθανάτῳ, τῷ δὲ τῷ ὀρατῷ). Socrates also says (79e1) that the soul is also ‘more akin’ (συγγενέστερον) to the eternal forms than to the body. The two claims make different kinds of comparison.12 The first is of the form: X is more similar to Z than Y is, (‘the soul is more similar to the forms than the body is’), whilst the second is of the form: X is more akin to Z than to S (‘the soul is more akin to the eternal than to body’). Both claims are logically consistent with its being true that the soul is entirely like the forms. Yet it would be misleading (by so-called conversational implicature) for Socrates to say only that the soul is more like the invisible if he also believed that the soul was altogether like the invisible. So it seems that Socrates thinks that the soul is not altogether akin to the eternal.

True, later on he also speaks of the soul, without the comparative, as simply being akin (συγγένης, 79d3) to the eternal. However, since Socrates already is committed to the notion of degrees of kinship, saying that the soul is akin to the eternal again seems quite compatible with its not being completely akin. But if the soul is not altogether akin to the eternal and not

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11 For the point that προσήκει indicates the relative weakness of the argument cf. C.J.Rowe, ‘L’argument par “affinité” dans le Phédon’, Revue Philosophique 181 (1991) 463-77 at 465: ‘En effet, Platon ne fait pas dire à Socrate, en conclusion, que l’âme “est” (Bostock) ou “doit être” (Gallop) “totalement indissoluble...”, mais seulement “qu’il lui convient (προσήκει) “d’être telle; et ici προσήκειν indique seulement un rapport relativement lâche, comme par exemple: si une propriété F est dite προσήκει to l’élément X, cela peut simplement vouloir dire qu’il y a des raisons de s’attendre à ce que F se rapporte à X.’

12 As Gallop, op.cit., 140 points out.
altogether alien to the bodily, then it must be because there are some properties that the soul can
shares with body, properties that it does not share with the eternal, provided, that is, that the
properties concerned are opposites that contrast the eternal with the bodily.\textsuperscript{13} But if there are
some properties that soul shares with body, Socrates cannot be arguing for strong dualism. For
this brand of dualism says that the soul and the body share no properties.

What does it mean for the soul to become bodily?

Is there any direct evidence that Socrates thinks that the soul can take on bodily properties? We
are told at 81c4 that a soul that has only cared for bodily matters becomes ‘interspersed with the
bodily’ (διειλημμένη ὑπὸ τοῦ σωματοειδοῦς) and again that the bodily is made σύμφυτον
(81c6) with the soul: ‘part of its nature’ (Fowler, Loeb transl.), or more weakly, ‘grown together
with’ (Rowe) it (81c4). The bodily is ‘ponderous’ (ἐμβριχές), ‘heavy’ (βαρύ), ‘earthy’
(γεωδές), and ‘visible’ (ὄρατόν). By ‘having’ (ἔχουσα) the bodily, the soul is weighed down
(βαρύνεται) and is dragged back into the visible region (81c9-10). Socrates compares the soul
thus affected to the phantoms of souls which, we are told, can be seen hovering around graves,
(τοῦ ὀρατοῦ μετέχουσα, 81d4).\textsuperscript{14}

I take it that at least part of the point of Socrates’ introducing the term ‘bodily’,
σωματοειδής, at 81b5 is to have a term that signifies a range of properties characteristic of
body.\textsuperscript{15} Τὸ σωματοειδές is, so to speak, shorthand for the kind of properties we tend to think of
when we think of body. However, it also seems part of the point of the term that something may
be σωματοειδές, have properties typically associated with body, without itself being a body. So
a soul can be said to be σωματοειδής without itself being said to be a body. That is why
Socrates can describe the effect on the soul of paying service to the body as making it
σωματοειδής (83d5) without thereby implying that the soul has become a body. Moreover,
when the soul of the body-lover is said to be interspersed with τὸ σωματοειδές we need not

\textsuperscript{13} The provision is required because properties in virtue of which the soul differs from the forms need not ipso facto
be properties that make it more similar to body.

\textsuperscript{14} We can with Rowe \textit{ad loc.} detect ‘evident irony’ in Socrates’ mention of ghost stories without doubting that he
thinks that souls do in a sense become visible by attaching themselves to bodies.

\textsuperscript{15} It has been suggested to me that σωματοειδής might be translated more weakly as ‘body-like’ in which case the
soul and the body need not share the same properties but only have comparable properties. However,
σωματοειδής elsewhere in the \textit{Phd.} (and in other dialogues) clearly means literally ‘corporeal’, cf., for example,
the emphatic \textit{Phd.} 86a1-3: αὕτη ἡ λύρα καὶ αἱ χορδαὶ σώματα τε καὶ σωματοειδή, καὶ γεωδή ἐστι and 81b5-6:
tὸ σωματοειδές, οὐ τίς αὖ ἁπαίτο καὶ ἕδι καὶ πίοι καὶ φαγοὶ καὶ πρὸς ἀφροδίσια χρήσαιτο. Cf. also \textit{Tim.} 31b4, \textit{Rep.} 532c. However, I have no objection to ‘body-like’ if it is taken to
imply having one or more characteristics of body.
take τὸ σωματοειδὲς to refer to an entity distinct from the soul. We need not think of the soul as being interspersed with bits of bodily stuff, where this stuff is somehow a distinct substance from the soul. In a possibly analogous use of ‘dispersed’ at Phd. 110b7, Socrates says that the true earth is, in Rowe’s translation, ‘picked out in different colours’ (χρωμασιν διειλημμένη). Just as colours can characterize the same earth in different parts, so we may take it that bodily properties can be distributed across the soul as a single substance. Put differently, whilst the expression ‘body’ may refer to a substance distinct from ‘soul’, there is no implication that ‘the bodily’ so refers. The soul may therefore be said to be interspersed with ‘the bodily’ where that may mean only that there are parts or aspects of the soul characterized by properties associated with body.

But what are these bodily properties? Socrates immediately offers us what look like two examples: weight and visibility. So the soul by ‘having the bodily’, which is heavy and visible, itself becomes weighed down and visible. However, this suggestion allows of at least three different readings.

The most radical reading says that when the soul becomes corporeal it assumes properties that are essential to bodies in the same manner that they qualify bodies. (Socrates mentions weight and visibility: what could be more essential to body?) Indeed, it comes ‘to share the same nature’ as the bodily, as one might paraphrase σύμφυτον at 81c6. On such a radical reading, the soul that has become ‘bodily’ does not even match up with substance dualism. Rather we seem to have something like property dualism: soul and body are not associated with mutually exclusive substances but rather with properties which the same subjects can take on at different times or in different respects. What we call ‘soul’ is a set of properties that a living being can lose in its dealing with the bodily in exchange for a set of properties associated with body.

On a less radical reading, we do not to translate σύμφυτον as ‘connate’ but, with Rowe, as ‘grown together’, or similar. Sure, the soul is attached to the body and temporarily takes on body-like properties, but it retains its distinctive nature. Socrates does not think that the soul becomes σωματοειδής in the same way as the body: particularly the bodily qualities do not affect the nature of the soul. Rather the soul takes on bodily qualities accidentally. One might think as a paradigm of the way a serious man temporarily takes on the manners of a buffoon under the influence of alcohol or the way a spherical ball when kicked briefly assumes the shape

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16 Burnet ad 81c4: ‘The meaning of διαλειμμάτειν is best seen from 110b7. As applied to colours, it means “to pick out”, distinguere, as in a quilt or tartan.’
17 E.g. Gallop: ‘ingrained in’. Rowe’s comparison ad loc. with a stone grown into the root of a tree seems apt in allowing the two, while hardly separable, to remain distinct substances.
of an ellipse. Similarly, the soul takes on bodily properties *per accidens* but keeps its underlying different nature. Substance dualism remains true for Socrates, but it is possible for the soul to assume properties of body in a qualified way whilst retaining its underlying contrary nature. Hence strong dualism is excluded.

Initially, the less radical reading seems preferable for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is more consistent with the affinity argument’s emphasis on the essential kinship between the soul and the eternal. The soul was said not just to be ‘like’ (ὁμοίος) the eternal but also of the same kin (συγγενής, 79b5, d3). Secondly, the radical reading would seem to imply that nothing essentially psychic remains when the soul becomes bodily. Yet it seems clear that even the most inveterate sinner retains his soul. Our souls do not disappear, we do not ‘die’, by becoming bad. As Socrates says,

‘if death were the separation from everything, it would be a godsend for the wicked, when they died, to be separated at once from the body and from their own wickedness along with the soul; but since, in fact, it is evidently immortal, there would be no refuge from ills or salvation for it, except to become as good and wise as possible’ (107c5-d2).

It seems that no degree of involvement with the bodily can render our souls mortal. The wicked cannot hope to avoid the afterlife, however extreme their attachment to the body. The soul must therefore retain specifically psychic properties even when it becomes σωματοειδής.

However, the less radical reading still leaves us with the problem of making sense of how the soul can be said to become visible or weighed down even if only *per accidens*. How could something that is essentially akin to the invisible forms even temporarily take on such qualities? How could a soul be said to become heavy or visible? That these attributes apply only metaphorically is no answer, since it is the soul’s becoming bodily that is supposed to explain how the soul becomes embodied.

One suggestion would be that the soul may be said to become heavy and participating in the visible simply because it is attached to something that is heavy and visible. Weight and visibility would be attributes of the soul only indirectly, insofar soul has grown together with something that does have those attributes. We might compare Aristotle’s analogy with the sailors in a ship at *De Anima* I.3 (406a3-8): the sailors do not themselves move but they are in a ship which does move; hence they can be said to move only indirectly or *per accidens*. Similarly, weight and visibility would be properly predicated of the bodily and only indirectly of the soul insofar as it was attached to the bodily.
Socrates’ description of the soul’s involvement with the bodily may seem crafted to suggest just such a reading. As we have seen, the bodily ‘is together with’ (81c5), ‘interspersed with’ (81c4), ‘grown together with’ (81C6), ‘attendant upon’ (συνεπακολουθούντος, 81e1) the soul. 81c9-11 (‘insofar as such a soul possesses [the bodily] it is weighed down and dragged back into the visible region’) can reasonably be read as saying that it is the bodily that is weighed down whilst the soul to which it is attached follows. 81d3-4 (‘souls that have been released in no pure condition, but while partaking in the seen; and that is just why they are seen’) need, perhaps, say no more than that the soul participates in the bodily and it is therefore seen indirectly insofar as the bodily is seen. The idea of the soul being indirectly visible through their bodies might get some content from Socrates’ subsequent account of how souls are imprisoned in animals of whatever character they have cultivated during their lives (81e2-3).

The problem with this reading is that we are told that the soul is itself made ‘bodily’ (83d4-5).\[^{18}\] And when the soul becomes fastened to the body it is said to be of like character (ομότροπος) with it (83d8). The soul, in other words, does not simply attach itself to something that has bodily properties: it assumes those properties itself. This should be sufficient to reject the claim that the soul accidentally takes on the properties of the body in the way the soul according to Aristotle moves accidentally insofar as it belongs to a body that moves as such.

However, for Aristotle this manner of assuming an attribute accidentally, what he refers to as ‘according to something else’ (kath’ heteron, DA 406a4), is not always true of accidental predication. When Socrates’ body becomes tanned it does so accidentally but not according to something other than Socrates. Rather the suntan is accidental because it is not generally, necessarily or essentially true of Socrates’ body that it is tanned: come January he will be pale again. Similarly, when in the Phd. we say that the soul accidentally takes on bodily qualities, this need not then be because it is in a body with those qualities. Rather we can understand the soul as itself taking on the qualities but only accidentally so because these qualities do not always, generally, necessarily, or indeed essentially belong to soul. This reading does imply a denial of the Aristotelian idea that essential properties cannot be held accidentally: e.g. if anything is a rational animal it is so essentially. For Socrates ‘bodily’ properties can be attributed to soul. The Affinity argument implies this denial anyway insofar as it allows the soul, while a different substance from the forms, to have to some degree properties characteristic of forms. As we saw, the thought was that opposite properties like visibility or invisibility are instantiated along a scale

\[^{18}\] οτι έκαστη ήδων ήκαι λύπη άστερ ήλον ἡχουσά προσφυλοί αὐτήν πρὸς τὸ σῶμα καὶ προσπεροῦσα καὶ ποιεῖ σωματοειδῆ...
and can be assumed to varying degrees by the soul. So just as the soul can become more form-like through philosophy, though presumably not entirely so, similarly it can become more bodily by its attachment to the body, though presumably it can, given its fundamentally different nature, again only assume instantiate bodily characteristics to some degree and not to the same degree as the body itself. The wisps of souls may hover round graves, thereby displaying some manner of visibility and weight, but nothing like that of actual bodies (81d4).

It is then the soul’s true nature to tend towards the properties of the forms, and it is for this reason that we say that its acquisition of bodily properties is ‘accidental’. This reading may not appear far removed from the ‘property dualism’ described above in that it allows for the same substance to realize ‘bodily’ and ‘form-like’ properties at different times, to varying degrees. Yet it still qualifies as a weak substance dualism insofar as it takes the soul to be a substance which naturally manifests form-like properties and accidentally the body-like properties. One might say that the soul is a substance that has the potential to assume form-like properties and the potential to assume body-like properties but it is only the former potential that is natural to it, and one that soul (therefore) retains while assuming body-like properties. Recall here my earlier comments on the Tim., where the soul was similarly able to assume bodily characteristics, namely the linear motions characteristic of body, without losing its underlying and distinct rational nature. On embodiment the rational soul gets knocked out of shape, but with the proper nurture and education it will, like a ball that has been squeezed, regain its proper circular form. Displaying bodily characteristics, then is both in the Phd. and the Tim. a contingent affliction for an essentially rational soul.

How does the soul become bodily?

The soul does not just accidentally assume properties of the body that it happens to be in. Nor does the soul simply take on bodily properties as a result of what the body does to it; rather the soul assumes corporeal attributes because of what it does itself, because of its own thoughts and desires. So when soul has grown together with the bodily, it remains the cause of its own continued attachment to the body. This brings us back to the question of the relationship between the intentional and functional aspects of thinking. Socrates seems to see a causal connection between the intentional and functional aspects of thinking. At 79c6-d8 the soul is said to become

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19 Further contradicting Aristotle’s claim substance terms, such as ‘man’, do not come in degrees and do not have opposites (Categories 5 3b24-4a9).
disturbed inasmuch as (άτε) it ‘touches upon’ something of this sort, whilst it becomes unvarying it is inasmuch as (άτε) it touches upon something of that sort. Again at 80e2-81a2:

‘Let us suppose that a soul departs in a state of purity, trailing nothing bodily after it, inasmuch (άτε) as during life it has had as little connection as possible with the body, has shunned it and gathered itself together by itself, inasmuch as (άτε) it always cultivated this...wouldn’t this be the cultivation of death?’

We can spell this out as follows: when the soul is concerned (in the intentional sense) with objects that wander (in the functional sense: this is the way these objects characteristically behave) that soul itself (both in the intentional and functional senses) wanders; that is, the soul’s object of changes irregularly and its thinking itself changes irregularly. But when the soul is concerned (intentionally) with something changeless (functionally) it itself rests (intentionally and functionally); that is, neither its object nor its thinking about it wanders.

The interplay between the intentional and the functional aspects of thought is a common Platonic theme. It underlies the account of the effects of poetry in Republic II-III. Like wax, the soul is molded by the stories we are told in childhood. We tend to become like the men and heroes we hear and talk about. The Tim. too assumes that we become like what we think about when it proposes that our souls move like the planets when we think about them:

‘The motions that have an affinity to the divine part within us are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe...we should redirect the revolutions in our heads that were thrown off course at our birth, by coming to learn the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, and so bring into conformity with its objects our faculty of understanding, as it was in its original condition. And when this conformity is complete, we shall have achieved our goal.’ (90d, transl. D.Zeyl)

The parallel with the Phd. seems clear. We become like what we think about: if we think about rational objects we come to share to a greater degree in their properties, and likewise if we concern ourselves with sensible matters we assimilate ourselves to them. Rather as we say that you become what you eat, so Plato seems to think that we become what we think. It might indeed be this analogy between physical and psychic nourishment that best makes sense to us of the idea that the soul is transformed by its objects. In the Phd., Socrates himself seems to be playing on this analogy when he says at that the pleasure-seeking soul becomes not only ὀμότροπος but also ὀμότροφος (83d9), ‘of like nurture’, with the body. Being nourished by the same kinds of pleasures and opinions as the body the soul itself becomes bodily in character.

Yet, why are we drawn to thinking about bodily matters at all? If the soul by its nature is akin to
the forms, why would we be tempted to concern ourselves with the lower things? The reason seems to be our susceptibility to intense pleasure or pain. Here is the key passage at Phd. 83c5-e3:

‘[SOCRATES] the soul of every man, when intensely pleased or pained at something, is forced at the same time to suppose that whatever most affects it in this way is most clear and most real, when it is not so, and such objects especially are things seen, aren’t they? [Cebes] Certainly. [Soc] Well, isn’t it in this experience that the soul is most thoroughly bound fast by body’ [Ceb] How so? [Soc] Because each pleasure and pain fastens it to the body with a sort of rivet, pins it there, and makes it corporeal, so that it takes for real whatever the body declares to be so. Since by sharing opinions and pleasures with the body, it is, I believe, forced to become of like character and nurture to it, and to be incapable of entering Hades in purity; but it must always exit contaminated by the body, and so quickly fall back into another body, and grow in it as if sown there and so have no part in communion with the divine and pure and uniform.’

Intense pleasures and pains seem to contain a cognitive or doxastic component: a judgment that what gives rise to the experience is real, and that it is more clear and more real the more intense the pleasure or pain. Socrates significantly refers to the maximal clarity (enargestaton) of the intense pleasure and pain, as if the vividness of the experience vouched for its representativeness or truthfulness. It is as if pleasure and pain in their intensity, perhaps uniquely among bodily experiences, conjure up a simulacrum of the clarity and reality that properly characterise the forms alone, and therefore tempt the soul to subscribe to their reality. So Socrates says ‘whatever most affects it in this way is most clear and most real, when it is not so’ (83c8, my emphasis), contrasting the strong appearance of reality and clarity presented by pain and pleasure with what is truly real and clear. As perhaps already the introductory scene intimated (60b-c), it takes a Socrates, a philosopher familiar with the forms, to see through pleasure and pain’s appearance of reality.

These points would help explain why pleasures and pains tend to distort our thinking even though our souls are naturally affiliated with the forms. This may be the story of how we are drawn to think of the bodily as real. The attraction to pleasures, and pains perhaps, has a tendency to become a more permanent state. And here it seems appropriate to talk about the body as being ingrown with the soul or of the soul as being riveted to the body. For if you are addicted to intense pleasures and pains it really seems impossible to want a life without the body.

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20 You might be said to be addicted to pains, for example, insofar as the intensity of pleasures may relate to the intensity of the concomitant pains. The dedicated weightlifter may crave the pain followed by relief.
And it seems to be in this more permanent addiction to pleasures and pains that the soul causes itself to be repeatedly embodied. So the souls of those who have associated with the body ‘wander about until, owing to the desire of the corporeal element attendant upon the souls, they are once more imprisoned in a body’ (81d9-e2). To this extent, S.Broadie seems justified in talking about ‘the soul’s power to create and maintain for itself the life it truly desires and thinks good, along with the lifestyle’s accoutrements’.  

There is an alternative to this account of the soul’s attachment to the body, which may strike one as immediately more plausible. There are some psychic functions that involve bodily organs, others that do not. So sense perception, and in particular the perception of pleasures and pains, depends on the use of the body. Thinking, in contrast, does not. What it means for Socrates to say that the soul itself becomes bodily is that it continuously indulges in activities that engage a bodily organ. The soul’s attachment to the body is an attachment to activities that require the use of the body. So at 81e1 we can take Socrates to understand the attendant corporeal element as the body that is instrumental in realizing the pleasures and pains to which one is attached. On this reading, then, the soul becomes body-like in the sense that it engages in embodied activities, but the soul itself does not acquire bodily attributes.

I resist this reading for two reasons. First, the soul of the pleasure-seeker retains characteristics of the body also in between incarnations, that is to say, at times when the soul does not have access to a body that could serve as an instrument. So the soul’s attendant corporeal aspect is said to have desires because of which the soul again becomes embodied. Second, the reading does not take adequate account of the role of desire in making us embodied. Even the philosopher may require the body as an instrument in digestion, walking, sitting, etc. Indeed, Socrates’ description of the role of his own body as a necessary condition of his staying in prison implies as much (98d-99a). But that does not seem sufficient to make his soul attached to the body, let alone to make it bodily. So the idea that the soul is bodily to the extent that it requires the body as an instrument seems too weak.

I have argued that soul, whilst remaining a substance distinct from body, has the capacity to take on bodily attributes per accidens. This conclusion raises two further questions. First, which are the properties that the soul can share with the body? Second, what is the nature of the soul such

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22 καὶ μέχρι γε τούτου πλακόνται, ἐως ὅτι τοῦ συνεπακολουθοῦντος, τοῦ σωματείδους, ἐπιθυμία παλιν ἐθεδώσιν εἰς σώμα (Phd. 81d9-e2). I take τοῦ συνεπακολουθοῦντος, τοῦ σωματείδους to be subjective genitives.
that it can take on those bodily properties? In answer to the first question, the soul was said to be interspersed with the bodily and thereby being weighed down and dragged down into the region of the visible (81c-d). ‘Heavy’ or ‘visible’ could here be predicated of soul, even if only accidentally I have suggested. The soul also becomes scattered around the body, so some division is also shared with the body.

In reply to the second question, it seems that to share in such ‘bodily’ properties the soul must, as a minimum, be such as to have a) spatial location, b) spatial extension, c) spatial motion. It has to have spatial location insofar as it attaches itself to or separates itself from the body. It has to have spatial extension insofar as it is scattered across the body and insofar as it becomes divided and interspersed with the bodily element (80c). Also the soul as visible must have some extension to be seen. Weight too requires the ability to move down, so the soul must admit of spatial motion. Spatial movability also seems implied by the soul’s being shaken and disturbed by the body.23

It is hard to say more about the implications that follow from the soul’s being able to share these bodily properties simply because the Phd. is not the proper context to pursue what makes something visible and heavy. These are questions to be picked up in the Tim. where both qualities will be explained in terms of the geometrical properties of body. The Tim. will give us the physics to ground the psychology of the Phd. It will tell us about a soul that is spatially extended and moving in such a way that it can be affected by bodily attributes themselves conceived of in terms of spatial configurations. All we can say is that there is a trail that leads from the Phd. to the Tim. for him who wishes to understand better why the soul is such that it can be so disturbingly assimilated to the body. And that psychology ultimately needs to be thought through in terms of physics is a claim that Phd. 95e-99c, highlights in bold.

Finally, two general observations about the soul-body relationship, as it has emerged in this paper. The first is that the Phd. underscores the ontological flexibility of the soul that we find elsewhere in Plato. The soul may in its essence be akin to the forms but it has the capacity to assume bodily characteristics. Commentators since Proclus have remarked that the soul in the Tim. represents an ontological intermediary between forms and visible objects, composed as it is of a mixture of being and becoming.24 It is this mixed composition that allows the soul to think about and be shaped by both. Yet such a development is not a far cry from the Phd. given what this dialogue has to say about how the soul becomes embodied and how it behaves while

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23 The final myth portrays the fate of the soul after separation from the body as an extensive journey (πορεία, 107e5) through the τόπος of the underworld. It is not so easy to dismiss the language of travel as mythical persiflage since it is consistently used throughout the Phd., cf. 80d5-8, 82c1.
embodied. The dialogue explains how the soul becomes embodied and bodily in terms of the soul’s own errant desires and values. It represents the in-between status of the soul as a function of its different intentional objects. Having bodily concerns and thereby assuming bodily characteristics may be a perversion of the soul’s true nature, its affinity with the forms, but it is nonetheless something the soul itself does, from its own choices and priorities. Bodily characteristics stem so to speak from the soul’s own resources, even they do not correspond to its own true nature.

The second related point concerns what it means for Plato to study psychology. What has fueled the assimilation of Platonic to Cartesian dualism, I believe, is the strong emphasis that the Platonic Socrates places on the contrast between the soul and the body in passages like the affinity argument. Yet this emphasis should properly be understood in the context of Socrates’ ethical recommendations. True, the soul is in its nature akin to and more akin to the eternal forms than it is to the body. But this kinship is the starting-point for how we should develop; it is the basis for the purification of the soul’s bodily properties. Indeed, the fact of the soul’s embodiment already suggests that it developed bodily attachments in an earlier life. The soul’s degree of plasticity, or as Bostock puts it, its ‘chameleon-like character’ comes with the idea that we need to strive to make our souls distinct from the body. The complete separation of soul from body is thus the end that we should work towards. The purified soul may look a lot more like the Cartesian ego; but in the meantime, whilst we struggle to cast off the mortal coil, the sharp demarcation between the psychic and the bodily eludes us.

Thomas Kjeller Johansen, University of Oslo

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Bostock, op.cit. 119, commenting on 79c: ‘[the soul] simply takes on the nature of whatever it is thinking of.’