

The Psychology of the beautiful Body in Plotinus' treatises

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The Psychology of the beautiful Body in Plotinus' treatises

Camille Guigon

In his *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry writes the following description of his master: “When he spoke, his intellect was evident, even in the way he lit up his face. He was beautiful to look at, but even more beautiful in those moments” (13, ed. L. Gerson).¹ This anecdote says something very important about the beautiful body in Neoplatonic thought: the intellect beautifies not only the soul but also the body.²

In treatise 1 [I.6], *On Beauty*, Plotinus describes the beauty of the body in a classical way for a platonician philosopher: A body is beautiful because it is associated with a form (1 (I, 6), 2, 7-8). But this beauty is only a shadow that disturbs our soul. We need to focus on the true beauty, the beauty of the intelligible world.

However, in treatise 5 [V.9], *On Intellect, Ideas, and Being*, we find the following statement: “So what is it that makes a body beautiful? On the one hand, it is the presence of beauty; on the other hand, it is the presence of the soul that has formed it and given it this form” (5 [V.9].2.16-18, ed. L. P. Gerson). It is the soul that makes its body beautiful. A similar idea appears in treatise 31 [V.8]: The gods have beautiful bodies because they have intellects (31 [V.8], 3, 20-24). But what exactly is the role of the soul in shaping the beautiful body? Is there a connection between the ethical state of the soul and the beauty of its body?

¹ At the very beginning of his *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry explains that Plotinus was ashamed to be in a body (*Life of Plotinus*, 1, 1-10). But as Dyer Williams (2017) demonstrates, we can infer from that a general perspective about the way how Plotinus considers body. What Plotinus probably meant in this anecdote was that his individual existence was “unimportant” (Dyer Williams (2017) 83). Moreover, the ugliness of the body and of the sensible world in general was a Gnostic argument, which is dismissed by Plotinus (Dyer Williams (2017) 78-81).

² “This means that anything which has soul is beautiful since soul is, on Platonic terms, the bearer of life. Plotinus even goes further than this, claiming that the activity of soul is causally responsible for every kind of beauty found in actions, ways of life and bodies – everything, that is, apart from Intellect and the Good where beauty and life have their proper residence” (Sen (2002) 22). For the ugliness of the soul, see also Hubler (2002) 196.

My hypothesis is that the beautiful body is the sensible image of the beautiful soul. The beauty of a body results from the actions of the individual soul during the creation of the body. Only a beautiful soul can produce a beautiful body, although there are some exceptions, exceptions that I will justify at the end of this lecture.

To prove this hypothesis, I will first describe the connection between beauty and intellect in Plotinus' treatises. Then I will set out the role of the individual soul in the production of the body and finally show that the good soul necessarily produces a beautiful body.

I – Beauty and Intellect

First of all, it should be emphasised that there is no intelligible form of beauty in Plotinus' thought, as there is in Plato's.³ Beauty is identified in Plotinus' treatises with the Intellect, the second principle in the intelligible realm. In treatise 1 [I.6], for example, we read the following statement:

Enn. 1 [I.6].9.17

For first the soul in its ascent will reach the intellect, and in the intelligible world it will see all beautiful forms and declare that these ideas are what beauty is. For all things are beautiful because of these; they are the offspring of the intellect and of substantiality. (Ed. L. Gerson)

As we can read, the beauty of the intellect comes from the intelligible forms that make up the second principle. Plotinus does not give a precise definition of the intelligible forms, but we can assume that they correspond to the living species. When Plotinus writes about the intelligible forms, he always uses living beings as an example, and he describes the intellect as a complete living being (ζῷον παντελής). But why are these forms beauty itself? What does it mean that the intellect is the source of beauty? As we can read in treatise 1 [I.6], Plotinian beauty implies the idea of order and form applied to matter, which is without any kind of organisation:⁴

Enn. 1 [I.6].2.13-17

We say that these [the beautiful beings] are beautiful through participation in form [εἶδους]. For anything that is formless but is

³ *Phdr.* 250c8-e1; *Smp.* 210e2-b5.

⁴ 12 [II.4].2.3-4; 10, 32. See also Hubler (2002) 194-195.

by nature capable of receiving form [μορφήν] or shape [εἶδος], and has no part in an expressed principle or form [λόγου], is ugly and is outside divine reason. This is utter ugliness. (Ed. L. Gerson)

There are several very important words here. First, we find the term μορφή. The μορφή corresponds to the εἶδος which is in matter.⁵ In other words, it corresponds to the external form of the sensible object, which is composed of form (εἶδος) and matter. The μορφή can be accurately described as a mathematical quantity because it implies a form (σχῆμα), some proportions (ἀναλογίαι) and a mathematical ratio.⁶ The εἶδος is one of the aspects of the intelligible world in Plotinus' philosophy and we can see that it is connected to the concept of the λόγος, which is probably one of the most important concepts in Plotinian thought. The λόγος here is not the faculty, but can be described as a rational formula. To these λόγοι correspond the intelligible forms of which the soul makes use.⁷ In the intellect, the forms are a perfect unity, some universal concepts in which multiplicity is only potential.⁸ For example, the form of the animal has all animal species potentially in it. But the soul, which thinks discursively, is not able to understand the forms in their perfect unity. It therefore breaks them down according to the individual species they contain. This division leads to the so-called λόγοι, which are the intelligible forms at the level of the soul⁹.

⁵ Arist., *De generatione et corruptione*, II, 8, 335a16; *Physica*, I, 7, 191a11

⁶ 20 [I.3].1.30. The σχῆμα implies size and measure, like for the geometrical figures (1 [I.6].9.19; 9 [VI.9].8.14; 43 [VI.2].21.23; 44 [VI.3].13.28). The mathematical ratios corresponding to the Greek λόγοι are compared to the distances (διαστάσεις) which compose every living thing, i.e. the length of the individual limbs and parts of the body (cf. 34 [VI.6].17.17; 40 [II.1].6.4; 45 [III.7].8.26). The connection between διάστασις and the mathematical measure already appears in the *Timaeus* when Plato describes the origin of the world soul (cf. *Ti.*, 36a6; b3; d3).

⁷ "Unlike thoughts, λόγοι are productive in matter, imitating the Demiurge or Intellect. Thus, their productivity is an imitation of the paradigmatic ἐνέργεια" (Gerson (2012) 23).

⁸ 9 [V.9].2.30-32. This multiplicity in the intelligible forms already appears in Plato's thinking, as A. H. Armstrong explains: "They [the intelligible forms] are the realities corresponding to universal definitions, forming an organized whole, the higher and more universal including the lower, whose structure is perceived by the thinking mind by the process of dialectic, collection and division" (Armstrong (1947) 368).

⁹ Fattal (1998) 20-21

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The λόγοι are both conceptual and ontological realities.¹⁰ The soul uses them to cognize the sensible objects because these objects are themselves composed of the λόγοι. It is not the intelligible forms themselves that are in matter, but the λόγοι.¹¹ In other words, the λόγος is the origin of the εἶδος which is in matter and gives rise to the living body.¹²

This creative λόγος is very close to the spermatic λόγοι of the Stoics: “In the human microcosm Spermatic *Logoi* are termed one of the parts (viz. the reproductive faculty) of the soul”.¹³ The Plotinian λόγοι are the origin of every living beings, in the same way that the Stoics spermatic λόγοι in the male semen is the cause of life in our material world.¹⁴ Both are a multiplicity compressed in an unity, which spread out souls.¹⁵

Consequently, a beautiful sensible object implies the presence and dominion of the λόγοι over matter.¹⁶ The λόγοι bring proportion (38 [VI.7].18.7; 22.25) and order to matter, which is stripped of everything.¹⁷ Ugliness is the absence of any kind of intelligible presence, of order and of proportion.¹⁸

The intellect, which is beauty, cannot therefore act directly on matter to produce bodies. It always makes use of the soul and its λόγοι as intermediaries. But how can the soul and the λόγοι transfer the beauty of the intellect into matter?

¹⁰ Rist (1967) 96-97.

¹¹ On the λόγοι, see also Corrigan (1984) 98-116; Zamora Calvo (1996) 87-108; Brisson (1999) 333-342.

¹² Clark (1996) 287.

¹³ Witt (1931) 103.

¹⁴ Witt (1931) 107.

¹⁵ Witt (1931) 107. However, the Plotinian λόγοι are incorporeal, whereas those of the Stoics are material (Witt (1931) 106; Fattal (1998) 34).

¹⁶ “Beauty is a unified arrangement of parts” (Miles (1999) 137).

¹⁷ As Narbonne ((2002) 4) explains, our soul does not endure the spectacle of indistinctness and the lack of form of the matter (see 12 [II.4].4.10).

¹⁸ “But what is ugliness for Plotinus? It is the absence of form in that which is destined to receive one. The ugly, then, is the unformed with which the soul has no affinity, in front of which it can receive no guidance, that which presents itself as the undetermined and unattainable. [...] On the other hand, the beautiful is obviously that which, first of all, is the bearer of form, shape and just proportions, in other words, that which the world profusely displays and that to which our soul is naturally directed” (Narbonne (2002) 4).

II – The demiurgic Power of the individual Soul

The presence of beauty is not an accidental situation in Plotinus' thought. The sensible world reflects the intelligible realm¹⁹. Beauty is one of the manifestations of the Intellect in our world, and the world-soul generates the sensible realm by considering the Intellect in its entirety:

Enn. 27 [IV.3].6.15-18

And it may be the case that the one looks to the whole of Intellect, while the others look rather to their own partial intellects – and perhaps even these would be capable of producing a universe, but since the other had already done so, it was no longer possible for them, that one having begun it first. (Ed. L. Gerson)

Sensible beauty has a different origin than in Plato's dialogues. In *Phaedrus*, for example, we understand that beautiful bodies are the reflection of the idea of beauty:

Phdr. 251a1-5

But when someone who has only recently been initiated, and who took in plenty of the sights to be seen then, sees a marvellous face or a bodily form which is a good reflection of beauty, at first he shivers and is gripped by something like the fear he felt then, and the sight also moves him to revere his beloved as if he were a god. (Tr. R. Waterfield)

But the connection between a beautiful body and a good soul seems accidental. Alcibiades, for example, is a very beautiful man, but his soul seems incapable of philosophy. In contrast, Socrates is ugly, but he is the wisest man of his time.²⁰

On the opposite side, Plotinus defends a necessary link between a good soul and a beautiful body. Firstly, the soul does not come into the body of the newborn. Plotinus writes the following sentence in treatise 27

¹⁹ “Intellect contains thoughts, differentiations, movements and rest, qualities and quantities. Intellect, in turn, beams its myriad forms to the common soul of all living creatures. At the level of soul, a further differentiation occurs; soul transforms the forms it receives from intellect into bodies. Bodies are created and supported in life by the One's continuous creative power circulating through the universe” (Miles (1999) 35).

²⁰ The ugliness of Socrates is proverbial. See for example *Smp.* 215a5-b3; *Tht.* 143e7-8; *Men.* 80a4-6.

[IV.3].7.28-30, *On Problems of the Soul 1*: “We say that it is another soul that comes into the maternal womb. This soul is not the soul of the mother” (My translation). In this text Plotinus clearly emphasises the fact that the soul comes into the body long before birth. The soul is present when the future individual is still in the womb of the mother. More precisely, the soul intervenes when the future body is what Plotinus calls the ὄγκος, a kind of mass, a mixture between the matter of the mother, probably menstruation, and the λόγος of greatness that comes from the seed of the father.²¹

Thanks to its λόγοι, the individual soul brings forth the body, as we can read in treatise 38 [VI.7], *How the Multiplicity of the Ideas Came to Exist, and on the Good*:

Enn. 38 [VI.7].6.33-36

But when the soul connected to the daemon it had when it was human being follows a soul that chose ‘the nature of a beast’, it gives the expressed principle [λόγον] that it had in itself to the animal. For this contains it, and this is an inferior activity for it. (Ed. L. Gerson)

This passage is a reference to treatise 15 [III.4], *On our allotted daemon*, where Plotinus describes what he calls the daemon, which is the faculty of the soul superior to the faculty principally realised by the soul when it is embodied²². The soul does not realise all its faculties in the same way; there is always one faculty that predominates in the individual soul:

Enn. 15 [III.4].2.11-22

When the soul leaves the body, however, it becomes that which predominated in it. For this reason, ‘we must escape to the higher world’ to avoid falling to the level of the faculty of sense-perception by following sensible images or to the faculty of growth by following the desire for procreation and ‘the luxuries of good food’, but rise to the intellectual faculty, to Intellect, and to god. And so those who maintain their humanity will return again as human beings, while those who lived by sense-perception alone will return as animals. But if their sense-perceptions are accompanied by passion, they will return as wild beasts. And the difference in their dispositions determines that which decides

²¹ Brisson (2000) 99.

²² 15 [III.4].3.3-10.

what kind of animal they become. Those who combine the life of sense-perception with appetite and the pleasure which is found in the appetitive part of the soul will become the sort of animals that are licentious and voracious. But if they fail even to combine sense-perception with these, but only a dim form of sense-perception, they will even become plants. (Ed. L. Gerson)

The general idea is this: Every soul has a faculty which it realises more than the others. This faculty, the daemon, determines the nature of the future body, for it determines the kind of λόγοι which the soul can use. The more the soul is close to the Intellect, the more it can use the totality of the λόγοι.²³ The further the soul is from the contemplation of the intellect, the narrower its access to the λόγοι, which explains why the soul, dominated by its lower faculties, such as appetite or sensation, can only produce an animal body.

Treatise 38 [VI.7] gives a general idea of the formation of the body in the womb:

Enn. 38 [VI.7].7.5-16

And if the soul contains the means, then it produces something better, and if not, then it produces what it can, which at any rate was what it was preordained to produce. It is like creators who know how to produce many forms, and then either produce these, or what they were ordered to, or what the matter was suited to. For what prevents the power of the soul of the universe from producing a sketch [προῦπογράφειν] beforehand, inasmuch as it is the expressed principle [λόγον] of everything, even before the psychical powers deriving from it? And what prevents the sketch [προῦπογραφήν] produced beforehand from being like illuminations anticipating matter, and soul from carrying out the work, following these traces [ἴχνεσιν], articulating traces part for part? Each soul becomes then what it draws near, shaping itself, just as the dancer fits himself to the role assigned to him. (Ed. L. Gerson)

²³ The fact that the soul's beauty depends from its use of the intellect originally appears in Plato: "The concept of my being beautiful is dependent upon and specified by my being what I am. To love the beautiful in me is thus to love my essential being, my 'realest' self" (Kosman (1976) 66). According to G. Vlastos, we can only love what is *really* beautiful, i.e. the Ideas themselves (Vlastos (2008) 156).

Plotinus seems to be explaining here that the world-soul (or the soul of the universe) casts what Plotinus calls a “sketch” (προϋπογραφή) into the matter of the womb. Actually, the World Soul does not act directly on the individual body, for it is only concerned with the general organisation of the world.²⁴ But the World Soul gives each living body a vegetative soul that takes care of the generation, nourishment and growth of the body. It is more likely that the vegetative souls of the mother and father are responsible for the sketch, as shown by the word ἔχνοϛ used by Plotinus to describe the embodiment of the vegetative soul.²⁵ Unfortunately, Plotinus does not indicate what role each parent plays in the constitution of the future living being. The sketch seems to be the λόγος of the living species of the progenitors transmitted to the offspring, but it is impossible to know which of the two gives this λόγος. In any case, the matter given rather by the mother has received the general characteristics of the living species, such as the shape of the body, the number of limbs, the texture of the skin, and so on.²⁶

Then the individual soul completes the making of its own future body by bringing forth the various organs, again thanks to the λόγοι. These physical organs are comparable to the ethical state of the soul:

Enn. 15 [III.4].5.10-14

What will happen then if the virtuous person gets [τύχοι] a worthless body or vice versa? Indeed, the characters [ἦθος] of the two kinds of souls may shape both kinds of bodies to a greater or lesser extent, since even other external accidents do not completely divert the will of man from its path. (Ed. L. Gerson)

The first clause is formed here with the conjunction εἰ and the optative τύχοι. This grammatical form can express a hypothesis that can potentially become true. It is unlikely that the wise soul has a bad body. Character (ἦθος) is unique to each individual soul. It is an expression of the way each soul views the intelligible realm and the sensible world.²⁷ A bad soul, i.e. a soul attracted to the sensible world, produces a body with very sensitive organs. The good soul, on the other hand, which

²⁴ 6 [IV.8].4.1-10.

²⁵ 28 [IV.4].28.8; 11; 16; 19; 21; 52; 66; 73; 29, 50; 38 [VI.7].11.17.

²⁶ For the role of the father and of the mother in the Plotinian embryology, see Wilberding (2008) 410-411; Wilberding (2017) 63-84.

²⁷ 15 [III.4].5.7; 11; 17; 19; 6, 28; 27 [IV.3].8.8; 28 [IV.4].5.19; 21; 45.40.

prefers the intelligent world²⁸, creates a body that does not react so easily to the sensitive stimuli. According to treatise 27 [IV.3], the ἦθος does not depend on the embodiment of the soul. It already exists when the soul is still in the intelligible sphere.²⁹ In other words, the ἦθος influences the dominant faculty, the use of the λόγοι and the kind of body the soul will produce. The possibility of a difference between the body and the ethical state of the soul exists, but is a very rare situation. Thanks to all these elements, I will now explain how the beautiful body comes into being and why this body is necessarily connected with a beautiful soul.

III – The production of the beautiful body

As I said in my introduction, there are two passages in the treatises that explain that the beautiful body comes from the good soul. First, there is the following extract from treatise 31 [V.8], *On the Intelligible Beauty*:

Enn. 31 [V.8].2.6-5

What, then, is beauty in these? It is not indeed in the blood and the menstrual fluid; their colour is different in each case and their shape amounts to no shape or else it is something shapeless or like the contour of some simple body. Where did the beauty of the Helen who was fought over actually radiate from, or those women who are said to be as beautiful as Aphrodite? Indeed, where did the beauty of Aphrodite come from? Or, generally, of any beautiful human being, or of any god who revealed himself to sight – or who had in himself a perceivable beauty, even if he never appeared to human beings? Is it not, then, everywhere a form [εἶδος], imposed by the producer on that which comes to be, as in the crafts where we said form was imposed on products of craft by the crafts? (Ed. L. Gerson)

Plotinus' theory is particularly important here insofar as he emphasises that matter is not responsible for the existence of the sensible beauty. The matter by itself is powerless, it cannot produce anything. Plotinus even believes that matter is not responsible for the individual differences between the sensible beings.³⁰ According to the text, the εἶδος is the

²⁸ “Only while engaged in the contemplation of the intelligible is the soul really a soul” (Kalligas (2000) 32).

²⁹ 3 [III.1].6.7; 15 [III.4].3.15; 5, 7; 11; 17; 19; 6, 28; 27 [IV.3]8.8; 28 [IV.4].5.19.

³⁰ Nikulin (2019) 70-71.

cause of the sensible beauty. As already explained, the εἶδος can be defined as the λόγος when it acts on matter to produce a body. In other words, the beauty of women like Helen of Troy is only caused by the λόγος. At best, the matter is only passive. At worst, it weakens the power of the λόγοι.³¹ But Plotinus becomes more precise about the cause of the sensible beauty in the following chapter:

Enn. 31 [V.8].3.18-23

For all the gods are worthy and beautiful, and their beauty is extraordinary. But what is it that makes them so? Indeed, it is the intellect, I mean the intellect that is more active in them, so that it is visible. It is certainly not because their bodies are beautiful. Those who have a body do not become gods because of it, but they are gods also because they have an intellect. (Ed. L. Gerson)

The gods here are the celestial objects, like the planets and the stars. Their bodies are beautiful, but this physical beauty is only the visible realisation of the beauty of their souls. Since Plato's *Timaeus*, the stars have been described as living beings animated by the most perfect soul from an ethical point of view: "Any soul which made good use of its allotted time would return to dwell once more on the star with which it had been paired, to live a blessed life in keeping with its character".³² Plotinus' idea is similar here. The stars have an individual soul, just like the other living beings. This soul is the one that can contemplate the intellect without being interested in the sensible world. This is why Plotinus calls it a good soul, a soul that contemplates only the intelligible realities.³³ As Plotinus writes, the intellect is so present in this soul that it manifests itself through the beauty of the celestial body and also through the circular motion of this body: "There, too, are all good souls which give life to the stars and to well-ordered heaven and to the eternal motion of heaven which wisely circles around everlastingly in the identical course in imitation of Intellect".³⁴ Incidentally, the souls in the stars also have a very easily controlled body, consisting only of fire, the purest physical element.³⁵ In other words, the beauty of the stars

³¹ See IV below.

³² *Ti.* 42b3-5. Tr. R. Waterfield.

³³ 27 [IV.3].8.5-17.

³⁴ *Enn.* 47 [III.2].3.28-31. Ed. L. Gerson.

³⁵ Like Plato (*Ti.* 45b7), Plotinus explains that there are two kinds of fire: the earthly fire, which is corrosive, and the heavenly fire, which only warms and shines. The stars consist of the second kind of fire (19 [I.2].7.33-49).

consists not only in their harmonious appearance, but rather in the fact that their movement and their physical constitution are the visible image of their perfect psychological state.

The second text that emphasises the connection between a beautiful body and a good soul comes from treatise 5 [V.9], *On Intellect, Ideas and Being*:

Enn. 5 [V.9].2.16-18

What is it, then, that makes a body beautiful? On the one hand, it is the presence of beauty; on the other hand, it is the presence of the soul that has formed it and given it this form. What is it then? Is the soul beautiful by itself? Indeed, it is not. For if it were, one soul would not be wise and beautiful and the other stupid and ugly. So it is wisdom [φρονήσῃ] that constitutes beauty in the soul. And what is it then that gives wisdom to the soul? It is necessarily the intellect; not an intellect that sometimes behaves like an intellect and sometimes not, but the true intellect, which is therefore beautiful of itself. (Ed. L. Gerson)

As we can read, the soul is not beautiful by itself. The soul is beautiful only when it contemplates the intellect.³⁶ On the other hand, the soul that prefers the sensible realm is ugly, i.e. it is deprived of a λόγοι and cannot fulfil its function of generating all living beings.³⁷ In treatise 1 [I.6] Plotinus defines wisdom as “the intellection that consists in a turning away from the things below, leading the soul to the things above”.³⁸ Wisdom is nothing other than the contemplation of the Intellect by the soul, which acquires universal concepts.³⁹ The “intellect that sometimes behaves like an intellect and sometimes not” means when he writes that the beautiful body needs the presence of beauty and the soul that produces the body.⁴⁰ The presence of beauty refers to the intellect, while the soul that produces the body can only be the individual

³⁶ “Intellect, Plotinus says, is the soul’s essence and therefore its beauty” (Miles (1999) 41). See also Narbonne (2002) 15): “The aesthetics of Plotinus is thus, above all, a purification of the soul, an ethical and metaphysical experience”. We find a similar idea in Quinn (2002) 45.

³⁷ Miles (1999) 45.

³⁸ *Enn.* 1 [I.6].6.12. Ed. L. Gerson.

³⁹ *Enn.* 19 [I.2].3.22; 6.12; 7.7; 20 [I.3].6.10.

⁴⁰ Hubler (2002) 198-199; 203.

soul.⁴¹ This is another example of the demiurgic power of the individual soul, because the vegetative soul, which comes from the world soul, is not able to see the intellect.⁴²

To sum up, the body is produced by the λόγοι, which are used by the individual soul of that body.⁴³ The λόγοι that give order and proportion to matter depend on the ethical state of the soul. A soul attracted to the intelligible realm produces a beautiful body, while the bad soul can only have an ugly body.⁴⁴ But then several problems arise. What happens when a good soul comes into an ugly body, as in the case of Socrates? Or when an ugly soul comes into a beautiful body?

IV – What about ugliness?

This necessary connection between the ethical state of the soul and the beauty of the body has some exceptions. A good person can be ugly, and a beautiful face can hide a very ugly soul. This difference between the physical aspect and the ethical value of the soul is first highlighted by Plato, as we can read in the *Gorgias*:

Grg. 524d7-525a6

So when the dead reach the judgement-seat, in the case of Asiatics the judgement seat of Rhadamanthus, Rhadamanthus summons them before him and inspects each person's soul, without knowing to whom it belongs. Often, when it is the king of Persia or some other monarch or potentate that he has to deal with, he finds that there is no soundness in the soul whatever; it is a mass of weals and scars imprinted on it by various acts, of perjury and wrongdoing which have been stamped on his soul; it is twisted and warped by lies and vanity and has grown crooked because

⁴¹ “His [Plotinus] philosophy seeks to demonstrate his conviction that one life, marked by beauty, circulates throughout the universe” (Miles (1999) 56).

⁴² “In short, the sensible objects in which beauty appears change and vanish before our very eyes. Their beauty is really that of informing soul, a stable beauty derived in turn from soul’s source, intellect and ultimately from intellect’s source, the One” (Miles (1999) 65).

⁴³ “Plotinus valued ensouled and enformed bodies for their capacity to bring order and life to the physical world and for their ability to turn human souls towards their divine origins” (Williams Dyer (2017) 71).

⁴⁴ As Charles-Saget (2007) explains, the face is the most important part of the body in the Plotinian aesthetic, because it is the part the most diverse and expressive of our body (Charles-Saget (2007) 70).

truth has had no part in its development. Power, luxury, pride and debauchery have left it so full of disproportion and ugliness that when he has inspected it Rhadamanthus dispatches it in ignominy straight to prison, where on its arrival it will undergo the appropriate treatment. (Tr. W. Hamilton)

Because of the beauty of their bodies, some souls managed to get to the Fortunate Isles, even though they were bad and vicious. Zeus decided that the court should deal with the real state of the soul and not with the physical aspect, because moral vices mutilate the soul and leave marks on it.

As I said earlier, Socrates is the best example of this difference. In Plato's dialogues, Socrates' ugliness, despite his wisdom, may be further proof that the relationship between soul and body is a contingent one and that the body is not the natural place of the soul.⁴⁵ But in Plotinus' treatises, the relationship is not contingent. So how can we explain this kind of anomaly?

Even if the λόγοι can give life and form to matter, the latter has a significant resistance because it is devoid of everything, as we can read in treatise 51 [I.8], *On What Evils Are and Where They Come From*:

Enn. 51 [I.8], 8, 13-24

Next, too, the forms in matter are not identical with what they would be if they existed by themselves, but rather are enmattered expressed principles corrupted and infected by that nature. For it is not fire itself that burns nor any of the other things that exist by themselves that do what they are said to do when in matter. For matter, being authoritative over that which shows up in it, corrupts and destroys it, juxtaposing its own nature which is contrary, not by adding cold to heat, but by bringing along its own formlessness to the form of heat, and the shapeless to the shape and excess and deficiency to the measured, until it makes it its own instead of belonging to itself. (Ed. L. Gerson)

As we can read, the power of the λόγοι is not absolute because it is limited by matter. Even if matter is nothing, it can influence the λόγοι

⁴⁵ As R. G. Edmonds (2000) demonstrates, "Socrates is both the lover and the beloved, both the seeker of true philosophic beauty and the embodiment of it" (Edmonds (2000) 276). Because of his ugliness, Socrates seeks beautiful young men in order to talk with them about the good. At the same time his soul is so beautiful that he is himself an object of desire (Edmonds (2000) 262; 274).

by imparting disproportion and disorder to the form brought by the soul. This resistance of matter is independent of the ethical state of the soul. A soul may be good and intellectual, but its λόγοι may also be greatly weakened by matter. In other words: If Socrates is ugly, it is not because of his soul or his λόγοι, but because of the nature of matter. Socrates' body should have been beautiful, but matter is an uncontrollable variable. It is because of matter that Socrates is ugly.

But how can the reverse situation be explained, when a man is beautiful and his soul is evil? In the Platonist dialogues, Alcibiade is the perfect counterpart to Socrates. His beauty is well known in Athens, but he seems to be able to do philosophy despite Socrates' teaching. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades himself confesses that he is ashamed of not being able to follow Socrates' philosophical recommendations:

Smp. 216a8-b6

What I have felt in the presence of this one man is what no one would think I had it in me to feel in front of anyone, and that is shame. And it is only in front of him that I feel it, because I am well aware that I cannot argue against him or deny that I ought to do as he says. Yet when I leave him I am equally aware that I am giving in to my desire for honour from the public. So I skulk out of his sight like a runaway slave, and whenever I do see him I am ashamed of the admissions I have made to him. (Tr. R. Waterfield)

The case of Alcibiades seems to be a serious objection to my theory, in the sense that the bad soul is unable to use the λόγοι to create proportion and order. That is why it produces animal bodies that are less perfect and complex than the human body. But we must not underestimate the role that external influences play on the soul. This idea is already underlined by Plato in the *Theaetetus* and the *Phaedrus*. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates explains that some souls who can practise philosophy move away from him because they prefer to listen to some teachers who let the knowledge they carried in their soul go to the wind.⁴⁶

A similar idea appears in *Phaedrus*. Plato explains that after the Fall there are three kinds of people: the people who can do philosophy, the people who cannot because their contemplation of the ideas before the Fall is insufficient, and the people who have a good soul that can

⁴⁶ *Tht.* 151a3-5.

contemplate the ideas but are victims of a bad society.⁴⁷ This bad society is the sophists who think that the absolute good and the absolute truth do not exist, but also some dissolute people who will nourish the ἐπιθυμία of the good soul against its λόγος. Incidentally, vice is also described by Plato as a kind of plague (νόσημα), implying the idea of contagion.⁴⁸

The bad company is used again by Plotinus himself, as we can read in the treatise 27 [IV.3], *On the problems of the soul 1*:

Enn. 27 [IV.3].4.35-37

It is as if one were to say that a person who was healthy and lived with other healthy people was occupied with his own pursuits, either living an active life or devoting himself to contemplation, while someone who was ill and attending to cures for his body was concerned with the body and had come to belong to it. (Ed. L. Gerson)

This chapter is about the relationship between the world soul and the vegetative souls that are in our bodies. The most important part for us is the comparison between health and disease. As we can read, the healthy person can do contemplation or some other activity thanks to his health, but also thanks to his healthy acquaintances. What is implied in the second part of the text about illness is not only that the body is in distress, but also that the other people are ill. It is, of course, a metaphor for the state of the soul.⁴⁹ In the first case, when the soul is healthy, that is, when it is not dominated by its body, it can realise higher activities that are consistent with its nature. But we can read that the soul can do this because it is also surrounded by good souls. On the other hand, we can conclude that the sick soul, obsessed with its body and the sensible realm, cannot heal because the souls around it are also sick and they consider the sensible world more important than the intelligible world, if they have any awareness of the intelligible world at all. In other words, the sickness of the soul is contagious.

The influence of bad society also seems to be hinted at in another text of treatise 27 [IV.3]:

⁴⁷ *Phdr.* 250e1-251a4.

⁴⁸ See *R.* IV, 492d2; VIII, 552c3. “As physical diseases certainly affect not only individual bodies but also *series* of bodies, for example, in the case of a plague, individual vicious souls in a city finally mark the cities with their character” (Renaut (2019), 70).

⁴⁹ The analogy between vice and disease exists since Plato. See Renaut (2019).

Enn. 27 [IV.3].15.7-10

They [the individual souls] become different either by reason of the variation of the bodies into which they are put, or by virtue of accidents of fortune or upbringing [τροφαῖς], or because they bring with them differences derived from themselves, or for all of these reasons, or certain of them. (Ed. L. Gerson)

The interesting word here is the word τροφή, which seems to be an evocation of the *Timaeus*: “For no one is bad of his own choice: an unhealthy body and a vulgar upbringing [τροφήν] are what make a bad man bad, and these are afflictions that no one chooses to have”.⁵⁰ Τροφή also appears in *Timaeus* 76a4-b1, where Plato explains that it can interact with the immortal soul and resist the soul’s movements, producing sutures on the skull. It is well known that Plato is very interested in the question of education. This interest is not expressed in the Plotinian treatises. But it seems clear that the use of τροφή in treatise 27 [IV 3] is a reminiscence of the *Timaeus*, and of the effects of good or bad environment on a soul in Plato’s dialogues in general. Education can improve the ethical state of the soul if it receives a philosophical education and if it has a good ethical model. But it can also pervert the soul and lead it away from the intelligible world. In this case, we can understand how a bad soul can have a beautiful body. She was not a bad soul when she first came into the body. But because of the bad company of other souls who are evil for various reasons, it loses its interest in the intelligible world.

Conclusion

What exactly is the role of the soul in creating a beautiful body? Is there a connection between the ethical state of the soul and the beauty of its body? We can now understand that only the good soul, which is naturally attracted to the intelligible realm, can produce a beautiful body. If it comes into an ugly body, it is due to the influence of matter, which resists the effects of the λόγοι. This is not the responsibility of the good soul. On the contrary, a bad soul cannot produce a beautiful body. If a bad soul has a beautiful body, it is because it was a good soul when it came into its body. But it becomes a victim of the influence of the bad souls around it. The connection between the ethical state of the soul and the beauty of its body reinforces the theory of the demiurgic power of

⁵⁰ *Ti.* 86e1-3. Tr. O. Renaut.

the individual soul in Plotinian psychology. Since the individual soul does not come into a body by chance but is involved in the making of the body during gestation, the body is the aesthetic representation of the soul's ethical state.

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