

Explain Plato's concept of the soul and its relationship with the body

Plato's theory of the body and soul originated from his earlier theories and dialogs, 'the analogy of the cave' and 'the theory of forms'. Plato believed that the soul is immortal. That the soul existed before it came to the physical body, and it is still there when the body dies. This is a dualistic interpretation of the mind/body problem.

Plato linked the soul to a charioteer in charge of two horses, the mind and the body, which are pulling in completely opposite directions. The soul wanting to go back to the world of the forms and the body wanting to enjoy the five sense plus pleasure. In Plato's words - the body is the source of endless trouble...it fills us full of love and lust and fear and fancies of all kinds...and takes us away from all power of thinking at all. Therefore emphasised that the philosophers must live simply and avoid sensual pleasure so as to focus the mind on the soul and gain its knowledge.

The analogy of the cave relates to the body and soul because the cave is not just encasing the prisoners from seeing the sun, but is also encasing the soul from seeing the world clearly for what it really is. The prisoners in the cave are like ourselves, as we and them let our body dominate our soul, however much our soul wants to be able to take over we just won't let it, the majority of us just like the prisoners are scared of what we might find. The sun shows us that everybody has a soul, and therefore every body has the power to let the soul take over our senses, and is therefore preventing the soul from gaining true knowledge (metaphor of sight). The journey back to the cave is the stage where the prisoner is finally able to release his soul, the prisoner let his soul take over his body and his senses, however it is possible for the body to reject what it is being told and slip back into old habits. The return to the cave represents the soul being released from the body, because now that the soul has been able to show the prisoner the true world it has been allowed to return to the forms.

The forms relate to the body and soul because Plato believes that every human being has an immortal soul and has the access to the world of forms before it was planted in the body. The soul is made up of non - physical matter and is therefore immortal and when the body dies it will return to the world of the forms.

Jacques Martain said that a spiritual soul can not be corrupted, because it isn't not made up of physical matter, it also can not be disintegrated because it has no substantial parts. It also cannot loose any individual unity because it is self subsisting. Once the soul exists, it can not disappear, it will live forever.

The soul does not like the body because the body doesn't always want to philosophise, it doesn't want true knowledge. Where as the soul does, it want to get out and find true knowledge, it wants to find out what things truly are. Plato noted that the body and soul hate each other for this, they totally oppose each other, and the mind is caught up in conflict.

Although we belong to our body, our soul owns our body, however our soul is not strong enough to take full control over the bodies and therefore can not help our body philosophise. Unfortunately if we do not allow the soul to take over we can not gain full knowledge because real knowledge is only grasped by the soul.

Plato argued that although the body belongs to the sensible world (our world) and shares changing with impermanent nature (we are always changing).

In conclusion the body and the soul in most cases truly hate one another. The body enjoys the pleasures gained by the senses, it doesn't mind being a 'sheep' following the crowd believing whatever it is told. Where as the soul is divided into tree parts, emotion, reason and desire, it wants to philosophise, find out what's out there in the world and ask questions.

