Introduction

It is standard Platonic doctrine that soul and body are distinct and that, in ideal conditions, the former should hold sway over the latter. Indeed, several dialogues canvass the view that the soul reaches its purity only when it is itself by itself, a condition that allows it to commune with the unalterable entities of the Platonic realm, namely the Forms. Such remarks, dispersed throughout the corpus, have given rise to the doctrine—mostly assumed rather than argued for—that Plato conceives of the self in non-physical terms and that he identifies “the true self” with the soul. However, extracting solely this conception of the self from Plato’s dialogues rests on a rather one-sided approach that turns a blind eye to textual evidence that shows awareness of different conceptions of the self, conceptions that clash with standard interpretation. In this book, I focus on these rather neglected aspects of personhood and selfhood in three of Plato’s dialogues, namely the Phaedo, the Republic, and the Timaeus. Given that any discussion about the nature of the self in Plato has to tackle the critical issues broached by modern theories of personal identity, I thought it apposite to briefly sketch out the state of the question in order to better illustrate the framework in which I expound my analysis. The purpose of the introduction is to provide an overview of the various existing conceptions of selfhood and to situate the present study within Platonic scholarship.

Varieties of Self

Issues concerning the existence as well as the nature of selfhood have not ceased to spark philosophical debate in modern times. Approaches vary from outright denial to affirmative defense of its existence, whereas the entire gamut of possible reactions to the problem is available both in continental and analytic philosophy.1 The loci classici that mark the renewal of modern interest on personal identity are to be found in the works of Descartes and Locke: in his Sixth Meditation,

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1 To give a few representative examples: Nietzsche explicitly negates the existence of the self by arguing that the doer is simply a fiction and the deed is all there is (Genealogy of Morals I.13). Along similar lines, Wittgenstein states that there is no such thing “as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas” (Tractatus 5.631). Both traditions are influenced by David Hume, for whom the self is a mere aggregate of succeeding perceptions (Treatise of Human Nature, Part IV, Sect. VI). For a list of modern philosophers who deny the existence of the self, see Sorabji (2006) 18–19.
Descartes infers from the mere fact of his existence that he is essentially a thinking thing (*res cogitans*). Picking up on Descartes’ reflections, John Locke included in the second edition of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* a new chapter on personal identity, in which he defined the person as “a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places” (2.27.9). Locke stressed the crucial role of memory in holding the self together and invoked consciousness as the unifying force that is coextensive with the person; as far back as this consciousness can be extended, so far reaches the identity of the person or self in question. Perhaps influenced by the historical associations of the term, Locke also emphasized the primarily forensic nature of the notion of personhood, his purpose being the establishment of a person’s identity across time, in order that the same individual could be held accountable for past actions in a court of law (2.27.26).

In spite of the different aims that inform the definitions offered by each philosopher, there is common ground to be found in their conceptions of the self, namely their reluctance to admit that the body might have some role in the constitution of the self and the concomitant insistence on dislodging it from the self’s essence. Following a line of reasoning closely resembling that of Augustine’s *cogito* arguments (*Trin.* 10.10.16), Descartes concludes that his essence is exhausted in his being a thinking non-extended thing from the fact that he has a clear and distinct idea of himself as a thinking non-extended thing; he considers the body as peripheral to—and detachable from—his core self on account of the fact that he has a clear and distinct idea of it as an extended non-thinking thing. In a similar vein, Locke entertains the conceptual possibility that certain human characteristics constitutive of personhood, most prominently ‘the use of Reason’ that renders one ‘subject to Law,’ might be found in other non-human forms of life. If, in addition, we turn to the Kantian conception of personhood, we see a kindred

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For a neurological perspective that discredits the existence of a unitary self as a special system that does not depend on general purpose information processing, see Gillihan and Farah (2005).

2 The origin of the Latin term *persona* might be Etruscan; the primary sense is “mask,” implying therefore a role or representation; cf. Ernout-Meillet (2001) 500. The anthropologist Marcel Mauss argued that the legal sense of the term derived from the initial notion of the mask, the transitional point being when sons acquired the right to represent themselves in legal activities, even when their fathers were still alive. See Mauss (1985). For an informative sketch of the history of the concept, see Poole (1996).


4 *Essay* 3.11.16 with Poole (1996) 41.
approach: to be a person, according to Kant, one has to be held morally accountable for their actions, a condition that is closely tied to the ability to act in accordance with practical reason.\(^5\)

The thinkers examined above jettison the body from the notions of selfhood and personhood, driving thereby a wedge between these concepts and that of human identity. The twin ideas that humans are only potentially persons and that persons are not necessarily humans are very much alive in modern philosophical literature.\(^6\) Notwithstanding the eminence of the views that emphasize the alleged non-physicality of persons, these conceptions of personhood and selfhood do not stand up to criticism, whereas the suggestion that the body may, in fact, constitute a necessary condition for personal identity gains in credence.\(^7\) Assuming this suggestion to be indispensable for any coherent theory of personal identity, I endorse it as a starting point for my examination of the dialogues that fall within the purview of this book. My reason for following this approach does not derive from a misplaced confidence on my behalf in its definitive accuracy but is rather rooted in its interpretive fertility. As a preliminary to my analysis, a brief survey of several passages from the Platonic corpus is in order. My purpose is twofold, namely to show that no single notion of selfhood is at play in the dialogues and that the body is not invariably steeped in negative connotations but is ascribed a positive status, especially in its role as a necessary condition for the acquisition of knowledge.\(^8\)

**Plato’s Incompatible Selves**

Granted that Plato would never have cast any discussion about these notions in modern terminology, it still remains an indisputable fact that there is substantial

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\(^6\) See, for example, the much-cited papers of Frankfurt (1971) 6 and Dennett (1975) 175. Wiggins (1987) 56 argues that one cannot delineate the content of the concept of personhood without relying on “the empirical notion of what a human being is” and specifies that the term “person” can be understood in three ways: namely, (1) as an object of neurophysiology, biology, and anatomy; (2) as subject of consciousness; (3) as the locus and origin of moral values and attributes.

\(^7\) Ayer (1936) 194; Merleau-Ponty (1962); Williams (1973a) 19–25, 64–81. See also Blatti and Snowdon (2016) 2–11.

overlap between modern discussions of the mind/body problem and the corresponding ancient debates on the differences between soul and body. Looking for ancient equivalents to the modern concept of the self in Plato’s dialogues should not, therefore, be considered methodologically suspect. Earlier studies have shown that the conceptions of selfhood and personhood found in Platonic works can hardly be brought together so as to form one coherent and unitary concept. Even though it might reasonably be argued that the modern concept of the person finds its analogue in the Platonic soul, the multivalence that lies at the heart of the latter confuses rather than clarifies the relation between these notions. The observation should be made, however, that both the Platonic soul and personhood are normative notions that involve the imperative to live according to an ideal. Despite this appeal to rise above the bodily and engage in a continuous

9 There is a perhaps insurmountable gap between what is designated by the terms “mind” and “soul,” the most conspicuous difference being that the latter was conceived of almost universally by Greek philosophers not as merely the locus of consciousness or intentionality but also as the principle of growth and movement; see Everson (1991). To argue, however, that the concept of personhood has no ancient equivalent is an oversimplification, especially in view of the fact that there is no consensus among philosophers as to the nature of personhood: one should rather specify which conception is absent (e.g. the Cartesian conception of the self, with its emphasis on the first-person perspective, might be said to be absent from ancient accounts of personhood, even though Augustine has offered arguments that purport to prove the existence of the self in the third person; see Hintikka (1962), who argues that the force of cogito arguments lies in their performative nature, hence formulation in the first person is essential for their effectivity). For the view that the body/soul problem did not exist in antiquity, see Matson (1966). Robinson (2000) provides a developmentalist overview of the various notions of selfhood vis-à-vis the mind/body problem in Plato. Ostenfeld (1987) examines the extent to which Plato can be seen as a property dualist. On the view that in Plato’s later works (mostly Phaedrus, Timaeus, Philebus, and Laws) the soul is much closer to the body than usually acknowledged, see the informative study of Carone (2005). For two complementary views on the notion of the self in antiquity, see Gill (2008) and Sorabji (2008). Gill (1996) is perhaps too strict in arguing that individualist/subjective conceptions of personality are absent from ancient accounts.

10 On the contrary, the extent to which ancient approaches to the problem provided a framework for the reemergence of the discussion in recent times should be given due consideration. For instance, Sorabji (2006) 212–29 offers convincing evidence for the view that the Cartesian conception of personhood resembles that of Augustine, who, in turn, was heavily influenced by Plotinus. See also Sorabji (2006) 94–111 on Locke’s debt to Lucretius for the idea that memory is necessarily a constituent of personhood.

11 Crombie (1962) 301 thinks that ψυχή in Plato is an incoherent notion because it is invested with clashing personalist and non-personalist functions.

12 For the relationship of Platonic souls to persons, see the illuminating study of Long (2005).

13 As Dennett (1975) 193 has emphasized, the concept of personhood is “inescapably normative,” which has the corollary that being a person is not a given but is something to be aspired
attempt to cultivate oneself, several passages throughout the corpus imply various conceptions of selfhood which conflict with one another. In this section, I briefly examine the notions of selfhood and personhood found in the *Theaetetus*, the *Alcibiades I*, the *Laws*, and the *Symposium*. My analysis reveals that these dialogues include at least two conceptions of selfhood that are so divergent as to be irreconcilable.

In the *Theaetetus*, for example, Socrates advances a conception of the self that resembles the so-called bundle theory, according to which there is nothing over and above the bundle of individual features: the self just is their sum. Socrates traces the origins of this account to a host of ancient philosophers and poets alike, with the names of Protagoras and Heraclitus receiving particular attention: just as everything else in the universe, the self is in a state of permanent flux, hence it is futile to search for any principle that unifies the individual (152c–153d). Toward the end of the dialogue, Socrates proposes the possibility that what differentiates individuals is a list of their distinct features (209b–c): Socrates is thus different from Theaetetus because of this particular snubness of nose. To be sure, the bundle conception of the self is only introduced to be refuted and thus to act as a foil for the view favored by Socrates, namely that there must be a unifying and unified locus of experience that processes and interprets the sensual data, so that it would be more accurate to say that one perceives through rather than with the sense organs: somewhat aporetically, Socrates proposes the term ψυχή to stand for this unifying principle (184c–d).

Whereas Socrates’ rebuttal of the bundle theory and his endorsement of the view that experience must be unified invoke the familiar doctrine that the self is essentially the soul, the idea should be resisted that the entire Platonic corpus heralds such a uniform notion of selfhood. Indeed, both the *Alcibiades I* and the...
Laws seem to leave little wiggle room for debate: there is hardly any doubt that in these dialogues the self is equated with the rational soul \((\text{Alc. I 133c4–6; Lg. 959a6–7})\).\(^\text{16}\) In addition, when, toward the end of the \textit{Phaedo}, Crito asks Socrates how he wants to be buried, Socrates replies, somewhat playfully, that they might bury him however they wish provided that he does not escape them, the implication being that he is not to be identified with his body \((\text{Phd. 115c3–d6})\).\(^\text{17}\) Despite the congruence of these texts, there are passages that run counter to the idea of a single notion of selfhood that permeates the Platonic corpus, one conspicuous example being the conception of selfhood forwarded by Diotima in the \textit{Symposium}: starting from the premise that reproduction is the means through which mortal nature shares in immortality,\(^\text{18}\) she develops an account according to which each and every animal is said to be “one and the same,” even though every part of its body is constantly renewed \((207d2–e1)\). The same thing, Diotima goes on, applies equally to matters of the soul: all the constituents of inner life (customs, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears) are subject to continuous alteration \((207e1–5)\). Even knowledge cannot secure identity, for it is always replenished as the very nature of learning suggests: pieces of knowledge that slip from memory are constantly replaced with new ones through study \((207e1–208a7)\).

Given that the identification of the self with the soul is buttressed by the implicit conviction that mental entities are unalterable, Diotima’s account of inner events as susceptible to change renders untenable the assumption that a doctrine about the self operates univocally throughout Plato’s works.

It should be clear by now that there is an irresolvable tension between the various notions of selfhood as presented in different dialogues, a tension that should neither be predicated on Plato’s nebulous logic nor be explained away as a byproduct of the development of Plato’s thought. Instead, consideration of

\(^\text{16}\) For \textit{Alcibiades I}, see Allen (1962); Johnson (1999); Altman (2017). It should be noted, though, that Socrates stresses the importance of the social conditions of self-knowledge, when he compares the eye that sees itself in another eye with the soul that knows itself through inspecting another soul \((133b2–10)\). Thus construed, the notion of selfhood at play in \textit{Alcibiades I} acquires a relational aspect that is customarily neglected. On the modern idea of “self as performance,” see Goffman (1956).

\(^\text{17}\) Crito’s question must be understood within the conventional context which implies a somewhat loose, nonetheless existing, identification of the self with the body, such as the one we find in the \textit{Iliad}, when dead Patroclus’ wraith hovers over sleeping Achilles and requests that he, i.e. Patroclus’ corpse, be buried \((θάπτε με ὅττι τάχιστα πύλας Ἀΐδαο περήσω, 23.71)\). See Long (2015) 18.

\(^\text{18}\) The sentiment expressed at \textit{Smp. 207d–208b} is so forceful in its denial of immortality that causes occasional discomfort among commentators; see, e.g., Crombie (1962) 363, who argues that it should “either be explained away or regarded as unique.”
these contradictory conceptions allows the drawing of certain inferences as to why Plato may have chosen to advance this rather than that conception of the self in each case: as I hope to make evident in the chapters that follow, the literary purposes of each dialogue inform the appearance of certain aspects of the soul, which in turn lay the emphasis on corresponding senses of the self and the person that are seamlessly tied to the overall context.

**Evaluation of the Body in Plato’s Dialogues**

The tendency to dissociate the essence of persons from biological organisms partially accounts for the current trend to examine Plato’s dialogues under the assumption that the person and the “true self” are equivalent to the ψυχή or its rational part. Unless, however, we take into account the preponderant tendency in Platonic interpretation to view the body as something inherently despicable, we get only half the picture; if ψυχή is a viable candidate for the allegedly immaterial persons, this is equally owed to the establishment as the hallmark of Platonism of certain somatophobic sentiments that are found in some dialogues. Even the *Gorgias*, a dialogue not as theory-driven as some later ones, alludes to negative characterizations of the body, as when, for example, Socrates mentions

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19 Examples abound: Renehan (1979) 279: “For him [Plato] man himself (αὐτός) was nothing other than the discarnate soul.” Long (2005) 174: “In this essay I want to approach the Platonic psyche as if it were primarily intended to elucidate what we today understand by the concept of a person.” Sorabji (2006) 34: “Plato held … that the true self is the reason or intellect.”

20 Similar to the notion of self, the term “body” proves equally resistant to definition: see Van Inwagen (1980), who argues for the abandonment of its technical use. For the opposite view, see Williams (1993) 26. For the history of the concept, see Joyce (2005) and Strathern and Lambek (1998) 1–25. The once influential proposition of Snell (1953) that, parallel to the absence of a unified notion of the self, there was no Homeric notion of an alive, unitary body has now been almost universally abandoned; detailed criticism in Williams (1993) 21–49. On the multiple meanings of “body” in Homer, see Vivante (1955). Renehan (1979) argues, definitively in my view, that σῶμα does not designate solely the corpse but is used also for the living body. Claus (1981) argues that the body, especially through medical analogies, was a catalyst in the development of the notion of ψυχή. On the development of the concept of the body in antiquity, see Holmes (2010) 5–9, 29–37. For an account of the body in the Hippocratic corpus, see Holmes (2018). As for the meaning of σῶμα in Plato, it is not necessarily tied to the definition as three-dimensional magnitude we find in the *Timaeus* (32a–c, 53c5–6): given that the Homeric notion of death as separation of body and soul is operative in the background of the *Phaedo*, it makes sense to consider the body in this dialogue as opposite to the soul. Significantly, σῶμα does not refer to non-human bodies in the *Phaedo*; see Egers Lan (1995) 109. The *Republic*, on the other hand, incorporates certain bodily functions in the appetitive soul.
the view that the body might in fact be our tomb (Grg. 493a). Most conspicuous in this regard is the take-away message that is easily extracted from a superficial reading of the Phaedo, namely that the body is repulsive because it constitutes a hindrance to knowledge (65a10: ἐμπόδιον).

Admittedly, there is something prima facie abhorrent about the function of the body in the aforementioned dialogues, especially the Phaedo, but it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the generalization according to which Plato denigrates the body is anchored on a rather specific interpretation of the passages under discussion. As Zoller has shown in her recent book, to think of Plato as an austere dualist who denounces the physical in its entirety is to mistake Plato for Plotinus. Rooted in the belief that matter is the cause of evil, the Neoplatonist stance against the body and all things physical is one of sheer aversion: one need look no further than Plotinus, the originator of Neoplatonist interpretation, who, according to Porphyry’s biography, seemed ashamed to be in a body (VP 1.1–2). In fact, the idiosyncrasy of the Neoplatonist position becomes most evident when we compare Plotinus’ description of the ascent to the Good with the preliminary steps of the scala amoris as expounded by Diotima in the Symposium: according to Plotinus, the ascent to the Good and the One can be achieved only by the philosophical man who despises physical beauty and thus flees upward, until he reaches beauty in itself (5.9.2). On the contrary, the attitude toward physical love that we find in Diotima’s speech is alive to the necessary role the body plays in triggering the expansion of erōs so as to embrace non-physical beauty (Smp. 210a4–b6). In fact, Diotima’s account veers off from the standard identification of the self with the soul, which rests tacitly on the alleged immortality of the soul: not only does she nowhere declare the soul to be immortal, but she advances a type of immortality that is predicated on biological procreation, which is “the way in which what is mortal, such as the body and everything else, partakes of immortality” (208b2–4).23

22 Friedländer (1969) 56: “No one may omit these preliminary stages, beyond which leads the soul’s path to beauty and upward. Plotinos no longer recognizes these stages.” Fierro (2013) 32: “Physical erōs is important as a necessary stage to start the process and so complete rejection of it is not appropriate; rather, it should be incorporated in a transcendental perspective.”
23 Dover (1980) 149 astutely remarks that the phrase “and everything else” is substituted for the expected “and soul.” Similar sentiments are expressed at Lg. 721b–d and Ti. 90c3. Cf. Hackforth (1950).
Let us round off this section with a few parallels from the Platonic corpus that attest to a positive evaluation of the body and the senses. Despite the Phaedo's ostensibly hostile stance toward the body, the Recollection Argument leaves room for assigning to sensory experience a somewhat more integral role than usually acknowledged. The clearest indication of this comes at Phd. 75a5–8, where we learn that the body is indispensable for recollecting the Forms: we first wonder about, say, the concept of equality through seeing sensible things that seem equal. The senses in this instance function in precisely the same way as the thought stimulators of Republic Book 7: there are some cases, Socrates argues there, in which sense perception itself suffices to pass adequate judgments about phenomena and thus does not incite the involvement of reason: for example, when one looks at one's own fingers, the senses report accurately about reality by properly categorizing the inspected items as fingers (523c11–d6). When it comes to certain properties, however, the senses offer conflicting accounts because the same thing appears to be both large and small, thick and thin, hard and soft, and so forth (523e3–524a4). In these cases, Socrates continues, the senses lead the soul to a state of aporia and summon reason to resolve the issue (524a6–b5). Given that elsewhere in Plato aporia and wonder mark the beginnings of philosophy, the view that Plato despises the body fundamentally and without qualification loses in credibility. If anything, there is sufficient evidence to warrant the inference that the first step in the endeavor to acquire knowledge is inextricably tied to the body and the ambiguities it helps give rise to.

In the Timaeus bodily senses are regarded as indispensable to our understanding of the universe. The cosmological perspective of the dialogue accords the human body certain positive functions in the teleologically ordered universe: despite its shortcomings, the body is presented as a vehicle for the attainment and advancement of intelligent activity (ὄχημα: 69c7). Significantly, in a passage that offers a rather favorable assessment of the sense of sight (47a1–c4), Plato has Timaeus explain that without it no one would be able to observe the sun, which is the light of the universe placed there by god in order to shine and lead the animals for which it was appropriate to grasp the concept of number. More specifically, the sun is the cause of the “wisest revolution,” i.e. the period of a single circling of a night-and-day, which corresponds to a single revolution

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24 See the analysis of Fierro (2013), who argues that the two competing conceptions of the body found in the Phaedrus (body as hindrance as opposed to body as instrument for knowledge) can be reconciled.
of the circle of the Same and is the prime example of the number “one” in the cosmos (39c1–2: ἡ τῆς μιᾶς καὶ φρονιμωτάτης κυκλήσεως περίοδος). It is through the senses, therefore, that human beings acquire the concept of oneness as well as the ability to count, something which leads to that godly gift of unsurpassed value, namely philosophy.

Overview of the Chapters

In Chapter 1, I focus on the Phaedo, which argues more directly and forcefully than any other Platonic work for the existence of an immaterial, incomposite, eternal, and essentially rational soul that is separated from the body at the time of death. Given the significance of the setting for this particular dialogue, which presents Socrates in the final moments before his execution, I investigate whether this work intentionally downplays the connection of the physical body to the self, so as to make post mortem survival seem possible: four intricate arguments are presented to support the thesis that the soul does not perish along with the body but goes on to lead an independent existence, and in at least one passage Socrates seems to advance the view that the rational soul should be regarded as identical to the self. I shift the focus to the frames surrounding the arguments, which themselves express doubts concerning the validity of the inferences made within them, and suggest that Socrates intends the immortality of the soul, and thus of the self, to be treated in a rather skeptical way: I propose that Socrates’ confidence in the face of death does not stem from exact knowledge about the state of affairs that obtains posthumously but from his expectation (ἐλπίς) about post mortem survival, which is tied to his embodied condition.27 Additionally, I contend that Socrates assumes the validity of the thesis that the soul is immortal mostly because of its indispensability for establishing the conclusion that pure knowledge is possible. Lastly, I trace a connection between the realization that the validity of this assumption is unverifiable and the subsequent impossibility of the absolute eradication of the fear of death: insofar as it rests on hypothetical assumptions, the view that knowledge is possible resembles mythical discourse and magical spells and is, as such, recommended by Socrates as a remedy to cure the irrational fears of the “inner child,” i.e. the part of ourselves that is impervious to reason and, therefore, cannot acknowledge the necessarily axiomatic na-

27 My analysis of the Phaedo owes much to Burger (1984); Roochnik (2008); Peterson (2011); Berger (2015).
ture of scientific discourse. Overall, my analysis of the *Phaedo* reveals the capacity of soul as intellectual self for change and psychological growth inasmuch as the hypotheses one employs to attain understanding are themselves alterable.

In Chapter 2, I turn to the more nuanced concept of the soul found in the *Republic*. Instead of an incomposite, essentially rational soul, the *Republic* offers an account according to which the soul is partitioned into reason, emotion, and appetite. The non-rational drives that were attributed to the body in the *Phaedo* are now incorporated into the soul, and the self—so it is usually argued—corresponds to the rational part thereof. My aim is to show that this identification is inaccurate on the grounds that the *Republic* includes evidence suggesting that the self is to be identified with the entire soul. My argument comes in two stages. First, I show that, contrary to the interpretation put forward by Bobonich (2002) and Lorenz (2006), tripartition of the soul was never intended in the strong sense of distinguishing between different agents within the soul: indeed, Plato has Socrates speak in Book 4 as if there were three independent sources of motivation within the soul. Adducing as parallel a crucial passage of Book 5, I contend that Plato’s use of such metaphors should not be taken as indication that the soul is partitioned in a way analogous to the partitioning of a physical entity. I examine the figurative language employed to describe tripartition, and I conclude that it should be understood as conceptual division. In the second part of my argument, I follow the analysis of Gill (1996) on the educational program of the *Republic* in order to argue that the lower parts of the soul are indispensable to the unification of the tripartite soul: bringing to light the division of bodily virtue into natural and man-made, of which the former is a prerequisite for the latter, I argue that this division serves as a model for a corresponding distinction between natural and technical virtue. Next, I examine how the *Republic*’s earlier educational stage instills pre-reflective virtue into the lower parts of the soul and explain how the development of such a pre-reflectively virtuous disposition is a necessary condition for the emergence of full-fledged virtue. Finally, I discuss the unitary nature of the entities that populate Plato’s intelligible realm and argue that the advanced education of the curriculum of Book 7 leads to the unification of the self through the principle of assimilation, which specifies that the learner is assimilated to the object of learning.

Chapter 3 focuses on the *Timaeus* and aims at establishing the thesis that the world soul and its body are made out of the same components. I begin by examining the role of Necessity in the creation of the cosmos and showing that it still exerts its influence even after the arrangement of primordial chaos into an organized whole. Next, I bring out its opposing functions as cause of permanence and principle of differentiation, and I argue that these two functions, understood as
matter and space respectively, correspond to the notions of Sameness and Difference, which are constituents of the world soul and, subsequently, of each individual human soul. Adducing parallels from the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides*, I explain that Difference is the most peculiar of the constituents of the soul because it is bound by its own nature to generate an indeterminate multiplicity. Finally, building on the analysis of Sayre (2005), I employ Aristotle’s description of Plato’s account of the soul in *De Anima* and *Metaphysics* to argue that the soul’s ability for cognition and interaction with the visible world may ultimately go back to the presence of the Receptacle in it: Aristotle relates that Plato fashions both the soul and all the sensibles out of the elements, which are correlated with the principles of the Dyad and the One. If we further consider Aristotle’s comment that Plato’s soul is crafted on the basis of the blind mechanism of attraction that prevailed in the precosmos and was specifically attributed to the Receptacle, then we may have good reason to think that the soul’s ability to interact with the perceptible world relies on their affinity.