

Proclus and the Conjunction of Soul and Body

Plato in the *Timaeus* has the Demiurge generate the rational soul and then hand on the rest of construction of the human being to the younger gods (*Tim.* 41cd). The gods go about their work, taking the rational soul from the Demiurge and fashioning composite human beings, joining their rational souls to the lower souls and to the body (42e-44c). This process involves borrowing amounts of the four elements to make the human body and forming them into a unity by welding the parts "with numerous rivets, invisible because of their smallness" (43a) and placing the circuits of the same and the different (that make up the rational soul) into this newly hobbled-together body. The rational soul is at birth thrown into confusion by the body, but can—in time—bring the compound subject into harmony and can lead a good, moral life (44a-c).

The Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus (412-485 C.E.), in his commentary to the *Timaeus*, investigates this compound of soul and body. His discussion is complicated by the Neoplatonic proliferation of psychic entities: the so-called "vehicle" (a quasi-corporeal body) housing the rational and irrational souls, along with the inclusion of the Aristotelian nutritive, perceptive, imaginative, and desiderative souls. Nonetheless, Proclus argues that the compound of soul and body can lead with proper care to a unified human being, just as Plato would have wished (III.320.10-356.28). In this paper I wish to examine Proclus' method and argumentation to see how he reaches his conclusion and what this imports for the Neoplatonic estimation of the worth of the body.

Proclus begins by distinguishing two demiurgies: that of the rational soul by the Demiurge and that of the lower soul, vehicle, and bodies by the visible gods. The former is intelligible and unified and the latter based in generation and time and therefore complex. Nonetheless, the visible gods seek to harmonize these elements, creating a unity of sorts. Thus,

the elements are bonded by the "numerous rivets," which he explains as nails that through fusion bond the body. This is, he says, a process similar to smelting metals, the nails and the body being heated and fused into the best compound possible for receiving the incorporeal soul-complex (321.12-322.17). Into this compound they insert the rational soul, which consists of the two Circles of the Same and Different. As in the *Timaeus*, the initial insertion leads the newborn into confusion and uproar, but for Proclus the eternal mathematical proportions that make up the Circuit of the Different allow the revolution to be controlled by the Circuit of the Same. The body is an impediment but can be conquered and controlled (349.21-350.8). Thus, the body becomes an instrument of the soul and aids in the soul's attainment of wisdom (351.19-353.4).

Although the Greek text breaks off before the discussion of the body proper begins, there is a discussion of the interrelation of soul and body preserved in a short Arabic version of the commentary. Here Proclus (as Plato before him) places more stress on the need for the rational soul to dominate the lower powers of the soul. Although there is still stress on the greater importance of the rational soul, there is also a concomitant concern for the irrational parts of the soul. Just as the body cannot be neglected, so too these parts may not be ignored without causing disruption to the human being. In this way Proclus endorses the more positive view of the body and the irrational soul that Plato gives in the *Timaeus*.