

Plotinus and the Aristotelian Hyломorphic Body: Making Room in Entelechy for the Soul as Substantial Form¹

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In *Ennead* 4.7.8(5) Plotinus offers a refutation of the theory that soul is entelechy.² Entelechism, as he describes it, defines soul as the form (εἶδος) of body, specifically “a natural body, equipped with organs, potentially possessed of life.”³ This is none other than the position famously espoused by Aristotle in *De Anima* II 1. There the soul is defined as “the first entelechy of a natural body potentially possessed of life—i.e., a body equipped with organs.”⁴ This position, elucidated in his well-known treatise on the soul, is dismissed by Plotinus in a sequence of terse criticisms for failing to properly account for soul or adequately describe its nature. Situated within a broader confrontation with materialist notions of the soul, the Peripatetic doctrine is rejected for making the soul wholly dependent upon body for its existence. Plotinus, who to a large extent preserves the Platonic independence and separability of soul, cannot accept such a reduction. Soul is for him itself an essence, absolutely self-subsisting and immortal. Yet Plotinus’s rejection of entelechism should not be seen as a wholesale repudiation of Aristotelian hyломorphism, even as regards the soul. As is clear from the totality of Plotinus’s writings, the form-matter dynamic is not a paradigm which the Neoplatonist rejects, and, even in understanding the soul, hyломorphism is not for him entirely irrelevant or problematic. While for Plotinus the soul could never be defined, in itself, as entelechy, yet for him the psychosomatic composite does admit of a certain hyломorphic character so that soul indeed informs body and supplies its entelechy. As such, the arguments against entelechism

1. This paper began as a seminar project under the direction of Professor Gary Gurtler, SJ, to whose instruction, guidance, and feedback it is greatly indebted.

2. τὸ δὲ τῆς ἐντελεχείας ὃδ’ ἂν τις ἐπισκέψαιτο, πῶς περὶ ψυχῆς λέγεται (lines 1–2; ed. P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera* II: *Enneades* IV–V [Brussels: L’Éditions Universelles, S.A., 1959], 208). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

3. Lines 4–5 (Henry and Schwyzer, 208).

4. 412a 28–30.

serve a very precise function and should in no way be misread as a violent departure from Aristotle. Rather, they serve to qualify the Peripatetic position and provide a particular synthesis of the Stagirite's teaching with the classic doctrines of the Platonists. When seeking to know what soul is, its reduction to entelechy is insufficient. Yet when seeking to understand the animation of the body, Plotinus himself does not rescind from an Aristotelian perspective.

THE SOUL AS ENTELECHY

Throughout the greater part of this treatise "On the Immortality of the Soul" Plotinus makes it clear that his purpose is to investigate, especially by comparison with other theories, precisely how the soul exists (τὸ εἶναι ἔχει).⁵ "What nature does it have?"⁶ "What is its essence?"⁷ Entelechism (τὸ τῆς ἐντελεχείας) constitutes in this investigation an avenue to be considered.⁸ After refuting Stoic, Epicurean, and Pythagorean definitions, Plotinus examines this view, whose author he does not name. The anonymous school (φασιν) to which this position belongs posits that soul "has the place of form in the composite."⁹ Plotinus understands by this that soul is supposed to have its existence "by being the form of something."¹⁰ Rather than existing of itself (παρ' αὐτῆς),¹¹ entelechism claims that soul "derives its existence from its foundation in body."¹²

Such a description is not unjust to the stated claims of Aristotle. In *De Anima* II 1 he explicitly purports to give a general definition of the soul.¹³ And soul is here defined as nothing other than entelechy. As essence (οὐσία) in the sense of definition (λόγος), soul informs body, making it what it is.¹⁴ It is body's actuality in the sense of faculty or possession (ὡς ἐπιστήμη) rather than activity or use (ὡς τὸ θεωρεῖν).¹⁵ Without soul, body is only equivocally body, and by actualizing body, soul constitutes its form.¹⁶ Organ-clad, natural bodies are thus substances (οὐσίαι) insofar as they admit of form and mat-

5. 4.7.8(5), line 40 (Henry and Schwyzer, 212).

6. 4.7.2, line 1 (Henry and Schwyzer, 178).

7. 4.7.8(5), line 43 (Henry and Schwyzer, 212).

8. *Ibid.*, line 1 (Henry and Schwyzer, 208).

9. *Ibid.*, lines 2–3 (Henry and Schwyzer, 208).

10. τῷ εἶδος εἶναι τις (ibid., line 40; Henry and Schwyzer, 212).

11. 4.7.9, line 1 (Henry and Schwyzer, 213); cf. line 22.

12. παρὰ τὸ ἐν σώματι ἰδρῦσθαι τὸ εἶναι λαμβάνουσα (ibid., line 41; Henry and Schwyzer, 212; trans. Armstrong, *Enneads*, Loeb Classical Library 443 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984], 377).

13. καθόλου μὲν οὖν εἴρηται τί ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχὴ (412b 10; ed. Hett, Loeb Classical Library 288 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936; reprinted 1957], 68).

14. οὐσία γὰρ ἢ κατὰ τὸν λόγον (412b 10; Hett, 68–70).

15. 412a 23–24 (Hett, 68).

16. *Ibid.* 20–21 (Hett, 68–70).

ter.¹⁷ The substrate (ὑποκείμενον), somewhat equivocally sharing the name of body on account of a terminological deficit, thus constitutes the matter. Defined in this way, it is clear that soul cannot but derive its existence from its foundation in body; both pre-existence and immortality are thus excluded as possibilities, as body and soul can be separated only in thought.¹⁸

Plotinus supplies an analogy for this inseparable (ἀχώριστος)¹⁹ entelechy which is not found in *De Anima*, but which is perfectly Aristotelian in character. Soul is compared to the form (μορφή) of a statue, whose matter is its bronze. As form is worked into (παραβέβληται) its substrate, complementing it (ὁμοίωται) for the realization of the substance, so soul constitutes, together with body, the living organism.²⁰ This image will serve as the basis for Plotinus's first critique of entelechism. Yet it must be asked whether he has not dramatically simplified Aristotle's meaning by his analogy and thereby misrepresented the Peripatetic position from the start. Shape (μορφή), while indeed an instance of entelechy in relation to the statue, no doubt functions differently from a vivifying principle. Indeed, this and other points in his argumentation have led some scholars to conclude that Plotinus is guilty of misinterpreting, or even distorting, Aristotle's complex theory.

As we have seen, Aristotle does not himself, aside from the comparison with the wax,²¹ liken the body-soul relationship to the hylomorphism of inanimate objects. He uses, rather, dynamic, albeit hypothetical, analogues. The eye, for example, were it a living thing, would be actualized by its faculty of sight. Yet this does not account for the eye's physical structure. Nor does Aristotle ever speak of soul as form in the sense of shape. C.J. O'Neill rightly asks whether it was "Aristotle's intention to reduce [soul] to mere figure?"²² And Christian Tornau, for this reason, sees in Plotinus's analogy a

17. Ibid. 19–20 (Hett, 66–68). Cf. E. Hartman, *Substance, Body, and Soul: Aristotelian Investigations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 99–100: "The body is strictly speaking not matter, since every real body is alive But Aristotle does frequently, and confusingly, treat the body as matter."

18. οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ψυχὴ χωριστὴ τοῦ σώματος (413a 4; Hett, 72). Aristotle states that it is no more necessary to ask whether body and soul are one than it is to ask whether wax and its impression are one (412b 6–7; Hett, 68). Cf. Hartman, *Substance, Body, and Soul*, 88: "He stretches the form-matter relation to a point at which form and matter are logically inextricable; but that will appear an inconvenience rather than a catastrophe to one who understands Aristotle's views about identity, and in particular about the accidental identity with itself of an item as introduced under multiple logically independent descriptions." See, also, *ibid.*, 134.

19. 4.7.8(5), lines 22, 27, 33 (Henry and Schwyzer, 210, 212).

20. *Ibid.*, lines 5–6 (Henry and Schwyzer, 208). Cf. MacKenna, trans., *Enneads* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 352.

21. See note 18 above.

22. C.J. O'Neill, "Plotinus as Critic of the Aristotelian Soul," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 23 (1949): 158.

minimization of entelechy “to the idea that soul is body’s immanent form.”²³

Yet Tornau does not offer an alternative understanding of entelechism as applied to soul which would render Plotinus’s analogy unjust. While soul cannot obviously be reduced to shape, it is not clear that something transcending immanent form can be found in Aristotle’s theory, although this will appear differently in each substance depending upon its level of complexity. O’Neill, for one, is satisfied with Aristotle’s generality in speaking of form to exonerate Plotinus. “Often enough,” he says, Aristotle “identifies or tends to fuse *species et figura*. Therefore one can hardly claim that Plotinus is distorting Aristotle’s teaching.”²⁴ Indeed, as E. Hartman has pointed out, it must be remembered that Aristotle is speaking of soul as the entelechy of body *qua* substance (elsewhere spoken of more generally as τὸ ζῶον),²⁵ and not of body *qua* matter.²⁶ Even bronze, it will be remembered, has a structure (molecular or otherwise) which could likewise be spoken of as shape or form. Yet this is to be distinguished from the form of the composite. Substrates, too, have a configuration which is important to the particular synthesis which it constitutes, but which is not determined by the form of the whole. Body, insofar as it constitutes the matter, may therefore consist of particular conditions which are not dependent upon the form with which it combines. Plotinus is therefore justified in likening soul to the shape of a statue. For Aristotle, without animation there is no body, anymore than without definition bronze can be called an effigy.

THE DIVISIBILITY OF THE ENTELECHY SOUL

This analogy is used by Plotinus to expose what he sees as a principal and problematic consequence of entelechism: the divisibility of soul. Entelechy, being inextricably bound to its matter, would admit of division along with the corporeal elements which it informs. Just as a statue’s shape departs along with its lopped-off segments, so “the soul, when the body is sundered, would be divided along with it (συνμερίζεσθαι). And when any portion is cut off, a piece of soul would be with the severed portion.”²⁷ Tornau claims that for Plotinus both immanent form and quality “are spatially divided in the

23. Christian Tornau, “Plotinus’ Criticism of Aristotelian Entelechism in *Enn.* IV 7 [2].8/5.25–50” in *Studi Sull’ Anima in Plotino*, ed. R. Chiaradonna (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2005), 153.

24. O’Neill, *Op. cit.*, 158. Tornau likewise partially concedes this point. He says that Plotinus gives a “crude and materialistic account of Aristotle’s theory that may indeed owe more to Alexander or contemporary Peripateticism than to Aristotle himself (though Aristotle is rather obscure on this point)” (*Op. cit.*, 166).

25. *De Anima* II 1, 413a 3–4.

26. See Hartman, *Substance, Body, and Soul*, 100–01.

27. 4.7.8(5), lines 7–9 (Henry and Schwyzer, 208–10).

same way as the body they belong to.”²⁸ What is more, for Tornau Plotinus does not ultimately distinguish between form and quality.²⁹ Both are *παῖθαι*: inherent conditions of body rather than subsisting realities.³⁰ Just as a body’s parts retain their qualities when they are separated, so they retain their form.

O’Neill defends the legitimacy of such an argument.³¹ Yet Plotinus’s critique clashes rather starkly with the Aristotelian exposition of entelechy, as O’Neill himself notes. Form, for Aristotle, is a thing’s defining essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*). It is what renders it the very thing that it is (i.e., its *λόγος*).³² (The eye, for instance, in the aforementioned example, is what it is by virtue of its sight.) Such a principle is, by necessity, pervasive, unified, and indivisible. So, in the reality described by Aristotle, a member divorced from the body is no longer what it was and forfeits all claim to the form. The severed hand cannot be called a hand, and so cannot be said to take “a piece of soul” along with it. The common identification of living and dead members is thus an equivocation.³³

The doctrine of entelechy as defining essence, though, does not deter O’Neill, and it is not clear that it would deter Plotinus. O’Neill points out that Aristotle himself ties soul to body in an absolute way, going so far as to identify some parts of the soul with the entelechy of their corresponding organs.³⁴ Aristotle, it must be remembered, is not here concerned with the hypostatization of soul. Rather, he is interested in precisely the opposite.³⁵ And this crucial difference between Plotinus and Aristotle, at least in these sections, is sufficient to explain the unique insight offered by the Neoplatonist. For Aristotle, form is dispensable. Because it does not constitute an entity in itself, soul as entelechy can be lost along with the dissolution of the body. In this sense there can be, for him, no “piece of soul.” The inseparability of soul is necessarily the indivisibility of soul, and Plotinus’s critique, that soul is divided along with body would seem to miss this point. Yet it would be a

28. “Plotinus’ Criticism of Aristotelian Entelechism,” 153.

29. *Ibid.*, 163 n. 33.

30. *Ibid.*, 173. See *Ennead* 4.7.8(5), line 44.

31. O’Neill, “Plotinus as Critic of the Aristotelian Soul,” 158. He notes that Aristotle makes no provision in his language for a differentiation between the higher kinds of entelechy and static forms which remains with the divisions of inanimate objects. I would argue that Aristotle’s distinction between natural and inorganic bodies suffices to establish a distinction between stable and transient entelechy (see, e.g., his concession in the axe analogy: 412b 15–18).

32. Cf. *ibid.* II 1, 412b 11.

33. *Op. cit.*, p. 158. See *De Anima* II 1, 413a 6–7.

34. See *De Anima* II 1, 412b 15. Plotinus seems to allude to this in *Ennead* 4.3.3, line 15.

35. Hartman, *Substance, Body, and Soul*, 98: “Aristotle wants to reduce the status of the soul from independent entity to form of a substance; so he finds himself saddled with a separate noun where there is no separate entity for it to denote, and therefore with the only form in his ontology that has its own name.

mistake to understand Plotinus's "piece of soul" as focusing on an entelechy which remains with the severed portion. Plotinus, concerned as he is with the integrity of soul as an essence, is not thinking of the form as it might remain in the member. Rather, his thought is for the form of the unified composite, sensitive as he is to how entelechy is affected by the divisibility of matter. The form of Hera's bronze likeness, to use O'Neill's image, shapes every part of the statue, and the entelechy of the entire work is bound up with each of its parts: head, arms, legs, etc. To remove any of these sections is to alter the form. And in this sense can one rightly speak of a "piece" of entelechy being divided along with its matter. In the living body, the organs and members carry the soul, or at least parts thereof, as their entelechy. To subtract any portion of that body would therefore remove the corresponding "piece of soul." While Aristotle would not call this separation, since the particular entelechy would in that case cease to exist, Plotinus is not completely unfair to the Peripatetic doctrine in calling it division, since what is affected is the entelechy as much as the substrate.³⁶

It is clear, for this reason, that Tornau's characterization is not entirely valid: Plotinus does not, in fact, equate form with quality. While in his view an entelechy soul would indeed suffer (*πάσχειν*) along with body, yet it is plain that quality does not do so, at least not in the same way. Accidents, as Plotinus notes, do not suffer division. In *Ennead* 4.3.2 he makes this clear using the example of colour.³⁷ Attempting to elucidate the sense in which individual souls are called parts, he offers a clarification of "part" as it refers to bodies. It is here that Plotinus's consistency in analyzing hylomorphism is manifested. Whereas he makes no mention of entelechy enduring in a severed portion of body, yet he is explicit that colour belongs not to the whole, but to the part. "The whiteness in the portion of milk is not the whiteness of all the milk. Rather, it is the whiteness of a portion, without however being a portion of whiteness."³⁸ The same statue of Hera, reduced to its torso, then, would retain its colour perfectly, losing none of it by segmentation alone. Form, on the other hand, is substantially modified by precisely such alteration of its matter. The very reference to divisibility thus shows that Plotinus himself distinguishes as part of his argumentation between essential form and accidental quality.

36. Cf. H.J. Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology: His Doctrines of the Embodied Soul* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 13: "The entelechy of a man who had lost his legs in an accident would be different from that of a normal man."

37. Lines 15–20.

38. 4.3.2, lines 16–19 (Henry and Schwyzer, 14).

SLEEP AND ACTUALITY

Plotinus's next argument likewise hinges on Aristotle's restriction of soul to its corporeal localization.³⁹ Problems arise for Plotinus "if entelechy must be rooted (προσφυᾷ) where it is." The consequence of this is the impossibility of the withdrawal (ἀναχώρησις) of the soul from body in sleep.⁴⁰ G. Verbeke connects this "retreat" of the soul with the transcendence of the composite which is Plotinus's ultimate goal. The true self is the soul unencumbered by body. As such, sleep constitutes a potent release from the constraints of embodiment. He connects this to the Platonic doctrine of sleep as a place of freedom from rational activity, and therefore an arena of divination and prophetic activity and contemplation.⁴¹ Thus, what is generally seen as a withdrawal is contrasted with strict inseparability, forming a counterpoint to the entelechism postulated by Aristotle.

Verbeke notes that this criticism of Plotinus does not take Aristotle's theory of sleep into account. Aristotle, he says, would "not accept Plotinus's explanation of sleep."⁴² The Stagirite's physiological and psychological explanations, as well as his treatment of divination, are presented by Verbeke as not inconsistent with his teaching on the inseparability of soul. The intellect, he says, is indeed freed by sleep. And Aristotle himself intimates that intellect transcends the body not only in sleep, but even more generally: "nothing prevents some parts from being separated from body, since they are not the entelechies of any body."⁴³ In this he accords, to a great extent, with the Platonic doctrine as described by Verbeke, including its potential repose from rational activity (seen as linear, discursive reasoning) in sleep.

But this is far from sufficient in order to satisfy Plotinus's critique. One might rightly wonder what Aristotle means by departing so drastically from his "general account of soul."⁴⁴ But it is not important here to reconcile this well-known aspect of Aristotle's teaching with his overall doctrine. What matters for Plotinus is that soul defined as entelechy, regardless of the intellect's relative liberty during slumber, is stuck in the body which it informs, precisely as its form. To return to Aristotle's image of the eye: if soul, as eyesight, is

39. *De Anima* II 1, 413a 4–8: "It is perfectly clear that neither the soul, nor any of its parts (if it should have them), is separable. For sometimes the entelechy belongs to the very parts" (Hett, 72).

40. *Ennead* 4.7.8(5), lines 9–10 (Henry and Schwyzer, 210).

41. G. Verbeke, "Les Critiques de Plotin contre l'entéléchisme d'Aristote," in *Philomathes: Studies and Essays in the Humanities in Memory of Philip Merlan* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 206. O'Neill, too, identifies in this argument an appeal to the universal perceptions of sleep and dreaming in the Greek world ("Plotinus as Critic of the Aristotelian Soul," 159).

42. G. Verbeke, "Les Critiques de Plotin," 207.

43. *De Anima* II 1, 413a 7–8.

44. See note 12 above.

simply what makes its matter an eye, it can have no activity which is not eyesight. It cannot cease to be eyesight by “departing” from its substrate. As something less than a substance, it cannot act without its matter, to which it is bound. Furthermore, as O’Neill remarks, form hardly explains “a thing so common as a dream,”⁴⁵ and it must not be forgotten that Plotinus is rejecting entelechism precisely as definition. Hylomorphism as an explanation of soul fails to account for the full range of its operations and movements.

Plotinus adds to this argument the bold claim that, by Aristotle’s definition of soul, “sleep could not even occur.” Blumenthal has rightly seen in this criticism a failure to distinguish between first and second entelechy, noting that Plotinus’s initial restatement of the Peripatetic definition even omits the term “first.”⁴⁶ Here Plotinus appears to have done the greatest disservice to Aristotle, who takes pains to be precise in his explication of entelechy, already alluded to above. “Actuality is spoken of in two ways: either as analogous to knowledge, or as analogous to contemplation.”⁴⁷ It is clear that we mean it in the sense that it is like knowledge.” And if this were not enough to dispel Plotinus’s argument, Aristotle adds: “For both sleep and waking are in soul, but waking is like contemplation, and sleep like having and not using.”⁴⁸ Rather than the entelechy soul precluding sleep, the latter is impossible without it. And this state is the primary image of soul: actuality in the sense of life rather than activity. Clearly Plotinus has departed a little from Aristotle’s theory. Yet this single deviation should not divert our attention from the fact that he is otherwise fully engaged with the entelechism put forth by Aristotle. Even if he has not criticized it perfectly, this does not mean that his arguments are completely inapplicable. And the omission may, in the end, be fairer to Aristotle than it would seem, since Plotinus may ultimately have been more precise in rejecting a generic, as opposed to a first, entelechy.

OTHER IMPOSSIBILITIES

The subject of sleep is thus one example where common experience serves as a testimony to the soul’s transcendence of the body. Another such appeal to basic human experience is observed in the reference to psychological tension. Reason (*λόγος*), pitted against desire (*ἐπιθυμία*) in daily life, struggles constantly to direct man’s activity in the world. Their opposition (*ἐναντίωσις*), says Plotinus, would be impossible if the soul were nothing

45. “Plotinus as Critic of the Aristotelian Soul,” 159.

46. *Plotinus’ Psychology*, 13. He is perhaps justified in his accusation that Plotinus “did not really bother to understand the theory as it was put forward,” at least in this one point (12).

47. See note 15. Contemplation is the activity of the mind, as opposed to the mere possession of knowledge.

48. 412a 23–27.

more than entelechy. Form, as a unity, “experiences (πεπονθέναι) one and the same thing throughout, not disagreeing (διαφωνοῦν) with itself.”⁴⁹ Indeed, internal states would necessarily be unified and pervasive if the soul were all throughout a single actuality of body, holding together what is materially disparate and synthetic.

Verbeke notes that Plotinus is operating with the notion of a Platonic tripartite soul. In this scheme the reason is superior and intended to dominate in the conflict among the parts through the exercise of justice. Yet it is not clear that Aristotle would accept such a characterization of soul.⁵⁰ Verbeke believes that by his theory of entelechism Aristotle has done away with such “radical dualism.” The rational and the irrational in man have been synthesized in the hylomorphic body.⁵¹ Thus, this critique by Plotinus is another which attacks the quasi-materialist soul of entelechism. Soul “is not a mere quality of the corporeal organism.”⁵² Against Verbeke, though, one might refer to any number of statements by Aristotle which establish the mutual opposition of appetites in man, even if grounded in principles which differ from those of the Academy: “Desires,” he says, “oppose one another. This happens when reason and desire conflict (ἐναντία ὄσι).”⁵³ Here again, though, O’Neill raises the point that even should Aristotle take pains to account for the opposition of reason and desire, as indeed he does by means of his obscure localization of intellect somewhere outside of soul, yet he fails to do so by means of his hylomorphic definition. As with sleep and dreaming, it is patent that entelechism does not produce such a struggle. The soul *qua* form could never be the source of a rebellious relationship between desire and reason.⁵⁴

Along similar lines, Plotinus adds the argument that thoughts (αἰ νοήσεις) would be impossible if the soul were reduced to entelechy. In this argument he finds an ally in Aristotle himself. As we have seen, Aristotle himself speaks of “parts of soul” which are not entelechies.⁵⁵ The reference to the intellect is clear from his several allusions to its possible separability and independence from body elsewhere in the text.⁵⁶ “But concerning the intellect and the faculty of contemplation, it is as yet unclear. It seems to be another kind (γένος ἕτερον) of soul. And this alone admits of separation, as immortality

49. *Ennead* 4.7.8(5), lines 12–14 (Henry and Schwyzer, 210).

50. Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* I 13, 1102b 33.

51. “Les Critiques de Plotin,” 210.

52. *Ibid.*, 207.

53. *De Anima* III 10, 433b 5–7.

54. “Plotinus as Critic of the Aristotelian Soul,” 159.

55. See note 42.

56. See, e.g., *De Anima* I 4, 19–20: “Mind seems to subsist as a kind of substance, perishing not.” Cf. III 4, 429a 11–12; I 1, 403a 11–13.

from corruptibility.”⁵⁷ This is what Plotinus means when he says that “they themselves introduce another soul (ἄλλην ψυχήν), i.e., intellect, which they make immortal.”⁵⁸ No argument could be more definitive than this criticism of entelechism. Even Aristotle is in agreement that thinking is peculiar to the soul alone, having nothing to do with body. As mentioned earlier, it is not necessary to attempt a reconciliation of this fact with the more general Peripatetic definition. It suffices that Plotinus’s reasoning is confirmed by his very opponent: entelechism can hardly explain thought.

As for perception (αἴσθησις), Plotinus concedes that hylomorphism could potentially explain the impression of forms on the sensoria. In fact, this is the only act which Plotinus believes entelechism can adequately explain.⁵⁹ Yet he is quick to minimize the possibilities even for sensation. According to Aristotle’s understanding, intellect alone pertains to soul in an absolute way. All else is a psychosomatic phenomenon. The senses do not exist apart from the body, and they have no operation which is not also corporeal.⁶⁰ Although Aristotle clearly acknowledges that sensation is not the reception of an object’s matter,⁶¹ yet the sense organ is nevertheless changed (ἀλλοιοῦσθαι) in being acted upon (πάσχειν), and the body itself is affected.⁶² Yet Plotinus retorts that such a process does not account for the soul’s retention of impressions after the removal of objects. Even Aristotle’s description of the lingering image relies entirely on corporeal affection.⁶³ For Plotinus this strains excessively the body’s capacities. The sense organs simply do not possess the storage capacity to accumulate impression after impression. It is necessary for even the memory of sensible objects to transcend the body, and an inseparable entelechy cannot provide this.⁶⁴

The desiring faculty (τὸ ἐπιθυμοῦν), too, is shown to be something other than inseparable entelechy. Corresponding most likely to the appetitive faculty (τὸ ὀρεκτικόν) in Aristotle,⁶⁵ the desiring faculty is said to have features which belong exclusively to the soul, something which, as we have seen, cannot belong to soul *qua* hylomorphic entelechy even for Aristotle. These features

57. Ibid. II 2, 413b 25–28. Cf. III 5, 439a 15–25: Speaking of the agent intellect, he says, “This intellect is separable, impassible, and unmingled, being in essence an activity It alone is, when separated, what it is, and it alone is immortal and eternal, . . . and without this there is no thought.”

58. 4.7.8(5), lines 15–16 (Henry and Schwyzer, 210).

59. Ibid., lines 14–15 (Henry and Schwyzer, 210): αἰσθήσεις δὲ μόνον δυνατόν ἴσως γίνεσθαι.

60. *De Anima* I 1, 403a 3–8.

61. Ibid. II 12, 424a 17–19.

62. See, e.g., *ibid.* 425b 22–5. Cf. *On Dreams* II, 459b 4–6.

63. See *On Dreams* II, 459b 4–6.

64. *Ennead* 4.7.8(5), lines 19–23.

65. ἡ γὰρ ἐπιθυμία ὀρεξίς τις ἐστίν (*De Anima* III 10, 433a 27–28; Hett, 188).

are, for Plotinus, the desire for things other than food and drink.⁶⁶ Aristotle himself, in his summary of desire, roots this part of the soul in the irrational part.⁶⁷ Hunger and thirst, then, accord easily with a description of soul as the body's actuality. But Plotinus points to desires which transcend corporeal appetite. These movements of the soul can only be independent of body, and thus show it to be something autonomous and self-subsistent, ground covered by Aristotle in his discussion of intellect, but not of the entelechy soul.

VEGETATIVE SOUL AND SEPARABILITY; METENSOMATOSIS

Additionally, Plotinus states that even the vegetative principle (τὸ φυτικόν) cannot be inseparable entelechy. As the lowest part or, conversely, as the lowest species, of soul, a refutation of the idea that nutritive soul constitutes the actuality of the body could very well erode the Peripatetic formula at its foundation. Intending perhaps to dismiss the entire theory by attacking its most fundamental application, the largest part of Plotinus's critique is devoted to this topic. Immediately recognizing that this faculty is undoubtedly corporeal in its associations and functions, Plotinus countenances the possibility that the vegetative soul might indeed be an inseparable entelechy. But, alas, even this is "clearly not so" (οὐδὲ τοῦτο φαίνεται οὕτως ἔχον).⁶⁸

His argument centers on the fluidity of a plant's entelechy, as well as its distance from its greater body, asking ultimately why such a thing cannot be altogether separated. The principle (ἀρχή) of every plant, he says, is located in the area of its root (περὶ τὴν ῥίζαν). The life of the plant, dwelling in this small part, can be observed to survive even the withering of its extended body, relying not at all on the form of the mature tree or bush.⁶⁹ Indeed, the vital principle does not only endure the destruction of its superficial members, but it even precedes their coming to be. This soul, then, must be something more than the entelechy of a given plant, and the nutritive faculty must be something more than the actuality of a vegetative body.⁷⁰

The second reference, to a plant's small beginnings, is in fact directly accounted for by Aristotle in his explanation of entelechy.⁷¹ The soul, it will be remembered, is actuality not in the sense of activity, but of dormant faculty. It is like the possession of knowledge rather than its exercise. The plant in seed form is thus perhaps the best example that can be found of "first actuality." It is the perfect exemplar, and the standard analogue, of a living body

66. *Ennead* 4.7.8(5), lines 24–25.

67. *De Anima* III 9, 432a 7.

68. 4.7.8(5), lines 25–28 (Henry and Schwyzer, p. 210; trans. Armstrong, 377).

69. Plotinus is speaking of plants which, while they are outwardly dead, are actually alive and admit of regeneration.

70. *Ibid.*, lines 28–35.

71. *De Anima* II 1, 412b 28–29.

possessing the whole blueprint of its unfolded being without yet exhibiting any particular features of what it might become. It would seem, then, that Plotinus has again misunderstood actuality, reducing it to energy, or perhaps mere shape. Yet, it should be noted that his emphasis is not on the seed as the potent nest of an undeveloped body, but on the outward extension of life whose beginning (*ἀρχή*) is in the seed. The entelechy which the viable seed possesses moves outward into new limbs and growths. This movement signifies for Plotinus a precedent for separability.

Yet the argument is incomplete if it depends solely on growth and generation, since these do not involve separation. It is necessary here to return to Plotinus's first argument, namely that the plant's principle (*ἀρχή*) is in its root, since this line of reasoning does indeed involve what is universally observed in nature as retraction and reanimation. Tornau points out that this argument is akin to the opening criticism of a divisible soul. The essence of a body would thus be capable of being reduced and diminished. In this case, of course, one is confronted with the continued shape of a soulless tree.⁷² Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Plotinus is using this argument as an appeal to separability, and not merely as a refutation of hylomorphism. Dead plants are frequently seen to rejuvenate in temperate weather, and this testifies to the stability of a separated soul, even if only in a relative sense. Plotinus therefore sees this as proof enough that soul is not absolutely bound to the body whose form it constitutes.

Finally, the closing argument which Plotinus offers against entelechism is its incompatibility with metempsychosis: "The same soul goes from one living thing to another. How could it go from being the soul of the first to that of the second if it is the entelechy of one?"⁷³ Here it is difficult for analysts to take Plotinus's argument seriously, at least on the surface, since nowhere is his reasoning so presumptuous as when he introduces reincarnation as a rebuttal to hylomorphism. Aristotle, as we know, completely rejects the doctrine of reincarnation, dismissing it as mythology.⁷⁴ As such, he would heartily agree that it is incompatible with entelechism, though he might retort that its truth is far from established so as to overturn his own position. Tornau alone considers the possibility that Plotinus is here referring to something other than reincarnation proper. The movement "between" living things, he suggests might in fact refer to spontaneous generation.⁷⁵ Regardless, this

72. "Plotinus' Criticism of Aristotelian Entelechism," 158. Tornau adds that it is possible to interpret this argument as criticizing entelechism for insufficiently upholding the identity of a thing over time (160–61).

73. 4.7.8(5), lines 36–38.

74. *De Anima* III 1, 407b 21–23.

75. See *Ennead* 4.3.8, lines 47–54.

too is an impossibility for Aristotle.⁷⁶ Modern thinkers, on the other hand, might gladly accept Plotinus's argumentation. The provision for the genesis of new creatures, whether vegetative, sentient, or otherwise, might clash with Aristotle's worldview, but it is a salient feature of prevalent, contemporary biological theory. If one kind of thing (actualized by its soul) can indeed give rise to another, then Plotinus's argument might have more to offer than would appear at first glance.⁷⁷

PLOTINUS'S ACCEPTANCE OF HYLOMORPHISM

All of these arguments serve to show, then, that Plotinus was thoroughly dissatisfied with Aristotle's definition of soul. If what we call soul is nothing other than the entelechy of body, then inconsistencies and problems arise, and the everyday phenomena of life are left unexplained. As we have seen, for Plotinus this critique is motivated by the desire to make of soul something hypostatic. As the self-actual reality that makes and creates, soul is not subject to becoming, change, or passion.⁷⁸ Yet for all this Plotinus makes great concessions to entelechism. When the doctrine is first encountered at 4.2.1, it is dismissed, but for rather specific reasons. It is "not true," says Plotinus. But he qualifies this by adding that it is not true "as stated" (ὡς λέγεται).⁷⁹ Such a qualification opens the door to a redemption of entelechism. It is not acceptable "as formulated," but perhaps it is acceptable in some other way.

Indeed, Plotinus's investigation of the doctrine had purported to examine precisely this about entelechism: "in what way it is spoken of with regard to soul (πῶς περὶ ψυχῆς λέγεται)."⁸⁰ The correspondence with the initial qualification is unmistakable. The series of arguments against entelechism, then, are meant to outline the problems with this particular definition of soul *qua* formula. And it is explicitly given: "they say that, in the composite, the soul plays the role of the form (εἶδος τὰξιν ἔχειν) with respect to its matter, the ensouled body."⁸¹ It is thus "as entelechy itself" (ἐντελεχίας οὐσης) that the Aristotelian soul is rejected.⁸² But Plotinus leaves room for the theory yet.

The obscurity, to say nothing of the ostensible inconsistency, of the *De Anima* is well known. And while Plotinus can be seen to engage the text

76. "Plotinus' Critique of Aristotelian Entelechism," 164–66. Cf. G. Verbeke, "Les Critiques de Plotin," 218–21; Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology*, 13.

77. Evolutionary theory would seem to demand just such a shift away from Aristotle in the understanding of reproduction.

78. *Ennead* 4.7.8(5), lines 43–50.

79. *Ibid.* 4.2.1, lines 3–4 (Henry and Schwyzer, 3).

80. *Ibid.* 4.7.8(5), lines 1–2 (Henry and Schwyzer, 208).

81. *Ibid.*, line 3 (Henry and Schwyzer, 208).

82. *Ibid.*, line 12 (Henry and Schwyzer, 210).

directly, yet his argumentation proves something closer to a clarification than a refutation. Entelechism is potentially misworded, poorly explained, or at least misunderstood. But that is not to say that there is not some valid form of the theory. When he says that the vegetative principle is “clearly not” inseparable entelechy, he is quick to add that it is not so “in this sense” (μη τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον).⁸³ Even the rational soul “must be entelechy in some other sense than this” (ἄλλως ἐντελέχειαν ἢ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον).⁸⁴ At the end of the day, Plotinus shows his dissatisfaction to be hermeneutical, and he remains open to interpreting entelechism in the most favorable light (εἰ δεῖ τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦτο χρῆσθαι).⁸⁵ There is confusion surrounding this doctrine, and it may be traced back to Aristotle himself, but Plotinus does not repudiate it altogether.

Plotinus reveals his dissatisfaction with the Aristotelian formula explicitly: it “says nothing positive (δηλωτικόν) about what soul is (ὄν τοῦ τί ἐστίν).”⁸⁶ Such a sentiment is difficult to understand in that Aristotle himself claims to have provided a positive definition of soul.⁸⁷ And Plotinus, it seems, has spent a considerable amount of time refuting said definition, rejecting it for a more Platonic perspective. Nevertheless, this statement serves to clarify the previous qualifications made by the Neoplatonist. The Peripatetic formula had been dismissed for its phrasing. This fact, combined with alleged shortcomings that belie the perceived intentions of the definition, reveal the key to a proper assessment of Plotinus’s critique of entelechism. It is not wrong; it is wrong as stated. And it is stated precisely as purporting to define soul. But this is exactly what Plotinus says it does not do. Plotinus, therefore, is seen to struggle against an inadvertently and accidentally materialist notion of soul. He does not accuse Aristotle, as we know, by name. And although Tornau and others have seen in this fact further evidence that Plotinus directed his criticism to later Peripatetics, including Alexander of Aphrodisias,⁸⁸ it is more likely that the obvious author of the doctrine is not named because he is not under attack, although his work serves as the raw material for the controversy at hand.

It is universally acknowledged that Plotinus drew heavily on Aristotle in developing his philosophy.⁸⁹ Igal has masterfully demonstrated the various

83. Ibid., line 26 (Henry and Schwyzer, 210).

84. Ibid., line 17–18 (Henry and Schwyzer, 210).

85. Ibid., line 18 (Henry and Schwyzer, 210).

86. Ibid. 4.2.1, line 4 (Henry and Schwyzer, 3).

87. See note 12.

88. “Plotinus’ Criticism of Aristotelian Entelechism,” 166.

89. See especially P. Henry, “Une comparaison chez Aristote, Alexandre et Plotin,” in *Entretiens Sur L’Antiquité Classique V: Les Sources de Plotin* (Geneva: Vadoeuvres, 1957), 429–44; and H. J. Blumenthal, “Plotinus’ Adaptation of Aristotle’s Psychology: Sensation, Imagination and Memory,” in *The Significance of Neoplatonism* (Norfolk, VA: Old Dominion University, 1976), 41–58.

ways in which Aristotle was not only a source, but a teacher. The entire anthropology of Plotinus, he argues, is nothing other than a developed synthesis of the *Timaeus* and Aristotelian hylomorphism. While clearly fighting against a definition of soul that reduces it, in essence, to corporeal entelechy, Plotinus obviously adopts the hylomorphic model for explaining the relationship of the self-subsisting, immortal soul to its perishable, divisible body. Although the soul is not in itself corporeal actuality, yet it informs body and “cares” for it. Animation is thus described in terms of actualization, and the soul in the end does come to form the body’s λόγος, without however being confined thereto.⁹⁰ Such an analysis captures the subtle force of Plotinus’s relationship with Aristotle which has many times succumbed to simplistic readings instigated by the verbal polemic. Although Igal does not explicitly engage Plotinus’s refutation of entelechism, his penetration of Plotinus’s anthropology illuminates this direct confrontation with the second master of Neoplatonism. As we have seen, the Stagirite’s teaching is sufficiently dense so as to elicit treatment so paradoxical as exegesis masquerading as refutation.

CONCLUSION

Igal has justly pointed out that Plotinus’s synthesis of the Platonic soul with the hylomorphism of Aristotle stands as an intriguing forerunner to the later doctrine of Thomas Aquinas. As both substance and entelechy, independently self-existent and yet determinative of body, the Plotinian model distinguishes between soul in its essence and soul in its effusive operation, i.e., in its role within the composite. Ingeniously utilizing the Aristotelian model to explain the relationship of soul to body, Plotinus rejects it, at times vehemently, as a definition of soul. Aristotle’s *De Anima*, precisely because of its potential for misinterpretation, becomes the object of definitive criticism, to put to rest any materialist ramifications stemming from an otherwise valid description of soul which nevertheless fails to account for what it truly is. Entelechy, as Plotinus knows, is inseparable from the matter which it animates. If this were all that soul is, then it would become divisible and perishable along with the body; its sleep would look very different; reason would not oppose desire; thinking, sensation, and desire would be severely diminished if not altogether destroyed; and growth and nutrition would not occur as they do. Plotinus knows that the soul must be more than entelechy, and his arguments are intended to supplement the dark language of Aristotle, to round out his position and clarify his statements, placing him on solid ground: soul is indeed the entelechy of a body, but that is not all. Nor does that really say what it is, but only what it does. Perhaps the *De Anima* is, as some have

90. J. Igal, “Aristoteles y la Evolucion de la Antropologia de Plotino,” *Pensamiento* 35 (1979): 315–45.

described it, a biological treatise. Plotinus seems to agree, and his criticisms appear as an effort to supplement the theory and bring it from the realm of biology into the realm of metaphysics.