

YOU ARE SENTENCED TO A LIFE IN IMPRISONMENT

**An explanatory expedition to find the relation between the soul and the body
with regard to imprisonment**

IV.

'Some philosophers and theologians since Plato have claimed that the human body is a kind of prison of the soul. Michel Foucault has recently suggested that 'the soul is a prison of the body' (*Surveiller et punir*, p.34). Consider some of the conceptions and arguments that might support these opposing views.'

I want to take you on a trip; we'll call it an exploratory expedition. I'll explain everything along the way. Just grab my hand, and walk through this essay with me. Walk long while I tell you this story. Be open. Be honest.

Let's set the scene. Imagine yourself in your living room, sitting in the chair as you have always done. Imagine yourself watching television. Your favourite series is on, the one you can't stop talking about to your friends. The one that you think about all the time, which takes up all your time in the day, the series that have become your life. As you are watching the flickering screen day in, day out, you familiarise yourself with the main characters, get sucked in the ideas he has and start thinking the way he thinks. You become part of the town the main character lives in, life the life he has. 'This series is my life', you tell your friends. 'I couldn't think of watching anything but this'.

What if I would tell you that these tiny people on your screen, the ones that are always turning their heads toward you when they speak, aren't real? What if I told you that there is a whole room around the noisy box you have been looking at your entire life? What if I told you that beyond the walls of your living room, beyond the walls of your tiny apartment, beyond the walls of your flat, there is a whole other world, where the people are more sincere when they talk? What if I told you that this life you have, isn't real? Would you believe me?

Would you let me show you around your apartment, familiarise you with the objects in the room you've always known about but forgot that they existed, teach you how to look at the bright light of an actual lightbulb instead of the pixels on your screen. Would you let me accompany you outside, while I assure you that the deafening noise and the blinding light will be something you get used to, if you just gave it time. Would you let me show you the real world?

I understand it if you are scared, the real world, the one outside your apartment, isn't as easy to grasp as the bite sized drama in your TV-series. The real world is in fact the most difficult thing to remember, because of the fact that you haven't seen it in such a long time. But I'll promise you, it'll be the best decision you've ever made. Let me make you become the human being you once were.

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The story you've just read is a modern interpretation of Plato's Cave Analogy, as it is written in the *'Politeia'* an uncromprehensible amount of years ago. The first time I heard about the analogy and the reasoning behind it, it sent shivers down my spine, and gave me goosebumps all over my body. I was mesmerized by the ideas Plato had and the simple yet elegant way these thoughts were put on paper. After getting over the initial shock of the brilliant story my teacher just explained to me, and when I started learning about it in more depth, I could think clearer, more rational, about all that had just been said. I started wondering about the level of truth that the concepts behind the story had, I started being critical about certain ideas and parts of the analogy.

The general concept of the Cave Analogy

Before I can take you further into this expedition we have embarked on, I must explain the path we're walking on and the direction we're going in. However, as we have limited time to travel, as this essay must be done within a couple of hours, we must keep it brief.

As many people know, Plato was a firm believer of the world of Ideas, a world above us. The original, real world that our souls lived in before we entered the one we are in now, is a world filled with Ideas, moulds (if you will) that are used to make copies for the world that you are reading this essay in right now. Plato believed that when we were born into the world we live in now, our soul, this perfect substance from the world of Ideas, was tortured and forced into the body we are in today. During this struggle, this involuntary imprisonment of the soul, this prefect substance got damaged. The soul forgot about the real world, the world of Ideas.

During our lifetime, as we get older and (often) wiser, our soul starts to rehabilitate, it starts to remember the Ideas that he once was so familiar with. Slowly, but surely, the soul cuts loose from the chains of the body, as it remembers the real world. This remembering was called *'Anamnesis'* by Plato.

The concrete topic of this essay and the main question

Now that we understand the path we're on, I must tell you what our surroundings will be during this trip, what our destination is.

During this essay we'll be comparing and contrasting two viewpoints with regards to imprisonment of our lives. These viewpoints will be:

'The body is a prison of the soul' vs. 'The soul is a prison of the body'^{1,2}

¹ This is a suggestion that is recently been made by Michel Foucault, a modern viewpoint on Plato's ideas. We'll be some of Plato's ideas during the course of this essay.

² The formation of the subject will also be a part of the discussion during the course of the essay.

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By discussing the before mentioned subject, I'd like to come to a conclusion which answers the question of what viewpoint we should have during our lives, and how we (consequently) should live this life we have.

As the first viewpoint is more widely known and understood, I'd like to mainly focus on second part of the sentence above. I'll be considering some of the conceptions behind the view that opposes Plato's and try and concisely give some arguments that might support these views, and regard the entire subject from different angles. I'll do this by using concrete examples, the ideas and thoughts of philosophers and my own humble thoughts on the subject in an organised essay.

Imprisonment: definitions, precise explanations of imprisonment, different possible angles to look at the subject

A. The definitions of 'soul', 'body' and 'prison'

In order to fully understand all things that will be said during this essay, we must have clear definitions of the words that we will be using a lot during this essay, however simple they might sound.

The first word we should discuss is 'soul'. When looking the word up in the Thesaurus, synonyms are to be seen, such as 'the inner self' and 'subconsciousness'. I'd like to therefore define the soul as a an inner part of a human being (inner self), which we often do not that think about directly (subconscious), and is almost always a sort of (moral) compass, a tool to base your actions and passive behaviour on³.

Secondly, the word body is used. This could easily be explained as your 'physique', your form. To specify, we could say that the border of a (healthy) human body is the outer layer of skin that it has.

Lastly, I'd like to explain 'imprisonment'. When using this word, we must remember that was metaphorically meant by Plato. We could try and explain it by saying that when someone is imprisoned, he/she is not able to be his/her 'full self'. Imprisonment comes with unwanted limitations.

B. The influences of the body on the soul

As I said, the first point of view, which is derived from Plato's idea is fairly well-known, and will therefore be briefly discussed, as it is considered to be general philosophical answers. However, we of course need to explain this point of view as well.

³ Of course, 'soul' is used in many forms nowadays, and could therefore also mean 'enthusiasm', 'warmth', 'energy', 'vitality', 'spirit'. However, I will not elaborate on this any further, as it does not directly concern the topic we are discussing at the moment.

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In which way could the body influence (or imprison) the soul? There are some general ideas we all have about this, that are fairly logical, but still need to be addressed in order to have a complete grasp of this viewpoint.

When we regard a body as we have defined it, we could easily explain in which way the body limits the soul. We could say that the body, due to the fact that it can merely be in one place at one time, immensely limits the soul in experiencing the outer world or remembering its true form, as Plato would say. I am in this classroom, typing a philosophical essay, and therefore I cannot be in an art gallery studying the paintings or in a math class, learning about the importance of brackets in a formula.

If this concept is clear, I'd like to take it one step further by saying that the before mentioned border of the body (the skin) is also a confinement to the soul. Of course the skin gives us the opportunity the sense of touch, but also disables us in a way that we cannot go beyond our body to feel as anything else. 'We are alone in this world', is what many people say, and I'd like to say that that is due to the fact that our body imprisons our soul in feeling anything other than the body itself.

C. The literal⁴ influences of the soul on the body: surroundings that free your body

As we now know, the soul is a compass. Now what does this compass do that makes it imprison the body of a human being? In order to grasp the answer to this question I'd like to give some concrete explanations.

Yet the soul could also free the body in a way, by 'loosening the chains'. Plato stated that the soul was hurt when put on the (not real) world, and that by studying and learning it'll remember the world of Ideas in time. From this you can gather that the world the soul is in now, is something it does not want to be a part of, yet it is grossly influenced by the surroundings and needs to study these surroundings in order to become a 'higher' soul. You could say that the soul, the ideas and thoughts one has, is influenced by other souls, causing them to have a larger amount of (agreeing or opposing) ideas. Using an extremely simple example, we could say the following. Sarah has a soul with ideas that make her dress her body in mostly pink evening gowns. This is an example of Sarah's soul putting literal (but also figurative) confinement on the body, causing the literal body not to be as free as before. Moreover, Sarah's soul is later on influenced by the soul of her friend Alya, which causes her to have different ideas about the clothes she's wearing. She now wears tight fitted jeans and oversized sweaters. Of course this is a grossly simple explanation, yet it does suffice in trying to understand how surroundings influence the soul, and therefore the amount of imprisonment of the body. When one studies the environment, one learns different ideas and ways to behave, and therefore there are more options for the body, making it a freer form.

The same thing goes for postural behaviour, so passive bodily behaviour. When one studies the 'fake copies of postures' in the world we live in now, we slowly but surely learn more about the wide roam of postures one could have, and therefore have a freer (literal) body.

⁴ This word is merely used to simplify the explanation, and should in no way be taken out of context or regarded as anything else but that.

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The two examples of surroundings that influence literal bodies are examples of long term changes. Yet there is also an example of a short term change that could happen, when one is influenced by its surroundings. In biology it is known as 'fight or flight', with which one means to say that the surroundings make a body decide how to move in an intuitive manner. When trying to explain that with regards to the soul and the body, we see that the soul has a very short time span (almost no time) to think and imprison the literal body, which causes the literal body to break out of the prison and behave in an animalistic manner. We see the literal body being freed.

In all these cases we can most definitely say that the soul is not imprisoned by the body, as the body has the limited options due to the soul being more (or less) aware of its true form and more (or less) able to confine the body.

D. The figurative⁵ influences of the soul on the body : Theology and Atheism, Empiricists and Rationalists

Of course we could just end the discussion on a practical, literal level, as we have explained above, and leave it at that. Yet that wouldn't suffice in my opinion, as the subject is much wider than that. Therefore I'd like to discuss the figurative⁶ influences of the soul on the body.

When reading the two possible imprisonments that have been laid out, you could have seen a category of thought to which each of the possible answers fit. With this I mean that 'The body is a prison of the soul' tends to be regarded as a theological explanation of imprisonment, whereas 'The soul is a prison of the body' is more of an atheistic point of view. I'll explain this a bit further.

A religious person⁷ might say that the soul is an entity with which a person is connected to God, and therefore of much greater importance than the body, as that is merely a tool to keep the body on earth, until it's time to leave for either heaven or hell. The soul is thus of greater importance than the body, because it is this that will be entering the life beyond this one, and that it is the body that prohibits the soul to get to the Promised Land.

An atheistic person, however, would say that there is no such thing as life beyond death, and that the life that we are living at the moment is the only life we have. This makes the soul of lesser importance than the body, as it is the body that gives you the opportunity to walk, talk, eat, sleep and live your life.

Of one is flexible with the definitions of body and soul, you could also regard 'The body is a prison of the soul' as a rationalistic point of view, whereas 'The soul is a prison of the body' would be an empirical point of view. This is simply because empiricists, such as Locke, Berkeley Hume and so on, think of the senses as the most important way of gaining information, and we know that the body provides this information. On the other hand there are the rationalists, like for example Rene Descartes, who believe that it is the mind that can provide us with the information needed.

⁵ I used this word because of a lack of any other word to explain that we must not only look at the literal ways in which the body is hindered due to the soul, but also the other influences that make one have the idea that the body is imprisoned instead of the soul

⁶ Or 'abstract', if you will

⁷ Of course not all religious people have the same thoughts. This phrase is merely used for clarity, so that is easily contrastable with an atheistic person.

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I think we must keep these different categories in mind when we are choosing our own answer to the question that has been raised⁸.

E. Breaking your compass

As we all know a compass (a soul) can stop working, break, if you will, in which it stops showing which way is north and therefore the direction you are going in. When this happens, you could see it as something negative, and say that a traveller (the body) lost his way because he doesn't know where he is supposed to be going. Yet, when looking at it from the viewpoint 'The soul is a prison of the body', we could see it as something extremely positive, as the traveller (body) is finally (forced to be) free to roam the world on his own. The limitations, the imprisonment has gone, and the options become limitless⁹.

In this case not having a soul, or desensitising the soul, breaking it, means that all ideas in the world become an option, as opposed to only the ideas the soul had obtained at the moment. This therefore shows that the soul was primarily limiting the body in options, imprisoning it.

F. Is Dualism the right way?

Lastly, I'd like to discuss the entirety of the subject, as we stated in the introduction. For is it true that there is only two possibly ways of looking at the problem of imprisonment¹⁰, and are we even allowed to blatantly accept that anything is imprisoned by anything else?

We see a form of underlying dualism in the two viewpoints we have, as we see the body and the soul as two different, maybe even opposing entities. We have differentiated between the *res extensa*¹¹ and the *res cogitans*¹², as Rene Descartes called it. Yet could the idea that both mind and body are one thing, monism, be up for discussion? Is it not true that these two are so connected, so intertwined, that they are one thing? Aren't the body and soul born together, and isn't right that neither of them is first or more important as the other, as they are both influenced by and dependant on each other? And does that not give the conclusion that neither of both is imprisoned only by the other, but both things should be combined and considered to be imprisoned by themselves? The body is imprisoned by its borders of the skin, time, space and so on, and the soul by its disabled form after birth. But the body imprisons the soul as well, by having a defined border and definite place and time within the universe. And the soul, by being in its disabled, little knowing form, imprisons the body by having limited, confining ideas in which the body could move, speak, dress, etc.

As the understanding of this paragraph is of huge importance, I'll use an example. So what do we mean when, for example, we say that we are heartbroken? Is it the fact that we have increased blood flow through the heart and a higher heartrate, which can be dangerous ('break') the heart,

⁸ What viewpoint should we have during our lives, and how should we this life we have?

⁹ Just like Sarah's clothing options become mor and more varied.

¹⁰ The problem that I mean is, is 'The body is a prison of the soul' vs. 'The soul is a prison of the body'.

¹¹ In this case the body

¹² In this case the soul

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or do we mean that are soul is damaged, regressed into a lesser form of itself? Is it not possible that we mean both?

Conclusion: vs. or &, it's not a competition

Every trip has a destination, every travel has an end. We have come to ours, and it is time to decide.

While I was introducing the subject we were going to discuss today I mentioned that the question we were trying to get answered will be what viewpoint would be the one we should have.

During the course of this essay we tried to look at the problem from different angles. Firstly, we defined the words 'soul', 'body' and imprisonment. Using that information we explained that the body, with its skin, place and time in the universe, imprisons the soul. Then we found the literal influences of the soul on the body, namely the surroundings of other souls in this universe. We then made nuances and relativities by trying to figure out which large movement agrees to which general idea of imprisonment. After that we regarded the practical, concrete way in which the loss of imprisonment of the soul would affect the body, as we wanted to compare it to the original idea of losing imprisonment called the Cave Analogy by Plato. Lastly, we made a very important step which makes sure that it is clear that there are massive amounts of probable answers to problems, by giving the example of monism also being an explanation for the imprisonment of every one of us.

We found out that perhaps it's not a competition between these two ideas, but maybe they are both part of one main idea. Thus saying that it's not 'The body is a prison of the soul' **vs.** 'The soul is a prison of the body', but 'The body is a prison of the soul' **&** 'The soul is a prison of the body'. We must figure out that the world, whether it's real or not, is never black and white, and that, like in most (if not all) things we do, it is often the mean and not the extreme that is the best possible answer, even if the extreme would be the easiest way to think.

We have arrived at a crossroad, and you can decide which path to go on. You either choose 'The body is a prison of the soul' vs. 'The soul is a prison of the body'. But always remember that you could always think out of the box by walking the least trodded path through the grass. Not choosing either, but picking both.