

# Chapter One

---

## Taking the World Soul Seriously

### INTRODUCTION

Does God have a body? Religious traditionalists in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) have had a tendency to answer this question in the negative. But the contemporary revolt against dualism (to use A. O. Lovejoy's phrase) requires us to examine this question carefully in that to deny that God has a body seems to commit a religious believer to a cosmological dualism wherein God (as pure spirit) transcends the natural world altogether. The problem here is that we, like other animals, come into contact with the rest of the world through our bodies, hence a belief in cosmological dualism makes God's awareness of the world radically different from, not even remotely analogous to, our awareness of it.

In this chapter I will examine Plato's cosmological monism (not cosmological dualism!) wherein God is viewed as the mind or soul for the body of the whole natural world, as the World Mind or World Soul. For over sixty-five years Hartshorne tried to explicate and defend this Platonic mind-body relation on a theological level. Briefly, the claim is that whereas our animal bodies are fragments of the cosmos, the divine animal's body *is* the cosmos.

One of the attractions of this view from the perspective of the Abrahamic religions is the intimacy between a conscious subject and its own body, an intimacy that is far greater than that implied in the familiar theological analogy between parent (especially male parent) and child. When Whitehead famously referred to God as "the fellow sufferer who understands," he could have noted that this understanding applies best to the relationship one has to one's own bodily cells (or to one's nerves—*neura*—for the ancient Greeks).<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the intimacy of the World Soul with respect to the body of the world, wherein God is closer than breathing and nearer than hands or feet, there is the ease with which one can account for the ubiquity of deity, a ubiquity that is quite a puzzle in any sort of cosmological dualism. On the World Soul doctrine, although there is no external environment for God, there is an internal one where it is possible for God to really care for, or sympathize with, the creatures.<sup>2</sup>

### PROBLEMS WITH MOHR'S ANALYSIS

Richard Mohr, one of the most recent in-depth commentators on Plato's cosmology, is probably not alone in his claim that Plato's World Soul is the oddest of many odd components in Plato's cosmology in that it is highly counterintuitive. Most of the world, according to Mohr, "just does not feel like an animal. Most of it is clearly inert."<sup>3</sup> But *is* this clear, as Mohr alleges? Further, according to Mohr, the World Soul is either redundant (if the World Soul is merely one more autokinetic soul, then it has no special function in Plato's cosmology) or useless (if the World Soul crafts external objects, then it becomes indistinguishable from the Demiurge).

Mohr realizes that the World Soul is an important doctrine for Plato, as is evidenced by the fact that it appears in four (actually five, including *Epinomis*) of the later dialogues (*Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, *Laws*).<sup>4</sup> But if the body of the whole universe is alive and possesses a single World Soul it is an "odd-sounding creature" in need of contemporary explication. The purpose of this chapter is to offer such an explication, to make the World Soul not only an intelligible concept but also to *defend* belief in the World Soul such that one need not exhibit Mohrlike reticence in taking Plato's World Soul seriously.

In this explication and defense I will rely on two thinkers who offer different modes of appreciating the World Soul: Hartshorne (who explicitly defends belief in the World Soul through a reliance on various principles fundamental to his process or neoclassical philosophy of religion) and Friedrich Solmsen (who places the World Soul within the context of Plato's philosophy of religion, in particular, and within Plato's entire philosophy).

Although I am not familiar with any contemporary analytic philosophers who can be used to defend belief in the World Soul, it should be noted that Richard Swinburne has defended a much stronger notion of divine embodiment than most theists who are analytic philosophers and that he somewhat bridges the gap between a supernatural God and the divine, cosmic animal.<sup>5</sup>

My hope is that the approaches mentioned above by Hartshorne and Solmsen will, like the strands in a Peircian cable, mutually reinforce each other in the explication and defense of the World Soul. Before moving to these two thinkers, however, it will be helpful to make clear why there is a need to consult them in order to understand and appreciate the importance of the World Soul.

Mohr's response to the supposed oddness of the World Soul consists in an attenuated version of the concept whereby the World Soul is disassociated from the autokinesis of soul found in the *Phaedrus* and *Laws X* and from any cosmological function other than the mere maintenance of an already established order.

Mohr notes that in the *Statesman* (269C–D) the universe is described by the Eleatic Stranger (and presumably by Plato) as a living creature (*zoon*) endowed with reason (*phronesin*). But he is premature in divorcing the World Soul from self-motion. When the Stranger says that we must not claim that the universe moves itself, he seems to be denying that it could go anywhere in that the World Soul animates the whole body of the world; there is no place for it to go. Later in the same speech (270A), however, the Stranger makes it clear that when the Demiurge withdraws from the world the soul of the world must move by its own innate force. That is, the World Soul must take control of the affairs of the universe when God (Cronus or the Demiurge) “withdraws” (274A), a comparison that I will later emphasize. Because there is no denial of autokinesis to the World Soul, the definition of soul as self-motion in the *Phaedrus* and *Laws X* would seem to apply to the World Soul as well as to the human soul.

The comparison between a human being and the World Soul is *noticed* by Mohr in his treatment of the World Soul in the *Philebus* (30A–B), but it is not used, as it is in Hartshorne, to make intelligible to modern readers why Plato believes in the World Soul, why Plato sees the World Soul as a cause, and why the besouled (*empsychon*) body of the world is fairer (*kallion*) than our bodies.

Despite numerous clues in the *Timaeus* as to how to ameliorate the oddness of the World Soul, Mohr concentrates on the “parallel structures and synchronized motions” between the World Soul and the world body. That is, he does not seem to see them as integrally connected in such a way that the World Soul animates the body of the world. *Timaeus* (and presumably Plato) makes it clear (30A) that God desired that all things should be good, to the extent that this is possible (*bouletheis gar ho theos agatha men panta, phlauron de meden einai kata dynamin*), by intelligently creating order out of disorder (*eis taxin auto egagen ek tes ataxias*). But divine intelligence, it is

equally clear (30B), *presupposes* soul. Mohr does not emphasize this. In fact, the world “came into being” when God put intelligence into the soul of the bodily world—a living creature (*ton kosmon zoon empsychon ennoun te te aletheia dia ten tou theou genesthai pronoian*).

The world is made in the likeness of an animal (*zoon*), or better, the individual animals in the world are parts of the whole animal. That is, the World Soul is the original animal (30C). The need for the World Soul becomes apparent when Plato comes to the realization that there is only one world (31A), literally a uni-verse. If there were two worlds there would be a need for a more comprehensive being to include both. The fact that the World Soul is called the “solitary, perfect” animal (*monosin homoion e to pantelei zoon*) is an invitation, refused by Mohr, to think through what Hartshorne has called the “logic of perfection.”

Because divine intelligence presupposes the World Soul (30B), and because divine intelligence is either eternal (outside of time altogether) or everlasting (existing throughout all of time), it should not surprise us that the world is not liable to old age or disease (33A) in that it must be eternal (or better, everlasting), too. Further (33C), there is no need to push the animal body comparison so far as to claim that the world has eyes because there is nothing outside of itself to be seen; nor is there any need for ears to hear any being external to it; lungs are not needed to take in air from without in that there is no “without” to the all-inclusive organism; and a digestive system is not needed if there is no external source of nourishment that must be tapped in order for the World Soul to survive. The excellence of the World Soul/world body complex consists largely, but not exclusively, as we will see, in its self-sufficiency (33D—*autarkes*). The absence of external enemies eliminates the need for hands for defense (34A), and as we have seen, there is no possibility for the world to “move to another place because it is its own place. There may well be other sorts of motion, however, contra Mohr, of which the World Soul is capable.

At 34B three significant points are made that militate against Mohr’s truncated version of the World Soul: (a) The World Soul is diffused throughout the body of the world (*psyche de eis meson autou theis dia pantos te eteinen kai eti exothen to soma aute periekalypten*) and hence does not have a mere parallel or epiphenomenal structure with relation to the body of the world, as Mohr alleges. (b) The World Soul is not to be divorced from God in that it is itself “generated” by the Demiurge as a blessed God (*dia panta de tauta eudaimona theon auton egenmesato*). In order to understand the World Soul, one must therefore explain how the Demiurge and the World Soul are both divine, which Hartshorne tries to do. And (c), Timaeus makes it clear that the soul was not made after the body. In fact, because the universe is

eternal or everlasting (37D), and because the body of the world cannot antedate the World Soul, the World Soul must also be eternal or everlasting such that the independence of the Demiurge from the World Soul cannot be literally construed as temporal priority. (Also see 34B–37A, 92C.)

Further, I am not sure what Mohr means when he criticizes various commentators on the *Timaeus* (Cornford, Cherniss, Archer-Hind, Herter, and Rosen) by saying that they offer “(unneeded) charitable attempts to dismiss Plato’s thought from Christian thought and more generally as attempts to reduce the number of unfashionable theological commitments in Plato’s cosmology.” Is Mohr agreeing with Plato’s theological commitments or disagreeing with them? Or more likely, is Mohr saying that we should not even try to link up Plato’s view of God with contemporary philosophical theology?<sup>6</sup>

Mohr does not treat Plato’s use of the World Soul in the *Laws*, perhaps because of his belief that the World Soul does not possess self-motion, and *Laws X* is the prime text where self-motion is treated. The Athenian (presumably Plato) makes it clear that self-movement is the *definition* of soul (896A—*ten dynamenen auten hauten kinean kinesin*), which implies that *all* soul possesses this property or it would not be soul. Soul is the *universal* cause of all change and motion (*epeide ge anephane metaboles te kai kineseos hapases aitia hapasin*). That is, a soulless body would have to be moved by something else (896B). Soul is (metaphysically) prior to body (896C—*psychen men proteran gegonenai somatos hemin, soma de deuteron te kai hysteron, psyches archouses, archomenon kata physin*) and controls all things universally (896D—*psychen de diokousan kai enoikousan en hapasin tois pante kinoumenois mon*).

Plato’s theodicy is a difficult topic, as we will see. It is worth noting here, however, that Plato sees the universe as being guided in wisdom by a supremely good soul (897C—*delon hos ten aristen psychen phateon epimeleisthai tou kosmou pantos kai agein auton ten toiauten hodon ekeinen*). The soul by which the circle of the heavens turns is supremely good (898C—*aristen psychen*). As before, these claims are seemingly irresistible invitations, nonetheless resisted by Mohr, to think through the relationships among the World Soul, the logic of perfection, and divinity. Hartshorne warmly receives such invitations. (Also see 902E, 903E–905E, 967C; and *Epinomis* 981B, 982B, 983C.)<sup>7</sup>

## HARTSHORNE’S DEFENSE OF THE WORLD SOUL

Process theology in general can be regarded as a partial return to Plato because of his World Soul as the divine self-moved, but not unmoved, mover

of all other self-movers and as the soul aware of all things. To help explicate Hartshorne's views on the World Soul, three sorts of psyche (P) can be distinguished, all three of which can be found in Plato and Hartshorne in various ways under different labels. P1 is psyche at the microscopic level of cells, atomic particles, and the like, where contemporary physics has vindicated Plato's flirtation with panpsychism, as in the passages from the *Laws* cited in the previous section. (Although the Greeks did not know about cells or subatomic particles, they did speculate about nerves—*neura*.<sup>8</sup>) The nightmare of determinism has faded as reality in its fundamental constituents itself seems to have at least a partially indeterminate character of self-motion. That is, the sum total of efficient causes from the past does not supply the sufficient cause to explain the behavior of the smallest units of becoming in the world. Plato was wiser than he knew; little did he know that in twentieth-century physics universal mechanism would give way to a cosmic dance.

P2 is psyche per se, psyche in the sense of feeling found in animals and human beings, whereby beings with central nervous systems feel as wholes just as their constituent parts prefigure feeling at a local level. And feeling *is* localized. Think of a knife stuck in the gut of any vertebrate or of sexual pleasure. P2 consists in taking these local feelings and collecting them so that an individual as a whole can feel what happens to its parts, even if the individual partially transcends the parts.

In the *Republic* (462C–D) Plato makes it clear (through the character Socrates) that if there is pain in one's finger (note, not the whole hand) the entire community (*pasa he koinonia*) of bodily connections is hurt; the organized unity of the individual is such that when one part is hurt there is a feeling of pain in the human being as a whole (*hole*) who has the pain in her finger.<sup>9</sup>

P3 is divine psyche. If I am not mistaken, Plato shares with Hartshorne the following four-term analogy: P1 : P2 :: P2 : P3. The universe is a society or an organism (a Platonic World Soul) of which one member (the Platonic Demiurge) is preeminent just as human beings or animals are societies of cells (or nerves) of which the mental part is preeminent.

Because animal individuals must, to maintain their integrity, adapt to their environments, mortality is implied. But if we imagine the World Soul we must not consider an environment external to deity but an internal one: the world body of the World Mind (the Demiurge) or the World Soul. This cosmic, divine animal has such an intimate relation to its body that it must also have ideal ways of perceiving and remembering its body such that it can identify the microindividuals (P2) it includes. We can only tell when cells in our toe have been burned by the fire; we cannot identify the microindividuals (P1) as such.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that there are several different plausible interpretations of the relationship between the Demiurge and the orderliness of the world. One such view is that the Demiurge is hampered by the inherent disorderliness in the realm of necessity (*anankē*) in the effort to conform the world or the contents of the receptacle to the ideal. Hartshorne does not so much reject this view as supplement it with the claim that the Demiurge is also impeded by a plurality of self-movers. The value of contrast and richness provided by “cosmic creativity” also provides the “recalcitrance of the material,” just as there is the “familiar difficulty of eliciting harmony among a plurality of creatures each having its own freedom.” Although the evidence from Plato is somewhat unclear as to how matter “could consist of multitudinous souls of extremely subhuman kinds,” and as to how the order of the universe could be a static good forever (which Hartshorne thinks is impossible), he had at least a glimmering “that it was the multiplicity of souls that made absolute order impossible.”<sup>11</sup>

On Hartshorne’s view philosophers have often myopically focused on the Plato they could understand and ignored the Plato who was too profound for them. This is most evident with respect to Plato’s panentheistic conception of the divine soul for the world. (*Panentheism* literally means that all is *in* God.) But Hartshorne has taken the World Soul as a clue for present philosophizing. For example, each new divine state harmonizes itself both with its predecessor and with the previous state of the cosmos. This is analogous to a human being harmonizing itself with its previous experience and bodily state, but with a decisive difference. The human being must hope that its internal environment and the external environment will continue to make it possible for it to survive, whereas God has no such problem in that there is no external environment for God.<sup>12</sup> But the differences between God and human beings (e.g., God knows the microindividuals included in the divine life, and God has no external environment) should not cloud the important similarities (e.g., the facts that self-change is integral to soul at all levels and that the soul-body analogy used to understand God does not preclude the person-person analogy, which links the divine person with human beings). The most important similarity lies in the fact that one’s bodily cells are associated, at a given moment, with one as a conscious, supercellular singular, just as all lesser beings are associated with the society of singulars called “God.”<sup>13</sup> In a way, all talk about God short of univocity contains *some* negativity, in that God does not exist, know, love, and so on, as we do. With regard to the divine body, however, many theists have allowed this negativity to run wild.<sup>14</sup> Hartshorne’s use of Plato is an attempt to remedy this imbalance.

Plato offered a “striking anticipation” of the doctrine of the compound individual, even if he ultimately fell short of the principle that individuality as such must be the compounding of organisms into organisms. But this is not surprising because cells were not yet discovered, even if “nerves” were.<sup>15</sup> In the case of the divine individual, where all entities are experienced, there can be no envy of others in that they are internal to the divine goodness. Less completely are a human being’s cells internal to the individual; for example, bone cells in one’s arm are less internal and less fully possessed by the individual than are the brain cells. These conditions regarding divine inclusiveness also explain why the cosmos could not be held together and ordered by a malevolent God or by a plurality of gods (as hypothesized by Hume), in that these deities are always partly divided within or among themselves and are incapable of an objective grasp of the forms. The cosmos can be held together only by an all-sympathetic coordinator.<sup>16</sup>

Plato also came closer than any other philosopher to Hartshorne’s notion that God is *whole* in “every categorical sense, all actuality in one individual actuality, and all possibility in one individual potentiality,” albeit tempered by Hartshorne’s own understanding of the potentiality inherent in God, somewhat different from that found in Whitehead’s view. And because of this wholeness God is not an organism of a loose kind who must await the light years it takes for cosmic interactions to take place because these interactions are all internal to the divine “ideal animal” itself.<sup>17</sup>

One of the reasons why Hartshorne thinks of Plato as among the “wisest and best” of theologians is that he thinks Plato may have realized that the Demiurge *is* the World Soul in abstraction; that is, the Demiurge is that part of the World Soul that is forever engaged in realizing eternal or everlasting ideals. (It must be admitted, however, that here more than elsewhere Hartshorne is interpreting Plato rather loosely for the purpose of present philosophizing. The connection he draws between the Demiurge and the World Soul is much closer than anything stated explicitly in the *Timaeus*.) This process of realization is what Plato means in the *Timaeus* by the “moving image of eternity.” Hartshorne’s tempting way of reading Plato alleges that God, utilizing partly self-created creatures, “creates its own forever unfinished actualization.” Thus, God is aware of both us and other non-cosmic animals and the lesser souls, on the one hand, and eternal ideals, on the other. Even though God is the “individual integrity” of the world, which is otherwise a concatenation of myriad parts, Hartshorne’s view is easily made compatible with the claim that God does not survey all events in the future with strict omniscience.<sup>18</sup>



Belief in a World Soul as the divine animal is connected with a belief in a world body, which is superior to our bodies because there is nothing internal to it (e.g., cancer cells) that could threaten its continued existence, even if the divine body happens to be spatially finite. Further, our bodies are fragmentary, as in a human infant's coming into the world as a secondary being expressing its feelings upon a system that already has a basic order in its cells; whereas the divine body does not begin to exist on a foundation otherwise established. When an animal dies, its individual lifestyle no longer controls its members, yet the result is not chaos but "simply a return to the more pervasive types of order expressive of the cosmic mind-body." The World Soul is aware of the divine body and can vicariously suffer with its suffering members, but it cannot suffer in the sense of ceasing to exist due to an alien force. "An individual can influence it, none can threaten it." Not even brain death can threaten it because the soul-body analogy cannot be pushed to the point where a divine brain is posited. As before, the contrast between the brain and a less essential bodily part only makes sense because an animal has an external environment. Consider again that the divine body does not need limbs to move about, for it is its own place: "space being merely the order among its parts." It does not need a digestive system or lungs to take in food or air from without in that there is no "without." So it is with all organs outside the central nervous system, which, as we know but Plato did not, is the organ that adapts "internal activities to external stimuli," a function that is not needed in the inclusive organism. The prime function of the divine body is to furnish the World Soul with awareness of, and power over, its bodily members. So although there is no special part of the cosmos recognizable as a nervous system, every individual becomes, *as it were*, a brain cell directly communicating to the World Soul and likewise receiving influences from divine feeling or thought.<sup>19</sup>

## SOLMSEN AND PLATO'S THEOLOGY

Hartshorne's favorable treatment of the World Soul is both an attempt to make intelligible to modern readers some rather difficult texts in Plato on the World Soul and an attempt (largely successful, I think) to suggest why belief in a World Soul is superior to disbelief in God, belief in pantheism, or belief in God as a strictly transcendent, supernatural, purely eternal, unmoved mover. Solmsen's project, which supplements Hartshorne's, is to concentrate on Plato, to locate the World Soul within the context of Plato's theology as it developed throughout his career.<sup>20</sup> I would like to show why Solmsen's work

is one of the best on Plato's thoughts on God to date. That is, Solmsen is able to show why the World Soul is a central element in Plato's theology, something that is not done by most subsequent commentators on Plato.

Solmsen makes it clear that the background to Plato's theology is provided by a traditional view of civic religion whereby piety of a nonpolitical sort or a purely secular patriotism would have been contradictions in terms. The destruction of the old religion had both a positive and a negative effect: it both made it possible for a more sophisticated, intellectual conception of God, and it opened the door to atheism. Plato meant to close this door and to elevate religious discourse. This elevation would, given Plato's lifelong interest in politics, have to be able to establish some sort of rapprochement with civic religion even if the primitive identification of the interests of the polis with a particular deity would have to be dropped. Further, this elevation would have to continue the pioneering work of the Pre-Socratics, whose objective was to connect the deity (or deities) to cosmic processes in nature, a connection that very often led to belief in the World Soul.

Solmsen details how Xenophanes and Aeschylus partially prepared the way for Plato by indicating that God (Plato's Demiurge) was a mind who acted without physical effort; Euripides at times thought of God in cosmic terms; Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia dealt with an intelligent organizer of the world—anything that serves its purpose well as a bodily organ cannot be the work of luck (*tyche*). This groping for a cosmic deity as opposed to a political one was characteristic of several Pre-Socratic thinkers. A philosophical "science" was taking over the lead in the search for a new divine principle. This concept of God as cosmic was not threatened by political upheaval, and hence philosophy of nature was the chief potential source for new religious beliefs. Plato criticized the traditional gods in the construction of the Republic so as to make room for the World Soul/Demiurge in the *Timaeus*, as the beginning of this latter dialogue indicates.<sup>21</sup>

Other scholars indicate how in Empedocles the cosmic sphere was given a divine status and how Thales, Anaximenes, and the Pythagoreans believed in a World Soul. Further, there is a contrast between human learning of many things (*polymathia*), on the one hand, and the divine wisdom of the World Soul, on the other, a wisdom that is found in several forms in Heraclitus: *hen to sophon*, universal logos, cosmic *gnome*, and *kyberman panta*. The very idea of a cosmos leads to a belief in the cosmic God, the contemplation of which largely constitutes human wisdom; we are constituents of cosmic order. Heraclitus sometimes personified the cosmic principle as Zeus and at other times viewed it as a rarefied, all-pervading presence, like ether, a view that was later made famous by the Stoics.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, according to Plutarch, all of the ancient philosophers, except Aristotle and the atomists, believed that the world was informed with a divine animal soul!<sup>23</sup> This is a claim that, even if an exaggeration, nonetheless shows how comfortable the ancients were with the World Soul, a comfort matched by modern discomfort.

Plato's attempt to reform religion is initially seen in the effort to define piety (*eusebeia*) in the *Euthyphro*, a reform that is intensified in the *Republic*. One practical result of this reform was a confrontation with the theodicy problem, which is resolved by Plato by noticing the limits of divine power (limits that are perfect in their own way in that they allow creatures self-motion) and the purity of divine goodness. Nonetheless in the *Republic* the gods (Plato often wavers between the singular and the plural, as we have seen) seem to occupy a plane below the highest. The gods are not inconsistent with the forms in the *Republic*, but their relation is not made clear in this work. Solmsen's tempting way of putting the problem is in the following Aristotelian terms: the forms provide, of course, the formal cause of goodness in the world, yet goodness will never be concretely produced in the world unless there is an efficient (divine) cause, an efficient cause made explicit in later dialogues in divine dipolarity (World Soul/Demiurge).<sup>24</sup>

Further, the *Sophist* exhibits a theory of forms where the stiffness and isolation of the forms are abandoned in favor of dynamic power, as we will see. The preparation for this dynamism is found in the *Phaedrus's* principle of psyche as self-motion, a principle that makes it possible for the World Soul to be an organic whole, such that neither materialism nor the theory of forms contains the full truth about reality. (F. M. Cornford, contra Mohr, emphasizes that the World Soul as a *zoon* must be self-moved if only because it was a commonplace in antiquity that animals were self-moved.)<sup>25</sup> However, Plato is quite willing, as we have seen, to "materialize" the whole by admitting divine embodiment. While the first part of the *Theaetetus* makes us aware of the dangers of absolutizing movement, these dangers are not necessary if one keeps *dynamis* regulated by form and if one realizes that the dynamic whole is an orderly one, a cosmos. What is to be noted is that almost every one of the late dialogues makes some contribution to the theory of movement, not least of which is the *Timaeus*, where the World Soul is seen as the source of movement,<sup>26</sup> and the *Laws*, where there is an elaborate classification of movements.<sup>27</sup>

Mind (*nous*) contemplates the forms, which are, "in themselves," eternal and immutable abstractions. Hence mind (i.e., the Demiurge) "by itself" lacks the right kind of contact to link up with life and flux. Only soul can do that because soul both animates what would otherwise be the dead body

of the world and has, through its mental functioning, communion with the forms.

Perhaps the most insightful commentator on the “amphibious” nature of soul is J. N. Findlay.<sup>28</sup> The World Soul has its feet in both the eidetic and the instancial camps, it is not merely a “link” between these regions; it is a living channel. The eidetic mind works only by way of the World Soul in which it is instantiated. The timeless mind is an “elder” God, in a way, but for Findlay the World Soul fulfills all of the tasks that could be demanded of God, as detailed by Hartshorne in his many writings.

Findlay is also instructive regarding the World Soul in Plotinus, a consideration of which will help us to better understand Plato’s view. Here the World Soul is an unquiet faculty (as in Hartshorne’s claim that it receives influence from *all* creatures), like Martha busy over many things (*polypragmon*—III.vii.2), in contrast to The One. Hartshorne supplements Findlay’s insights. The Greeks—Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus among them—realized that any possible world must involve a multiplicity of individuals, each making their own decisions. Hence there is an aspect of real chance in what happens. Unfortunately, this notion of chance was not sufficiently synthesized by Plato with the (materialistic) atomism of Leucippus and Democritus or with the “swerve” of atoms (i.e., the tychism) found in Epicurus. It is perhaps this failure that accounts for the monopolarity of the Neoplatonists in their interpretation of Plato, as we will see. In a way, Plotinus reaffirms Plato’s “three aspects of the ultimate” in the *Timaeus*: the forms (especially the form of the good), the Demiurge, and the World Soul. These appear in Plotinus, respectively, as The One, Intellect (*nous*), and the Plotinian World Soul.

But Plotinus has a (necessitarian) logical principle for the progression from The One to the World Soul. Plotinus’ ontolatry (i.e., his worship of being) differs from Plato’s belief in a World Soul because the self-motion of soul in Plato is replaced in Plotinus by a conception of soul with a merely “accidental and superficial motility,” a motility derived in an Aristotelian way from body rather than from the soul’s own nature. Plotinus at least enhanced Plato’s aesthetic argument for God, and he rightly viewed Plato’s forms as essentially “objects-for-Nous,” but for the most part his monopolarity (i.e., his worship of eminent being to the exclusion of eminent becoming) detracted from an appreciation of Plato’s greatest insights regarding the World Soul. Hartshorne finds it “comic” to watch Plotinus trying to prove that without unity and simplicity we cannot understand the multiple and complex. This is correct, but it is equally correct that without plurality, contrast, and complexity there is “no unity, beauty, goodness, value, or reality.”<sup>29</sup>

At once Plato's concept of 'soul' preserves the best in the Orphic, Pythagorean, and mystery religion traditions regarding soul; it makes the soul the locus of political virtue; it allows soul to be used to explain the cosmos in religious terms; and, in fact, as we have seen, it even makes mind the auxiliary of soul. The supreme soul, the World Soul, is Plato's attempt to connect the world of flux with that of sameness into an integrated theory of reality. Hence the function of God in the *Timaeus* is not so much to impart life to the universe as to make its life as excellent as possible. The philosophical contemplation of the beauty of the universe (through astronomy and music, where apparently discordant elements are brought into harmony) makes the human soul at least akin to, if not homogeneous with, the Soul of the cosmos.<sup>30</sup>

Two noted scholars whom I do not find helpful in the understanding of the World Soul are P. E. More, who wavered as to whether or not the World Soul was a God, and Gregory Vlastos, who, when the question was asked, "Why does the cosmos have a soul?" responded by saying that the form of a living creature has a soul. In effect, if I understand Vlastos correctly, the main reason why Plato talked about the World Soul was to have a model for the Demiurge to create other (presumably human) souls. But this interpretation fails to take Plato's religiosity seriously, for it implies that the telos of the World Soul is to contribute to us; it is to commit the theological error of putting the human above the divine. I seriously doubt if Plato would have wanted this.<sup>31</sup>

God (the supreme psyche with supreme *nous*) confronts the elements of the world that remain discordant with persuasion (*peitho*), not force (*bia*). But God still has power (*kratos*), specifically the immense power to persuade the world by offering it a model of perfection. Although Solmsen is hesitant to literally identify the Demiurge with the World Soul on the evidence of the *Timaeus*, he is willing to see the two as aspects of one God that deal with separate functions: the World Soul with movement and life and the Demiurge with order, design, and rationality. In the *Laws*, however, such an identification is legitimate. As we have seen, in the *Laws* mind presupposes a living soul, even if mind itself is eternal or everlasting (and even if the Demiurge is mythically depicted as prior to the World Soul in the *Timaeus*).<sup>32</sup>

Solmsen reinforces Hartshorne's notion of a personal deity: once Plato's doctrine of a cosmic soul had taken shape not only did it succeed in "respiritualizing" nature, but it also transformed the indirect relation between the individual and God into a direct and hence personal relationship. The ardor that this relationship fosters constitutes Platonic piety, which, as at the end of the *Euthyphro*, is a type of service (Hartshorne would say contribution) to God.<sup>33</sup>

Paul Friedlander sees this respiritualization of law, art, and nature as the central task of Plato's life. Hence Plato can be said to metaphorically return to Thales' notion that all things are full of gods. Friedlander is also instructive regarding the similarity between the individual and God, for example, in the *Gorgias* (505E). Plato indicates not only that there is a soul for the cosmos but also that there is something like a cosmos or wholeness for the individual soul. That is, the best humans reflect the World Soul in that their common principle is the good (*agathon*). If the world is, as Friedlander notes many contemporary thinkers believe, a mere machine, then the appearance of a leaf or a caterpillar would be "miraculous."<sup>34</sup>

It should not surprise us that in *Laws* X the argument against atheism is described as a prelude (*prooimion*) for the whole body of laws. Religion is the basis of Plato's city here and plays a much more significant role than it did in the *Republic*. It was actually his aim to refute three types of atheism: the denial of God altogether; the belief that divinity does not care for us; and the claim that God can be bought off with sacrifices, and so on. Plato's refutation is in terms of his own theological tenets, including belief in the divine animal. The World Soul in the *Laws* at times surfaces not as an individual entity (as in the *Timaeus*) but as a generic principle, as some of the texts treated above indicate. Soul does not, however, manifest itself with equal distinctness in every phase of the cosmos; it is in some way intensified in animals, especially in human animals and in the divine animal. But the *constancy* of the world's organic functioning as due to the World Soul is emphasized by Hans-Georg Gadamer, who notices that an animal, even a divine animal, differs from a plant because it can relay back to itself all the stimulations of sense experience. That is, the World Soul integrates the scattered multiplicity of the bodily, an integration that is similar to that found in Anaxagoras and Xenocrates. Gadamer is also helpful in the defense of Hartshorne's version of Platonic theodicy in that the second "bad" World Soul of the *Laws* cannot be taken literally; a second "World" Soul would entail a third to unify the first two into a cosmos, and so on.<sup>35</sup>

As before, the Aristotelian conception of a self-sufficient God who contemplates only itself is entirely alien to Plato. God's *telos*, if there is such, is the best possible harmony for the sum of things: the parts are for the whole, but the whole only flourishes with healthy parts. God is like the good physician who does not give attention to a single, isolated organ, but rather to the body of the world as a whole. Although it would be rash to suggest that Plato felt himself in his later years more at home in the cosmos than in the polis, it must be admitted that he prepared the way (say by his attraction to panpsychism in the *Laws*) for Hellenistic escape from politics into the life

of the cosmos.<sup>36</sup> Further, the cosmic scope of the World Soul is, in many ways, a return to the Great Mother tradition in religion that existed before the bifurcation between Father Sky God and Mother Earth Goddess, a bifurcation that gradually tilted heavily toward Father Sky God, out of which Yahweh grew, as Jurgen Moltmann argues.<sup>37</sup>

Solmsen is quite explicit that the “concept of a divine World Soul as the fountain of movements and as the intelligent power controlling the world of Becoming is the cornerstone of the whole new system,” a theological system based on physics. Before individual or political experience can be understood, the validity of religion itself has to be understood on cosmic grounds. This understanding makes it possible to consider oneself more of a “citizen of the Universe” than a citizen of any mere political community. Law in a polis is indeed important, but only if it is seen against a larger background, specifically the theological background of the *Timaeus* and *Laws*, which were attempts to stem the process of disintegration in Greek culture that had been in existence for almost a century.<sup>38</sup>

Here we should note that A. E. Taylor is instructive in his belief that the World Soul (God) is far more important in the *Timaeus* than in the *Republic* largely because the World Soul is a key part of a new cosmology without matter (an indirect way of saying that Plato was a panpsychist). Taylor also indicates that the language of God (here the Demiurge) putting soul into the body of the world is obviously not to be taken literally. God (*ariste psyche*) is transcendent and immanent (i.e., dipolar), with the former making it difficult to call Plato’s God pantheistic and the latter making it difficult to limit God in an Aristotelian, Thomistic, monopolar way. It is no surprise that Taylor uses Whitehead to criticize monopolarity, as in his criticism of viewing soul at whatever level as “substance.”<sup>39</sup>

Plato never abandoned his theory of forms, but the World Soul takes over functions previously fulfilled by the forms. For example, knowledge (*episteme*) and craftsmanship (*techne*) are elevated to positions of great dignity because they either have affinity to soul or are skills that soul itself can attain. God extends control over the region of becoming due to the fact that reason, regularity, order, and form are not limited to the sphere of being (*ta onta*) but can be used by God as values in the harmonization of the world.<sup>40</sup>

## THE LEGACY OF THE WORLD SOUL

It is sad that Plato’s thoughts on God have been obscured in the history of Platonism. He was the last Greek to discuss God in a context of a political

system, and after his death ancient theistic philosophers went in one of two directions: Aristotle moved toward a conception of divinity as transcendent, and the Stoics moved toward pantheism, leaving no one, as it were, to guard the Platonic fort. Solmsen seems to agree with Hartshorne that Christianity has largely followed the Aristotelian move, albeit designated at times as “Platonic,” by relying almost exclusively on Plato’s form of the good.

The possibility of a genuinely Platonic type of Christianity, wherein the World Soul is taken seriously, is evidenced in Origen. He was a Christian theist who avoided both impersonal pantheism and the view of God as supernatural (cosmological dualism). To briefly sample some of Origen’s thoughts in this regard, consider his citation of a question from Jeremiah (23:24), “Do not I fill heaven and earth?, says the Lord,” and his use of a famous passage from I Corinthians (12:12), “The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body, and so it is with Christ.” Christ is identified by Origen with an omnipresent logos, with the agape that binds all things together, with the soul for the body of the world.

Or again, Origen is clear that our one body (*corpus nostrum unum*) is composed of many members (*multis membris*) that are held together by one soul (*una anima*). Likewise, the universe is an immense animal of many members that are held together by God (*ita et universum mundum velut animal quoddam immensum atque immane opinandum puto, quod quasi ab una anima virtute Dei*). *Immensum* here entails something vast: the fact that God brings together the world within the boundaries of the divine body.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps Christians and other theists in the Abrahamic religions should be more sympathetic to the World Soul than they have been to date. If we start with the microcosm, we can then easily understand how cells are brought within the order of our “mesocosmic” bodies. But such an understanding was not always easy. It was not until the early nineteenth century that cell theory took coherent form in the work of Bichat, Muller, Schleiden, Schwann, and Pasteur, work that still has not been assimilated into philosophical theology. It is at least plausible to move to the other side of the mesocosm, where we can see ourselves as parts of a macrocosmic whole.

It must be admitted that Solmsen and Hartshorne, despite the fact that they mutually reinforce each other in the effort to make belief in the World Soul plausible, engage in two quite different types of scholarship. Solmsen is much more interested than Hartshorne in justifying his claims on the basis of evidence from the Platonic texts themselves, but this should not lead us to assume that he was a naive positivist in that he certainly brings his own theoretical baggage to those texts. And Hartshorne is much more



interested than Solmsen in doing intellectual work with Plato in the effort to respond to issues in contemporary philosophy of religion, but this should not lead us to assume that Hartshorne is indifferent to the integrity of Plato's texts. Nor is Hartshorne's approach imperialistic in the sense of his wishing to crowd out other interpretations of Plato. Rather, it is *because* he has, in fact, read Plato carefully that he thinks it is appropriate for other scholars to at least take the World Soul seriously as an intellectually respectable position rather than as a piece of antiquarian lore.

Talk about the divine body is not merely a consequence of the use of the soul-body analogy to understand God; it is also logically entailed in Plato's metaphysics, as Hartshorne argues. Hartshorne has often claimed (contra Kant and others) that there are necessary truths concerning existence (e.g., "Something exists"). The absurdity of claiming that "there might have been (absolutely) nothing" is derived from Plato himself, who, when he commits parricide on father Parmenides in the *Sophist* (241–42), only admits the existence of relative nonbeing or otherness, not the existence of absolutely nothing, which would be a logical contradiction in that *it* would then be something. Hartshorne agrees with Plato that all determination is negation, but this inescapable element of negation is precisely Plato's form of otherness or relative nonbeing. The statement *Nothing exists* could not conceivably be verified. That is, a completely restrictive or wholly negative statement is not a conceivable yet unrealized fact but an impossibility. Particular bodies can pass out of existence (or better, pass into another sort of existence), but the divine body of the universe has no alternative but to exist.<sup>42</sup>

My hope is that by taking the World Soul seriously we might (1) eliminate the oddness of this doctrine as it is conceived by many, Mohr among them; (2) make better sense than most commentators (Solmsen excluded) of the movement of Plato's theology in the later dialogues; and (3) learn how to use Plato to respond to several important issues in contemporary philosophy of religion. That is, paradoxical as it may sound, Plato's theology is at once archaic (in that it is an attempt to preserve the best in civic religion, the Great Mother tradition, the mystery cults, and Pre-Socratic religiosity) and future oriented.<sup>43</sup> It is future oriented both because it points toward Hellenistic, cosmic religion and because it provides important clues to show us how to solve some of the unnecessary problems regarding theodicy that have plagued theism for centuries. Plato's theology can also enable us to bridge contemporary philosophical concern for ecology with philosophy of religion but without an appeal to pantheism.

I would like to conclude this chapter with a few remarks on pain that bear on a Platonic theodicy, in particular. The experience of pain in the finger is

both mine and something not mine (in that it involves not only my life but the lives of cells, too). Likewise, God can experience our pains without thereby becoming identical with us. This is why “pantheism” should not be seen as exhausting all varieties of divine inclusiveness. “Panentheism” (once again, literally, all is *in* God), as when Plato suggests in the *Timaeus*, *Laws*, and *Epinomis* that body is in soul, rather than vice-versa, is a type of divine inclusiveness that should no longer be ignored. We are not in God as marbles are in a box or as an idea is in a mind. Rather, if we are to take seriously the Platonic idea of God as the World Soul who animates the body of the world—indeed he refers to it as the “divine animal”—then the sort of panentheistic inclusiveness to be considered is *organic* inclusiveness of bodily pain in a whole animal.<sup>44</sup> It is not without reason that Whitehead traced the origin of his own philosophy of organism back to Plato’s *Timaeus*, where, as we will see in the next chapter, it is not so much matter itself that is created but rather a certain sort of order to the natural world that is congenial to our contemporary view wherein there has been a dissolution of material quanta into (partially self-moving) vibrations.<sup>45</sup>

In any event, it is crucial to notice on the evidence in the *Timaeus* that there is only one cosmos (rather than one in an infinite series, as the atomists believed) that is shaped in the image of the form of a living being, a form that is part of the content of the divine mind. Although scholars have been quick to notice the difference between the form of a living being and the perceptual world animal, they have generally not been as quick to notice that while the inclusion of forms in the divine mind is somewhat like the inclusion of contents of thought within any mind, the inclusion of the world in God is actually *organic* inclusiveness, on the analogy of parts included in an animal body.<sup>46</sup> This has implications, as we will see, for understanding the relationship between God (the World Soul) and the evils or pains that exist in the natural world.