

# Why Embodiment Leads to Evil

Draft

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Consider Satan. According to the poet John Milton, the Master Deceiver's guiding principle in life is: evil be thou my good.<sup>1</sup> In order to appreciate Plotinus' multifarious approach to evil, it is useful, if only for a moment, to dwell on the question of whether or not adhering to such a principle is even possible. Satan, let us suppose, desires his own good. Indeed, it is Platonism that has taught philosophy generally that to desire anything else is not possible; in fact, it is a kind of a posteriori necessary truth that desire has as its object the good of the one who has the desire.<sup>2</sup> So, let us suppose that Satan believes that evil is good for himself. But, then, he cannot believe that evil is evil, that is, that in attaining evil he attains what is *not* good for himself. So, if we submit the intellect of Satan to Platonic analysis, he must be ignorant of the fact that evil, since he desires it, is not his good. But Milton—no Platonist—will have none of this. For in the previous lines, he has Satan declaim, 'So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear / Farewell remorse! All good to me is lost'. One who is ignorant of the fact that he is pursuing the opposite of what he wants is not bereft of hope. He is certainly not going to acknowledge that his good is lost. Satan is or has an angelic intellect, which is to say that his intellect is a refined version of our own. His problem, though, is evidently not intellectual, but volitional. Satan wills that evil be his good, despite his knowing that it is not. For a Platonist, this can make little sense. For the will for the Good or *epheis* follows intellect. How could will operate otherwise?

In a way, this problem is anticipated by St. Anselm of Canterbury who in his *De casu diaboli* considers the question of how Satan can have a will that is oriented other than as his intellect determines. If, reasons Anselm, the will follows intellect, then freedom of the will is impossible. For an intellect for whom the good is transparent, cannot but will it. And yet the will cannot be completely independent of intellect; for if it were, it could not be the will of an intellectual creature. Accordingly, Anselm posits two wills in the Satanic nature, the will for happiness and the will for justice. It was up to Satan to will that his happiness be subordinate to justice or *vice versa*. In his rebellion, Satan willed happiness over justice, thereby earning his just divine punishment. Like Satan and his minions, the first human beings willed happiness over justice. By doing so, they abandoned the will for justice and became unable to will justice for its own sake. Apart from divine grace, then, fallen human beings cannot help but sin.

The doctrine of two wills—both in Satanic intelligences and in prelapsarian humans—has seemed to most philosophers and theologians quite gratuitous. It is argued that the orientation of the will is the result of a calculation of what, *all things considered*, one ought to do. So, in considering the achievement of my happiness, I might or I might not consider that justice needs to be done. In either case, the will that originates my action is unified, all things considered, not

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<sup>1</sup> See John Milton, *Paradise Lost* Book IV, 110.

<sup>2</sup> No doubt, this is why Socrates at *Protag.* 345D5ff, in his interpretation of the words in Simonides' poem to the effect that no one willingly does anything shameful, assumes that he is saying something that all educated people agree with. See Sophocles, *Women of Trachis* 1123: ἤμαρτεν οὐκ ἔκουσία, the words spoken by Hyllus regarding her mother.

dual. Plotinus thinks otherwise, no doubt for reasons quite different from those that motivated St. Anselm. But for Plotinus, the duality is strictly a function of embodiment. The disembodied or undescended intellect is entirely incapable of willing anything other than union with the Good, a union that is achieved eternally by intellect's acting according to its own nature. For Plotinus, it seems, there could not be wicked angels. The question I wish to address in this paper is why embodiment is necessary for the possession of a will that can operate other than in accord with the intellect's knowledge of that which is good? Why is it that being embodied can lead us to evil?

## I

Two crucial terms in Plotinus' account are 'longing' (*epheisis*) and 'willed' (*boulētos*). The first term is generally distinguished by Plotinus from the generic term for desire, *orexis*. The term *orexis* represents the essential feature of soul, that is, its motion in the direction of specific goal achievement originating in embodiment. The term *epheisis* indicates paradigmatically intellect's orientation to the Good.<sup>3</sup> Intellect eternally longs for and eternally attains the Good in contemplation of it. Derivatively, *epheisis* indicates a desire for something only insofar as it is good. So, one can have *orexis* for, say, physical pleasure, but this *orexis* is also an *epheisis* only if one were to regard physical pleasure as the Good itself. Since nothing but the Good is the Good itself, the only true *epheisis*, 'the real *epheisis* [of the soul]', is for the Good. Stated otherwise, the *orexis* for something only coincides with or is extensionally equivalent to the *epheisis* for the Good if the former is not merely an apparent good. In the virtuous person, it is always *epheisis* for the Good that explains a particular *orexis*. In an embodied person, *epheisis* for the Good is a kind of second-order desire. That is, one always must desire a particular concrete good that is supposed to be an instantiation of the Good. This contrasts with the disembodied intellect whose *epheisis* for the Good is direct and always fulfilled in one and only one way.

The other term, *boulētos*, from the noun *boulēsis*, is close to being synonymous with *epheisis*, but also with the activity of intellect itself. It is self-conscious *epheisis*, that is, self-conscious longing for the Good.<sup>4</sup> When intellect recognizes the Good, it 'proposes' it to the will, which immediately longs for it. That is why in reality there is no difference between intellection, longing, and achievement of what is longed for. We distinguish *orexis* from *epheisis* because the former may not be self-conscious that what it *really* desires is the Good; the latter is that self-conscious desire. As self-conscious, it is a will for the Good alone. This willing the Good alone is paradigmatically in intellect and only derivatively in embodied human beings. The transition point between the Aristotelian and Stoic position, on the one hand, and Plotinus' position, on the other, is from a self-conscious desire for x as good to a longing for the Good itself.

The complete picture is, I believe, something like this. The *orexeis* of embodied persons are at the same time objects of *epheisis*, that is, supposed instantiations of the Good. The fact that we can have an *orexis* for something at the same time as we have an *epheisis* for it *as good* is

<sup>3</sup> See 1.6.7.3 and esp. 6.7.21.1-6; 6.7.27.24-7: Νῦν δέ, εἰ ταῦτα ὀρθῶς λέγεται, καὶ ἡ ἐπανάβασις ἔχει τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐν φύσει τινὶ κείμενον, καὶ οὐχ ἡ ἔφεσις ποιεῖ τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἀλλ' ἡ ἔφεσις, ὅτι ἀγαθόν...

<sup>4</sup> See 6.8.6.32-8: Ὁ δὲ θεωρητικὸς νοῦς καὶ πρῶτος οὕτω τὸ ἐφ' αὐτῷ, ὅτι τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ μηδαμῶς ἐπ' ἄλλω, ἀλλὰ πᾶς ἐπέστραπται πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ αὐτὸς καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ κείμενος ἀνευδεῆς καὶ πλήρης ὑπάρχων καὶ οἷον κατὰ βούλησιν ζῶν· ἡ δὲ βούλησις ἢ νόησις, βούλησις δ' ἐλέχθη, ὅτι κατὰ νοῦν· καὶ γὰρ λέγομεν· "ἡ βούλησις τὸ κατὰ νοῦν μιμεῖται."

owing to the fundamental complexity of our cognition. Since thinking is essentially self-reflexive, we can have an *orexis* for something and an *epheis* for it if we self-reflexively consider that ‘first-order’ desire we have as being for that which we regard as good.<sup>5</sup> Endorsing that desire as being for the good is *epheis* for what we take to be an instance of the Good.

Plotinus asserts:

**I.** Each of us is double: one being the composite and one being the self.<sup>6</sup>

But the self, we are told, is the soul, whereas the composite is the soul plus the body.<sup>7</sup> This seems puzzling at first, since the soul appears to be ‘counted’ twice. In fact, each person is the composite insofar as he acts on desires originating in the composite; he is his self when he acts on or identifies with his reason.<sup>8</sup> The claim that the composite is ‘me’ but not the *real* or *true* ‘me’ captures this duality exactly.<sup>9</sup>

According to Plotinus’s analysis, the difference between one who acts willingly and one who does not is this:

**II.** For this reason, we will not designate the actions of evil persons, who do many things according to [their] imaginings, as ‘up to them’ or voluntary, whereas we will designate those as self-determining who, owing to the activities of intellect, are free from the affections of the body. Referring ‘up to us’ to the most noble principle, the activity of intellect, we will designate as really free the premises that come from there and claim that the desires that arise from thinking are not involuntary, and we will say that [self-determination] is found among the gods who live in this manner.<sup>10</sup>

The ‘really free premises’ are, I think, universal premises in practical syllogisms.<sup>11</sup> The desires that arise from thinking are voluntary, in contrast to those arising from states of the body. From these desires arise what Plotinus calls ‘the premises of the affection’ (αἱ τοῦ πάθους

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<sup>5</sup> See 5.3.13.13-14 on the essential self-reflexivity of thinking. Insofar as we are embodied thinkers, we participate in that essential activity in a derivative manner. In this case, our participation is through our practical thinking.

<sup>6</sup> 2.3.9.30-1: Διττὸς γὰρ ἕκαστος, ὁ μὲν τὸ συναμφοτέρον τι, ὁ δὲ αὐτός. Cf. 4.4.18.14-19.

<sup>7</sup> See 4.7.1.24-25. Cf. Plato, *Alcibiades* I, 130C.

<sup>8</sup> See 1.1. 9.15-18.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 4.4.18.11-16. Cf. Plato, *Lg.* 959A4-B7, who identifies the true self with what remains after the death of the composite. That this is a rational entity alone seems to follow from *Tim.* 90B1-D7.

<sup>10</sup> 6.8.3.17-26: διὸ καὶ τοῖς φαύλοις κατὰ ταύτας πράττουσι τὰ πολλὰ οὔτε τὸ ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς οὔτε τὸ ἐκούσιον δώσομεν, τῷ δὲ διὰ νοῦ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν ἐλευθέρῳ τῶν παθημάτων τοῦ σώματος τὸ αὐτεξούσιον δώσομεν—εἰς ἀρχὴν τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν καλλίστην ἀνάγοντες τὴν τοῦ νοῦ ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὰς ἐντεῦθεν προτάσεις ἐλευθέρως ὄντως δώσομεν, καὶ τὰς ὀρέξεις τὰς ἐκ τοῦ νοεῖν ἐγειρομένας οὐκ ἀκούσιους εἶναι δώσομεν, καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς τοῦτον ζῶσι τὸν τρόπον [ὅσοι νῶ καὶ ὀρέξει τῇ κατὰ νοῦν ζῶσι] φήσομεν παρεῖναι

<sup>11</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.5.1147a1. For Aristotle, the universal premise never fails to be effective; the failure is always with respect to cognition of the minor premise or of the conclusion. Analogously, Stoics equate assent with impulse to act.

προτάσεις).<sup>12</sup> These premises are the ‘origin of the irrational’ (ἀρχή καὶ τοῦ ἀλόγου), that is, the origin of the actions not in agreement with the universal premises.<sup>13</sup> How there can be such disagreement, I shall discuss in a moment. I note in passing, though, that actions stemming from irrational states, like those of the emotions, are not irrational in the non-normative sense. All the actions of embodied rational beings are rational by definition.

According to the model of action here being employed, the starting-points for wrongdoing are found in the *orexeis* that are a necessary consequence of embodiment. By contrast, our assent to or belief in the universal premises in practical syllogisms have a different origin. To believe that ‘p is true’ where ‘p’ represents a universal proposition to the effect that such-and-such is good, is to hold this good to be a manifestation or instantiation of the Good.<sup>14</sup> Of course, from the belief that ‘p is true’ it does not follow that such-and-such really is good. The vicious person employs practical syllogisms as much as does the virtuous person. In his case, the universal premises to which he assents, for example, that justice is the interests of the stronger, are likely to be false. The acratist will assent to a true universal premise, but will be overcome by his embodied *orexis*.

The problem here is that Plotinus, following Plato, is committed to the principle that no one does wrong willingly (οὐδεὶς ἐκὼν ἀμαρτάνει).<sup>15</sup> Taken in one way, this claim is tautologous: no one willingly acts counter to their best interests as they conceive them to be. Taken in another, a paradox emerges: no one willingly acts counter to what are in fact their best interests, regardless of how they conceive of them. The quasi-tautology focuses on the meaning of ‘does wrong’ or ἀμαρτάνει, for this implies one is trying to hit a target, this being one’s own good. And, of course, no one *willingly* fails to hit the target at which he aims. By contrast, the paradox relies on an implicit distinction between what one really wills and what one thinks one wills. But the paradox does not consist in this distinction, which is in itself banal. Nor does it even consist in the claim that if one believes that something is bad for oneself, then one cannot in any sense will it; this is simply false, as the existence of the phenomenon of ἀκρασία clearly shows. What turns the tautology into a paradox is the claim that one’s own good is in fact never achievable at the expense of others, that is, by doing something that is *not* good for someone else. If this is true, what one really wills is only the good *simpliciter*. And so if one errs it is always with respect to mistaking what appears to be good as the real good. This is an intellectual error, to be sure. But it is highly misleading to characterize it exclusively thus. For we might well wonder why anyone would be convinced that there is never—absolutely never—a divergence between my own good and the good *simpliciter*. According to both Plato and Plotinus, such a conviction arises only in one who has radically reconceived his own identity. Such a person comes to think of his good only as the sort of thing that is obtainable without negative consequences for anyone else. In short, he comes to identify himself as an intellectual soul or simply an intellect whose only good is enjoyment of cognition of all that is intelligible.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See 4.4.44.6.

<sup>13</sup> See 1.1.5.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 1.3.6.10-12: ἡ δὲ φρόνησις ἐπιλογισμὸς τις καὶ τὸ καθόλου μᾶλλον καὶ εἰ ἀντακολουθοῦσι καὶ εἰ δεῖ νῦν ἐπισχεῖν ἢ εἰσαυθῆς ἢ ὅλως ἄλλο βέλτιον· *Phronesis* indicates only practical reasoning on the basis of true universal judgments.

<sup>15</sup> See Plato *Ap.* 37A5; *Gorg.* 488A3; *Protag.* 345D8, 358C7; *Rep.* 589C6; *Tim.* 86D2, E1; *Lg.* 731C-D. Cf. 4.8.5.8-10: Πᾶν μὲν γὰρ ἰὸν ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον ἀκούσιον, φορᾶ γὰρ μὴν οἰκεία ἰὸν πάσχον τὰ χεῖρω ἔχειν λέγεται τὴν ἐφ’ οἷς ἔπραξε δίκην. Also, 6.8.3.15.

<sup>16</sup> See 6.4.15.32-40: Τοῦτο δὲ καὶ ἀνθρώπου κακία αὐτῷ ἔχοντος δῆμον ἐν αὐτῷ ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ φόβων κρατησάντων συνδόντος ἑαυτὸν τοῦ τοιούτου ἀνθρώπου δῆμω τῷ τοιούτῳ· ὅς δ’ ἂν τοῦτον τὸν ὄχλον δουλώσεται

If no one does wrong willingly, then the vicious person does not voluntarily err. He is ignorant of the falsity of the universal premises of his practical syllogisms. He is ignorant that what he thinks is good for himself is not really so. Then how can this person be held morally responsible for his wrongdoing? There is no doubt that Plotinus does so hold him:

**III.** So there is a place for every man, one fit for the good and one fit for the bad. Each kind of man, then, goes according to nature and the λόγος in him to the place that suits him, and holds the position he has chosen. There one speaks blasphemies and commits crimes, the other speaks and acts in the opposite way; for the agents existed before the play and bring their own selves to it. Now in human plays the author provides the words, but the agents, each and every one of them, are responsible by themselves and from themselves for the good or bad acting of their parts—for there is action, too, which is theirs in addition to the words of the poet.<sup>17</sup>

Here Plotinus is commenting on the passage in Plato's *Laws* in which the Athenian Stranger is considering divine providence. He says that 'all our actions are ensouled' (ἐμψύχους οὔσας τὰς πράξεις ἀπάσας) meaning, I think, that they are all a function of the state of the soul of the agent.<sup>18</sup> The Stranger then adds that the 'King'

**IV.** made responsible the acts of willing of each individual for the generation of the state of the soul. This is so because in whatever way one manifests desire and whatever state his soul is in, it is almost always in this way that he acts each time and [this is the way] the state of the soul comes to be.<sup>19</sup>

So, these people who are held morally responsible for what they do are, nevertheless, not willingly doing wrong. How can this be? How can they be culpably ignorant? There is no

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καὶ ἀναδράμη εἰς ἐκεῖνον, ὅς ποτε ἦν, κατ' ἐκεῖνόν τε ζῆ καὶ ἔστιν ἐκεῖνος διδοὺς τῷ σώματι, ὅσα δίδωσιν ὡς ἑτέρου ὄντι ἑαυτοῦ· ἄλλος δὲ τις ὅτε μὲν οὕτως, ὅτε δὲ ἄλλως ζῆ, μικτός τις ἐξ ἀγαθοῦ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ κακοῦ ἑτέρου γεγεννημένος. ('This is also the vice of humans; he, too, has a populace of pleasures and appetites and fears which gain control when a human being of this sort gives himself over to a populace of this sort. But whoever subdues a mob of this sort and runs back to the being he once was, and lives according to that and is that and gives to the body such things as belong to something other than himself. Someone else at one time lives this way and at another lives another way, having become something mixed from his own good and the evil of the other'). This passage is essentially a commentary on *Lg.* 689A5-E3. Cf. *Phdr.* 256B2.

<sup>17</sup> 3.2.17.22-32: οὕτω τοι καὶ ἐστὶ τόπος ἐκάστῳ ὁ μὲν τῷ ἀγαθῷ, ὁ δὲ τῷ κακῷ πρέπων. Ἐκάτερος οὖν κατὰ φύσιν καὶ κατὰ λόγον εἰς ἐκάτερον καὶ τὸν πρέποντα χωρεῖ τὸν τόπον ἔχων, ὃν εἴλετο. Εἴτα φθέγγεται καὶ ποιεῖ ὁ μὲν ἀσεβεῖς λόγους καὶ ἔργα πονηρῶν, ὁ δὲ τὰ ἐναντία· ἦσαν γὰρ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ δράματος οἱ τοιοῦτοι ὑποκριταὶ διδόντες ἑαυτοὺς τῷ δράματι. Ἐν μὲν οὖν τοῖς ἀνθρωπίνους δράμασιν ὁ μὲν ποιητὴς ἔδωκε τοὺς λόγους, οἱ δὲ ἔχουσι παρ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν τό τε καλῶς καὶ τὸ κακῶς ἕκαστος—ἔστι γὰρ καὶ ἔργον αὐτοῖς μετὰ τὰς ῥήσεις τοῦ ποιητοῦ. Cf. 3.2.10.11-19; 3.3.3; 4.2.24.11-16.

<sup>18</sup> *Lg.* 10.904A6-7.

<sup>19</sup> *Lg.* 10.904B8-C4: τῆς δὲ γενέσεως τοῦ ποίου τινὸς ἀφῆκε ταῖς βουλήσεσιν ἐκάστων ἡμῶν τὰς αἰτίας. ὅπη γὰρ ἂν ἐπιθυμῆ καὶ ὁποῖός τις ὦν τὴν ψυχὴν, ταῦτη σχεδὸν ἐκάστοτε καὶ τοιοῦτος γίνεταί ἅπας ἡμῶν ὡς τὸ πολὺ.

doubt that they are ignorant of their own good in their pursuit of that which is not good *simpliciter*. But why hold them—as opposed to their parents, their society, their upbringing, etc.—responsible for this ignorance? Why are they held responsible for their beliefs given that belief formation is purely passive? We cannot, after all, choose what we believe. Whence the culpability for their ignorance? It will hardly do to follow Aristotle and say, in effect, that ‘he should have known better’. This is question-begging. Why should he?

Put Satan behind you. Consider another legendary figure. In this instance, we imagine a man who is approached by a messenger from the oracle at Delphi. The messenger says to him that his future happiness depends entirely on how he responds to a proposition that he, the messenger, is about to proclaim. The man is terrified at what initially appears to him to be some sort of fiendish trap. The messenger says, ‘Calm yourself. There is nothing to fear. All you have to do is acknowledge to yourself either the truth *or* the falsity of the proposition I am about to advance. It does not matter whether you believe it to be true or believe it to be false. All that does matter is that you act accordingly. If you believe the proposition to be true, you must act on that belief; if you believe it to be false, so, too, must you act accordingly. It does not matter at all whether you believe the proposition true or false. Just resolve to act on your belief’. The man relaxes and the messenger says to him, ‘you are fated to kill your father and marry your mother’. The man, whose name happens to be Oedipus, is stunned. He vociferously denies that this will happen. That is, he does not believe that the proposition is true. The messenger says that this response is perfectly understandable and even commendable and that all Oedipus has to do now is act on his belief. Oedipus ponders his course of action and informs the messenger that he will leave his home in Corinth in order to avoid his terrible fate. The messenger, shaking his head with profound sadness, returns to Delphi, knowing that Oedipus is doomed by his own profound irrationality.

As we can easily see, Oedipus completely fails to follow the simple instructions of the messenger. If he did not believe that he was fated to kill his father and marry his mother, then why would he leave home? He should have simply disregarded the false prophesy and continued his life, honoring both his (supposed) father and mother and eventually inheriting the kingship of Corinth. Conversely, if he believed that he was fated to kill his father and marry his mother, why would he suppose that he could avoid his fate by running away? The messenger, after all, did not say that he would kill his father and marry his mother only if he stayed in Corinth. The unconditional nature of the prophesy makes the idea of eluding his fate incoherent unless that is, one does not believe in fate at all, in which case all Oedipus needed to do was act on that belief.

Oedipus holds himself to have been culpably ignorant, though his reasons for this are obscure. From a Plotinian perspective, however, we may say that Oedipus has committed an offense against reason. He has acted contrary to his own belief. The salient feature of his situation for our purposes is that his belief is constitutive of the rational structure of that contrary action. That is, in believing that he could elude what he believed to be his fate, he acted in a profoundly irrational manner. For fate cannot be eluded unless, of course, one eludes it simply by denying its reality, much like one who ‘exorcizes’ ghosts by denying their reality.

In a similar fashion, Plotinus’ putative wrongdoer embraces a universal proposition and then acts on this when the appropriate particular proposition is also believed. His culpability, I maintain, rests on his embrace of or assent to the universal proposition at the same time as he acts as if the universal proposition were not true. How can this be? Here is my explanation. Assent to any practical universal proposition is not just assent to the truth of that proposition but it is also perforce assent to another implicit proposition, namely, that the universal proposition is

one to which one *ought* to assent. To announce that one ought to assent to a practical universal proposition is to acknowledge that one is essentially rational, that one's good is revealed in that proposition. To act thus is to act 'with reason' (μετὰ λόγου) and not merely 'according to reason' (κατὰ λόγον), as Aristotle puts it.<sup>20</sup> What differentiates the virtuous person, for Plotinus, from everyone else, is that he fully and unqualifiedly embraces the proposition that his own good is expressed in the universal proposition. He identifies himself as a rational soul, *not* the composite of body and soul that is the subject of *orexeis*.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to him, everyone else more or less acknowledges their own rationality at the same time as they repudiate this by putting their rationality in the service of their *orexeis*. Even the most vicious person acknowledges his essential rationality when he discerns or thinks he discerns his own good contained in a universal proposition.

Perhaps it will be objected that the vicious person who is ignorant of his identity is non-culpable and his use of or obedience to a universal proposition is, accordingly, taken by him to be strictly instrumental to the fulfillment of his true identity which is as the subject of his embodied *orexeis*. Like David Hume, he contends that 'reason is exclusively the slave of the passions'. The objection confuses a non-normative and a normative sense of 'rationality'.<sup>22</sup> To hold that reason is exclusively the slave of the passions is to do more than merely use reason as a slave of the passions. Of course, the vicious person uses reason to serve his passions. But this is simply because he has a rational soul and so all of his actions are non-normatively rational. One is non-normatively rational because one is a human being, not because one is a good human being. Normative rationality enters, however, when he acknowledges—as he must—that his good is to be achieved by following the universal premise. Of course, what he takes to be his good is, *ex hypothesi*, not really his good. Nevertheless, by his acknowledgement that such-and-such is good for him, he is using his reason normatively. This is a use of reason fundamentally different from the instrumental use. This is so because the determination that something is good for oneself is *either* an immediate inference from the claim that something is good *simpliciter* or it is reduced to the claim that a particular appetite or *orexis* is good for oneself. But this reduction amounts to saying that it is good because I want it which is fundamentally different from saying that I want it because it is good. And this is as much as to say that one has foregone a practical syllogism altogether.

To put the point in a slightly different way, if a vicious person defends his vice, he must employ his reason normatively, saying something to the effect that it is good for people to act as their appetites dictate. Even if the supposed universal premise he claims to follow is that every appetite ought to be satisfied whenever it arises—like the leaky bucket of Callicles—this is only a real universal claim if it is universally applicable, that is, if he claims that it is true for everyone or, say, for anyone who is in a position of power. To use one's reason to figure out what is good

<sup>20</sup> See *EN* 1.7.1098a14, 7.4.1140a4, etc. Plotinus prefers the phrase κατὰ βούλησιν to express the idea of acting 'with reason'. See 1.4.4.17; 6.8.6.36.

<sup>21</sup> See 1.4.4.13-15: τὸν δὲ εὐδαιμόνα ἤδη, ὃς δὴ καὶ ἐνεργεῖα ἐστὶ τοῦτο καὶ μεταβέβηκε πρὸς τὸ αὐτό, εἶναι τοῦτο.

<sup>22</sup> See the passage quoted in note 16 where the non-normative use of reason is evident in the man's 'giving himself over to his appetites, etc. I take this to amount to using his reason instrumentally to satisfy these. Normative reason is located in the intellect that the person really is. That intellect is permanently oriented to the Good. The embodied manifestation of that intellect operates dualistically: first-order rational desires (with non-normative rationality) and second-order rational desires (with normative rationality). So, if I desire to take drugs that is non-normative rationality and if I desire not to have the desire to take drugs, that is normative rationality. A return to one's true self is not completely possible while embodied. The ideal is, as it were, an asymptote.

for oneself is to acknowledge implicitly that one's good consists of something other than satisfying every appetite that arises. That is, it is to acknowledge that one's own good is achieved by following reason. If a malefactor said that his ideal would be to act according to the rule that every appetite should be satisfied as soon as it arises, he would *still* be admitting that it is reason that has determined what is good for him. But it is incoherent to acknowledge this and to deny that reason has the 'final say' in a dispute between reason and appetite. Even the deranged tyrant who abandons himself to the satisfaction of his 'basest appetite', as Plato calls it, manifests his essential rationality in deciding that this is a good thing for him to do, that this is how his good is to be achieved.

In Plotinus' accounts of the grades of virtue, it is clear that the embodied soul's tendency to evil results from its failure to identify with intellect and its inclination to identify itself solely as the subject of embodied *orexeis*:

V. In fact, since the soul is evil when it is enmeshed in the body, and comes to feel the same things as it, and comes to believe the same things, it would be good and have virtue if it were not to believe these things, but were to act alone—which is what thinking and being wise is—and not feel the same things as the body—which is what self-control is—and not fear being separated from the body—which is what it is to be courageous—and if reason or intellect were to lead it, with the passions not opposing it—which is what justice would be.<sup>23</sup>

I interpret this passage within the framework of the practical syllogism. Progress in virtue consists in the gradual identification with the subject that sees its own good in the deliverances of reason rather than in the satisfaction of appetites. The words 'acting alone' I take to mean acting according to reason or intellect, that is, according to the universal premises of the syllogism. One does this because one identifies oneself and hence one identifies one's own good more or less with that intellect. Since everyone (and everything) seeks its own good, the man making progress in virtue comes to see that his own good is the good that is determined in the normative use of reason, that use that affirms the universal claim that such-and-such is good.

Of course, as we have seen, appeal to a universal premise in one's practical reasoning is not necessarily benign since the universal claim may be false, which is to say that what one takes to be good for oneself is not in fact so because it is not identical with that which is good *simpliciter*. When this occurs, it is no doubt owing to a residual identification with the subject of the *orexeis*, the subject who 'believes the same things' as the body, that is, the ensouled body. The culpable ignorance of the wrongdoer consists in the practical contradiction contained in 'believing what the body believes' at the same time as he employs his reason normatively to determine his own good. The ignorance is ignorance of one's own true identity; the culpability resides in one's denial of this identity at the very moment that one affirms it in his non-normative rational acting.

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<sup>23</sup> 1.2.3.11-19: "Ἡ ἐπειδὴ κακὴ μὲν ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχὴ συμπεφυρμένη τῷ σώματι καὶ ὁμοπαθῆς γινομένη αὐτῷ καὶ πάντα συνδοξάζουσα, εἴη ἂν ἀγαθὴ καὶ ἀρετὴν ἔχουσα, εἰ μῆτε συνδοξάζοι, ἀλλὰ μόνη ἐνεργοῖ—ὅπερ ἐστὶ νοεῖν τε καὶ φρονεῖν—μῆτε ὁμοπαθῆς εἴη—ὅπερ ἐστὶ σωφρονεῖν—μῆτε φοβοῖτο ἀφισταμένη τοῦ σώματος—ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἀνδρίζεσθαι—ἡγοῖτο δὲ λόγος καὶ νοῦς, τὰ δὲ μὴ ἀντιτείνουσι—δικαιοσύνη δ' ἂν εἴη τοῦτο.

Plotinus repeatedly exhorts his readers to discover their true identities. This has no doubt seemed to many to a paradoxical, if not whimsical, request. After all, in the immortal words of the philosopher Popeye, ‘I yam what I yam, Olive Oil’. How could *I* discover myself to be anything *but* what I am? For Plotinus, the discovery constitutes a realization of what I must be in order to act or even in order to claim to be anything other than a rational soul. A man who claims to be a rabbit, pointing out his devotion to lettuce, cannot evade culpability for his claim even though he is ignorant of its falsity.

## II

If this interpretation is basically correct, one still wants to know why embodiment should lead to evil, why there should be upon embodiment what Plotinus famously calls a ‘forgetting’ of one’s true lineage and identity.<sup>24</sup> Why should there even be a possibility of culpable ignorance? This is essentially a question of theodicy because the inclination to evil presumes the existence of evil, even if only as a possibility and, since the Good or the One is the ‘source of all things’,<sup>25</sup> it is somehow implicated in the existence of evil.

As we all know, there are numerous difficulties in the Plotinian texts pertaining to the existence of evil. Here I can only summarize my interpretation of the texts relevant to my main theme. Matter is a necessary condition for the possibility of a sensible world that imitates the intelligible world. The necessity for the existence of matter is revealed to us by the existence of things with matter, that is, things with bodies. For knowing that these exist, we know that if they did not, Intellect would have been grudging in its withholding of what is possible and the One would be, *per impossibile*, limited in not producing the kinds of things that could be produced.<sup>26</sup> In the imitation of the intelligible world found among sensibles there is all manner of derived goodness. Matter is not separate from its causes just in the sense that it is this necessary condition. Matter, though, is evil when it is pursued as an end. Since everything desires that which is good, to pursue the opposite is, as it were, to be oriented in the most perverse way possible. It is to do more than to take the apparent good as the Good itself.<sup>27</sup> For, according to Plotinus, apparent goods will have a measure of the Good in them insofar as they have any semblance of an intelligible nature. That is why it is possible to appeal to a false universal premise in a practical syllogism as indicating a good. In fact, it is not clear that the genuinely successful pursuit of evil as such is anything other than a theoretical possibility for Plotinus. No embodied person can say with Milton’s Satan, ‘evil be thou my good’ and mean it.

What is, however, all too real is vice (κακία). The distinction between evil and vice is, says Plotinus, the distinction between that which is unqualified privation of form or measure and that which is a particular sort of lack of measure, such as injustice.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, virtue is not the Good, but *a* good, which enables us to dominate matter.<sup>29</sup> The reason why injustice, for example, is a vice is that it constitutes an orientation in the sensible world in the ‘direction’ of evil, that is, away from the Good. It does this by one directing one’s desires to the body as if its good were the Good. The goods of the body do appear to be the Good because body is not

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<sup>24</sup> See 5.1.1.

<sup>25</sup> See 5.3.15.27-30: Πῶς δὲ ἐκεῖνο ἀρχὴ τῶν πάντων; Ἄρα, ὅτι αὐτὰ σώζει ἐν ἑκαστῶν αὐτῶν ποιήσασα εἶναι; Ἡ καὶ ὅτι ὑπέστησεν αὐτά. Πῶς δὲ; Ἡ τῷ πρότερον ἔχειν αὐτά.

<sup>26</sup> See e.g., 5.9.9; 6.7.3.22-33; 6.7.8.12-13: ταῦτα δὲ ἐπηκολούθει ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐκείνοις .

<sup>27</sup> See 4.4.44.30-2: τὸ γὰρ οὐκ ἀγαθὸν ὡς ἀγαθὸν διώκειν ἐλχθέντα τῷ ἐκείνου εἶδει ἀλόγοις ὀρμαῖς, τοῦτο ἐστὶν ἀγομένου ὅπου μὴ ἤθελεν οὐκ εἰδότης.

<sup>28</sup> See 1.8.5.14-17.

<sup>29</sup> See 1.8.6.19-20. Cf. 1.8.13.5-7.

without intelligible form. But to take the goods of the body merely as apparent goods without deception would be not to desire them other than as images of the intelligible reality that they imitate.<sup>30</sup> This interpretation is supported by the claim made by Plotinus that certain gods and certain men, though having bodies, are not inclined to evil.<sup>31</sup> It is not the presence of matter alone that produces any vice. So, to call matter ‘evil’ is to indicate matter operating in a certain condition or circumstance. This circumstance is the embodied life of a soul that has a certain weakness.<sup>32</sup>

The inclination to evil in an embodied soul is owing entirely to the inevitability of there being embodied souls, that is, images of the disembodied souls that are identical with our intellects. A modern day scientist would no doubt want to insist that it might have been the case there, had evolution gone differently, there would be no human beings. But for Plotinus, even if evolution does occur, *devolution* is ontologically prior to this, that is, the devolution or unfolding of all that is possible, ultimately from the One.<sup>33</sup> An embodied soul has a fractured identity. That is, to put it simply, it is partitioned. This must be the case because if it were not, embodiment would be something like being a zombie in reverse. We would be like intellects with no way of using our bodies and, indeed, no need to use them. One cannot be a human being without having embodied *orexeis*. This is the original sin, so to speak. If our ‘forgetting’ our true identity is the original sin, we still necessarily retain an attachment to our own disembodied and undescended intellects wherein our true identity lies. Virtually every moment of their waking lives, most people implicitly proclaim that identity even as they betray it.

Here is a fairly obvious objection to Plotinus’ position. If, as Plato teaches us, the embodied soul is tripartite, this means, among other things, that there are irrational appetites. In the devolution of a rational soul, the tyrant stands out as a sort of limiting case. He has completely, or almost so, identified himself with his most depraved appetite. He is no doubt ignorant of his true nature. How can he be culpably so? How can we blame Mr. Hyde for being ignorant of the fact that he is really Dr. Jekyll? Plotinus’ response to this problem, which deserves a far more extensive treatment, is, I think, that it is an illusion to suppose that an irrational appetite must have an irrational subject.<sup>34</sup> It is a rational soul that has an irrational appetite, irrational only in the sense that it requires a body. To desire something requires, at least, the conceptualization of a πάθος or state of the body such that one can deliberate about that desire’s satisfaction. This is non-normative reason. It is the permanent endowment of an embodied human soul. Normative rationality judges the operation of non-normative reasoning. Self-discovery is the discovery of *that*. The habituation in virtue is the gradually increasing intimate acquaintance with one’s normative rational power; vice, the alienation from it. That is how Plotinus understands the astonishing Socratic claim that philosophy is the practice for dying and being dead.

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<sup>30</sup> See 1.8.8.1-28 and 1.8.9 where Plotinus contrasts a clear and a deceptive appraisal of form in bodies. For bodily evils like sickness or ugliness see 1.8.4.1-2; 1.8.14.10-13; 5.9.10.

<sup>31</sup> See 1.8.5.30-4.

<sup>32</sup> See 4.8.4.1-23. At 6.7.23.15-6 Plotinus says εἰ δὲ τις λέγοι μὴ εἶναι, οὐδὲ κακὸν ἂν εἶη, referring to the Good. But this does not gainsay the claim that matter is only evil as a τέλος.

<sup>33</sup> See 5.5.12. 46-7: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔστιν ὃ μὴ γέγονε γενομένων τῶν πάντων. (‘For there is nothing which has not come to be given that everything has come to be’).

<sup>34</sup> See 4.3.3.24-30: Ἀλλ’ ὅτι ἔν [soul] γε πανταχοῦ, εἴρηται, καὶ ἐν τοῖς διαφοροῖς τῶν ἔργων., Ὅταν δὲ καὶ λογικὴ ἢ ψυχὴ, καὶ οὕτω λογικὴ ὡς <ή> ὅλη λέγεται. Cf. 5.1.3.17-19: Καὶ ταῦτας μόνας δεῖ λέγειν ἐνεργείας ψυχῆς, ὅσα νοεῶς καὶ ὅσα οἰκοθεν·.

A Satanic intelligence is, accordingly, inconceivable for Plotinus.<sup>35</sup> If disembodied persons choose their embodied stations unwisely that is owing to character flaws acquired here below. The travails of embodiment are fully compensated by the opportunity for redemption. Like a reborn Oedipus given a second chance, a human being need only acknowledge his own self-identity as revealed by, among other things, his rational renunciation of that self-identity in action. The embodied person who reflects on his propensity to evil, if only for a moment, eliminates the possibility or perhaps plausibility of his claiming that his ignorance of his own nature is non-culpable.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Plato, *Crat.* 398B6 and 6.7.6.32-3 on *daimones* which do not seem to be like Satan at all.