

Modern Science Meets the Canon

Post by “Hiram” of June 3, 2019 at 1:24 PM

Embodied cognition was a prominent theme in this essay @ Aeon, which was very enjoyable to read

<https://aeon.co/essays/feminis...e-from-its-body>

In it, Sally Davies is the first person that I'm aware of who attacks transhumanist ideology as an expression of an irrational Platonic anxiety about the body. She also challenges Descartes for a similar reason. Concerning Plato, she says:

Since Plato, generations of philosophers have been gripped by a fear of the body and the desire to transcend it – a wish that works hand-in-hand with a fear of women, and a desire to control them. In the dialogue *Timaeus*, Plato likens the force of his ideal, immaterial forms to a disciplinarian father, imposing order on all this unwieldy material *stuff* that was nonetheless ‘the mother and receptacle of all created and visible and in any way sensible things’. Here Plato deploys a well-worn technique for suppressing corporeal angst: carving off the mind (rational, detached, inviolable, symbolically male) from the body (emotional, entangled, weak, symbolically female).

Plato’s legacy persisted into the Medieval world, as the split between form and matter assumed the moral complexion of Christianity. Humans were believed to be in possession of an immortal soul, which reason and restraint should shield from the corrupting influence of earthly pleasures. Women and the female body, the presumed targets of men’s sexual desire, therefore bore the semiotic burden of sin. The theologian St Augustine, for example, chastised himself for repeatedly succumbing to lustful urges in his youth, where women ‘found my soul beyond its portals, dwelling in the eye of my flesh’.

Christianity took the Platonic neurosis to new heights. We must not forget that Eve--like Pandora before her--was blamed for all the evils in the world, and that after the primal so-called "fall from grace" she and Adam are imagined as covering up their nakedness out of shame--shame of having a body, of being a natural being.

With the advent of modernity and the Enlightenment, this wish to detach from the material became a self-consciously scientific and rational enterprise. ...

No wonder feminist thinkers have been so skeptical about attempts to raise ‘rationality’ above all else. The concept of reason itself is built on a profoundly gendered blueprint. But a surprising rapprochement might be in sight: between feminists who criticise the mind/matter split, and certain philosophers and scientists who are now trying to put them back together. Fresh theories and findings about

human cognition suggest that **those feminised zones of physicality, emotion and desire not only affect the way we think, but are the very constituents of thought itself.**

... Within a broad church that can be called - not uncontentiously - *embodied cognition*, a growing number of psychologists, scientists and theorists **are approaching mental life as something that is not just contingent on, but constituted by, the state of our bodies.**