

*Is the doctrine of a soul that has no material side or body but just controls a body sensible?*

To control it must have powers but what are those powers?

Some teachers talk about the soul having different faculties and describe a hierarchy of them. These often make the list. Nutrition, perception, desire, locomotion and intellect.

Locomotion describes the power to act. Without it the others are no good. You cannot perceive for perception is an action. So the order is in terms of importance, the power to act, the power to perceive, the power to think, the power to desire. So it follows a soul with only the power to act and nothing else is still a soul. The notion that the soul helps guarantee personhood is bizarre. It does not. Who says that stones then do not have souls? We don't go down that road for we see the absurdity of souls.

The soul if it exists would be a conscious entity. But we never experience consciousness in its purity. We have different kinds of it. The consciousness of a sound is not the same as that by which a light is perceived. So there is sound consciousness. There is sight consciousness. There is touch consciousness - and taste and smell. Consciousness is never independent. Even when we think of something abstract, we use all those kinds of consciousness to help us think of it. So do we have a hearing soul and a seeing soul? Why say we have one soul?

The Catechism of Christian Doctrine says the soul has three powers. The powers are memory and understanding and will. Nonsense. The main power of the soul if it exists is awareness. It knows it exists and may be aware of other things. A soul without memory and understanding would still be as aware as ever. If we deny that then we are saying that forgetful people and those we consider to be stupid are inferior souls to the souls of the intelligent memory masters. They are less important souls and may be discriminated against. The power of will - the power to intend is also an extra power. You don't need it to be aware. You will be conscious whether you want to be or not. Your memory and understanding and your will are not part of you if you are a soul. In no sense, are they you.

A soul is an entity without parts. It is a whole. If a spirit is love then it is wholly love. If a spirit is cruel then it is wholly cruel. The spirit is a power that is perfectly one because it is partless. For it to be a mixture of qualities would mean that it has some power to be bad and some to be good or some to be clever and some to be stupid or whatever. That is impossible for it is one power. The ability of the spiritual soul is not something that is distinct from its awareness but is its awareness. So, if you are a soul and think of a picture at one moment and a dog in the next there is not one consciousness but two. It follows that every moment and every time you have a new thought you are becoming a new person. The person who thinks of the picture is not the person who contemplates the dog.

You are only conscious of the present moment and you don't know for sure if you were really conscious a second ago for you could just be tapping into a reservoir of memory from the preceding consciousness if you think you can remember being you. If you came into existence a second ago complete with a memory you would not know. Thus, if you have a soul there is no proof that you are not changing into another person every second. My memory is a sense. It is the power to sense that you experienced the past. But senses can be deceived.

The doctrine of a spiritual soul leads to these shocking conclusions. The doctrine tells us that God cannot exist because there is no point in him sending or permitting suffering when one person is just replacing another inside each body. The person lives but a moment and is annihilated. The substance is used to create a new person.

The person who falls asleep dies and somebody else rises up in the morning. Buddhism says you are seven things. Consciousness is one of them. Are you a person when you are asleep and not dreaming? Think about that. Is it murder to kill a sleeping person? Buddhism teaches that since you are a collection of seven things and none of them is you but together they make you you that you doesn't really exist. In their idea, if you think of a car as a unit you will make the mistake of thinking the car exists. It does not for its a collection of parts. Its just a bundle you put a label on. In the same way, for Buddhists, the label person is just a name you give to a bundle of seven things. It would seem that if you are a soul then the soul is essentially consciousness and is dead when you are asleep. It must be immoral to fall asleep.

Religion teaches that life is absolutely valuable. They reason that this is so because it is stupid to say that happiness should be promoted if persons are not important. To say happiness should be worked for is to say that human life is more important than happiness. If that is true then though you are alive when you are asleep your consciousness is dead if you are not dreaming. Life is no good without consciousness. So it is conscious human life not just human life that is valuable. Falling asleep then is murder and denying the value of life. Its wrong to take a nap for you can do without a nap.

If life is absolutely valuable and if I am a soul in a body, then it follows that souls come first. The death of the body does not affect the life of the soul. Such a doctrine is essential fanaticism. If, hypothetically, we were required to kill bodies so that one soul could live then we would have to kill the bodies. The only thing then that is stopping religionists from doing this is that there is no need to. They have to still intend to do it if there is need.

The religious cannot explain some things about our minds so they assume that a supernatural soul is the explanation. But why not just say its inexplicable? And indeed that is what we should say for consciousness in all its mystery is somehow rooted in the physical brain.

Religion argues that there are strange things about how we know we are alive and how we function so they say that means there is a soul. But maybe we do know how it works but don't know how to show it scientifically. But maybe there is a natural explanation. Maybe if we don't have one we can have one even if we will never find it. It is a fallacy to say that "I don't know how this is done so it is supernatural or non-natural."

Religion says that evil is that which destroys and the soul that makes evil damages itself. That implies that evil is defined by what it does to your soul. If the soul is the real you then evil is self-abuse. If that is all that evil is about then the soul doctrine is poison.

The soul doctrine is used as an excuse for saying your real self is a child of God so if you sin you are not being you.

Nobody can make up their minds but either interpretation is just an excuse for interior narcissism.

You feel safest with what you are used to so look at everything and make sure you realise what you have and how good it is. Look after your body more than your soul for at least you can see the body and touch it so looking after the body should help your mind get healthier for you feel safer and see the results. The Church has always said that looking after the body and the mind is less important than the soul which exposes it for the anti-happiness rip-off that it is. The soul is thought to be what's left when your body and mind perish in death and it can only be looked after by prayer and religion! How good for the market that is religion!

We only know that we are aware that we exist and that we are having experiences. We do not know how. We only experience what our minds do and think and perceive but they are not like objects we can examine like a stone or flower.

Descartes said that the only thing you are certain of is that you are aware now. Thus there is no way to know if the you that existed a moment ago is really you. Maybe its just a memory you got and the self is constantly replacing itself. This is like the Heraclitus suggestion that you never enter the same river twice for all is change. So you never get the same self twice either. Berkeley because of Descartes suggested that logically it makes sense to deny that matter is real - its all in the mind. I am me now but I was not me a moment ago. Self is not real but a momentary thing that uses memory to look real. Camus then ended up saying life is more than meaningless but absurd. Derrida agreed with all these people that self, everything, just just change and transition and there is no real unity. The self is a succession of selves not a united thing having different experiences.

Sarte ended up saying life is meaningless for there is no fixed self. "Man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the being of man and his being-free". So the human person is freedom - the human person is not something that can be free. Sight is sight and sight is not something that is just there to see. It is seeing - it is not to be mixed up with a faculty. Seeing is what it is not what it does though it does see. For Sarte, freedom is why the human person has no fixed nature or substance. A person is fluid and is not a fixed power - a person to be free has to be always literally becoming somebody else. "Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of the human being is suspended in freedom".

All these people were just repeating what Hume said - that if you look within you can find no self and no fixed self.

Hume made the mistake of thinking the mind (what he meant by self) was an illusion for he could never find it like he could another object. He was wrong for he assumed that it is an illusion just because it is not an observable object. He didn't see that it could be an unobservable object. People who have never observed or seen their own eyes are not entitled to assume they have no eyes.

Perhaps the mind is an object albeit one that is only detectable by experiencing it. Hume failed to see that it is the subject of feelings and actions and experiences. If it is an object we cannot know or prove that for we only experience the subject side of it. And only a mind could have the illusion of there being a mind. So Hume's insistence that there is no self or mind is suspect.

"I know I exist. I cannot know anything unless in some sense this knowledge is me. This is supernatural for how else could

I be my knowledge?" This argument says I am me but I am also my knowledge that I exist. But this is contradictory. It is like saying my lungs are my breath. It is one thing to argue that I have a supernatural soul but it is another to argue that I have a contradictory soul!

The Christian religion thinks itself to be very clever when it says we have immortal souls which are purely spiritual entities, entities without parts. A soul is like a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. It is one substance which has no parts or components but which is self-sufficient. It is only beings that have bits and pieces that are not self-sufficient for they depend on things to protect them and on forces to hold them together. A soul is thought to be spirit - spirit means a non-physical reality. Its there but it is not made of matter or energy as we understand them in physics.

Believers know that you can still be alive though unconscious. So they have started to say that the soul's consciousness is not the same consciousness as the brain. That way they argue that if a person is severely brain damaged and barely conscious, their soul is still as conscious as ever. I like Peter Atkins's declaration in his book *On Being* that believers in the notion that each of us has an individual soul are saying it is "a consciousness beyond consciousness" (page 89). When we are unconscious or are in an extremely deep coma, believers say our brain is unconscious but the conscious soul is still there. This doctrine contradicts our experience. When you fall asleep you don't know if you are dead or alive. And the doctrine is wholly incapable of being supported by evidence. If we are conscious without knowing it then why not say your soul is in your dog or your child?

The doctrine of the soul makes it plain that the law of the land is wrong to say that if you are brain-dead then you are dead. No true Christian can support such a law. It follows that it is a sin to turn off life support when a person experiences brain-death as that could be killing them. You ignore brain death and treat them as if it never happened. If a person is stabbed to death nobody can say they were stabbed to death. The real killer is the person who does not treat them as alive.

It is odd that we say we have souls. We should say we are claiming that we ARE souls.

Some religions claim that the soul is really God bundled into your body. The thought that your soul is God is a delight to those mystical people who can be described as religious narcissists. The Christians pretend that it is enough to assert that the soul is not God. But it would be our inability to be God and God's inability to be us that is holding us back. It is not humility that restrains us. It is nonsense to associate humility with the doctrine that your soul is not God.

The Christians claim that the atheist disbelief in the soul is demeaning. They think we have a higher status if we have immortal souls. But they should realise it depends on the evidence. Having a soul or not having one is irrelevant in relation to humility. What is prideful is to say we have a soul when there is no adequate evidence for it. The narcissism of thinking you are too good to be matter is behind belief in the soul. Catholicism would collapse if it dropped the concept. The centre of Catholicism, so it says, is the sacraments. The sacraments only have meaning if they are going to put powers in the soul. The real centre then is the soul. The sacraments reflect and induce Catholic arrogance. If a scientist reveals that we are not ensouled entities, the Christians often get mad at this. They are afraid of their indulgent little fantasy being challenged.

Matter imposes restrictions. If I have a spiritual or supernatural soul, it follows that my soul is more free than my body. It is the real seat of freedom. The Church deduces that as well for it says the soul has the power of free will. The soul transcends matter. The soul and its freedom is magic even if it cannot do magic in the sense that a cat can be turned into a dog with a snap of the fingers. The magical soul is the true cause of what I freely do, the source of my freedom. Clearly to say you are a soul or have one is to insult the body. It places the soul above the body in importance. Death is to be welcomed as it gives release to the soul. Some argued that as the body is bad, suicide is a virtue. Others said that as the body deserves no respect you may have all the promiscuous sex you want. The Christian should logically adopt one view or the other. But because of the laws of the Church they refuse to have the integrity to. Its a case of putting rules before logic!

The doctrine of a spiritual soul is deadly indeed and is as absurd as it is evil.

*On Being*, Peter Atkins, Oxford, New York, 2011

