

## REASON AND SPIRITUALITY

In philosophy the word 'soul' traditionally means 'principle of life' or 'source of life'. The context in which the word 'soul' is used is the following. The universe is made up of matter, matter combined in different ways, matter organized into different kinds of units. Some of the matter we find in the universe displays characteristics we refer to by words such as 'life', 'living', and 'animate'; we do not find these characteristics in the rest of the matter of the universe. The tree outside the window is part of the matter of the universe; the sidewalk next to it is also part of the matter of the universe. We discover by experience that the tree grows, nourishes itself and reproduces itself; we discover by experience also that the sidewalk does none of these things. These functions, and others such as sensing, remembering, self-locomotion, thinking, etc., are life functions. Anything able to perform such a function is alive; anything not able to perform them is not alive. But why is it that some of the matter in the universe displays such features and the rest of the matter does not? How are we to explain why one particular collection of material parts, the tree for instance, displays these functions while another collection of material parts, the sidewalk, does not display these functions?

'Soul' is used to refer to whatever it is about the tree, or any other living thing, which explains why we find life properties in the matter that makes up the tree but not in other collections of matter. Why is it that growth, nourishment and reproduction are found here and not there? To ask what is the cause of the presence of life in some of the matter making up the universe is the same as asking what is the source of life or principle of life in those groups of matter. And 'soul' is simply shorthand for this concept. So far, then, there is nothing controversial about the concept of soul. You may wonder how useful this concept is. But that is not the same as thinking there is something intrinsically wrong with the concept as here described. There is at least one attempt to use this concept which has been controversial, namely, the claim that the human soul is something spiritual; but that claim goes far beyond anything we have said so far.

Just by definition, then, every living thing has a soul; for there will always be something about any portion of the universe's matter which is alive that will explain why it, and not some other portion of matter, is alive. But to say that every living thing has a soul is not to say that living things are composed of body and soul. Living things are composites of matter, not composites of body and soul. There is not one thing called a body and another thing called a soul. A living thing is matter organized a certain way, matter with a certain structure. It is because the atoms and molecules that make up a body have a particular underlying structure, are organized so that they are related to each

other in ways that the components of non-living things are not related, that this body is alive. To say that a body has a soul, in other words, is to say that its underlying material components are organized in one way and not in another way. But the way in which matter is organized is not a thing, a unit of existence, separate and distinct from the matter. The shape of a lump of clay is the way some matter is organized; but the shape is not something existing in its own right, that happens to be stuck on to the clay the way we might stick a piece of paper to the clay, the shape is simply a set of relations between different material components.

This may sound as if we are reducing the soul to next to nothing; we seem to be suggesting that the matter is what is really important. It is clear that this is not the case for two reasons. The first we have already dwelt on at length: without its underlying principle of organization, the soul, the matter would not be living; it would not be capable of life functions. The second reason is this: the matter making up a living organism can change completely but the living organism retains its identity. The same organism could not survive while its material components change completely unless the underlying structure according to which the new components are organized was the same as the structure of the old components. The cells of the human body come and go and the matter is completely replaced every seven years. But each new cell produced carries the same unique DNA code which has determined and directed the production of every other cell that has ever been part of that body. We are the same being now that existed at our birth only because the principle of organization of the matter making us up has remained the same despite a total change in the matter itself. So even though the soul is not a thing over and above the matter, still it is correlative with matter as an explanatory principal necessary to account for life.

Understanding ‘soul’ as referring to a principle which accounts for the existence of certain things, rather than understanding it as referring to a fully existent thing, we can say that a living thing is matter plus a soul but not that a living thing is composed of soul and body. Quoting the French philosopher Claude Tresmontant, “The definition of a body is matter vitalized by a soul. There can be no body without a soul; when the soul disappears in death, what is left is not a body but a corpse, that is, a miscellaneous heap of matter which disintegrates. To call a corpse a ‘body’ is to be guilty of a confusing misnomer.” In other words, there is a traditional meaning for ‘body’ that refers not just to physical matter in general, but to organized physical matter, matter with a certain structure. A heap of unrelated parts is not a body in this sense, and a corpse is such a heap of parts. What the corpse lacks which the living body had is not any of the body’s material parts. The same matter is in the living body and in the corpse immediately after death. What is different is that the material components are not related in the same way in the corpse as in the body. The corpse is the body minus the soul. But to say “body and soul” is redundant. The concept of body (organized matter)

includes the concept of soul (principle of structure in matter which is so organized as to be alive). Saying “body and soul” is like saying “salt and pepper and salt” or “complete football team and quarterback.”

The problem of the relationship between soul and body has no meaning; a living body is matter vitalized by a soul. How matter becomes vitalized is a problem, but it is a different problem. The controversial claim I referred to earlier occurs in the case of the human soul. Since the soul is the principle of life, different forms of life will require specifically different souls. There will be vegetative souls, animal souls and human souls. However, the general characteristics associated with the definition of soul will be true of each kind of soul. Thus the human soul will account for the fact that some of the bodies we encounter in the universe display the features we associate with rational life. The human soul will be whatever the human body has which accounts for the fact that this body is capable of rational life functions while other bodies are not. Clearly one of the things required for a body to be capable of rational functions is that its underlying material components be related to one another in a structural pattern which is not true of other forms of life. But many philosophers claim that while a certain organization of material parts is a necessary condition for rational life, it is not a sufficient condition. The human soul, in other words, is a principle accounting for the fact that matter is structured in a certain way (the general idea of soul) but the human soul is not just that. The human soul is what is implied by the definition which applies to all souls (a principle of organization for matter) but it is also more than that.

Specifically many philosophers claim that the human soul is capable of existing apart from the matter of which it is the ultimate principle of organization. For our purposes we can take that as a definition of what it means to call something spiritual, i.e. capable of existing apart from matter. There is a better definition of spirituality but it is too technical to be useful here. On this view the human soul would be drastically unlike the shape of a lump of clay. Obviously the shape cannot exist on its own apart from the clay, but it is asserted that the soul can do just that. The reason shape cannot get up and walk away from the matter of which it is the shape is that shape is merely a set of relations between the components of a physical thing, and relations have no existence apart from the things whose relations they are. You cannot have a relation of marriage without a husband and wife. To assert that the soul is capable of existing apart from matter, therefore, is to imply that the human soul is not just the set of relationships into which the material components of man have been organized.

Rather the human soul is the ultimate principle explaining why man's underlying material components are organized according to the relations necessary for man's body to be capable of rational life functions. To explain the presence of human life in matter, it is argued, more is required than the material components being related in certain ways. This may be enough to explain the forms of life but not enough to explain human life. So the definition of soul may apply to the mere way matter is organized in other living things, but not in men. For a body to display human life functions, its underlying material structure must be the result of the presence of a principle that is not just a material structure.

The argument for this view, which we will spell out shortly, will simply try to show that, because of the very nature of rational life, more is needed to account for its presence in matter than the mere way matter is organized. The organization of matter is a necessary condition but it is not a sufficient condition. The life functions, vegetative and animal, that man shares with other species, are operations performed by the body, the matter under a given system of organization. In other words it is the union of matter and soul, the body, that performs operations such as nutrition, reproduction, sensation, memory, etc. But it is argued that rational, conceptual thought consists of operations that cannot be performed by the body. Yet the operations involved in conceptual thinking do belong to us; we perform them. Therefore they must be accounted for by some principle in our make-up.

Specifically it will be argued that conceptual thinking cannot be performed by anything physical, by anything of which matter is a component. Therefore they must belong to the soul directly. They must be performed by the soul itself and not by anything that results from the union of soul and matter. Seeing, for instance, is performed the eye, but the eye is part of the union of soul and matter which we call the body. And just as we see by means of a part of ourselves, so we reason by means of a part of ourselves. To say that rational thought is performed by the soul directly is not to say that it is not we who are doing the thinking. We do the thinking with our soul just as we see with part of our body.

If it is true that thinking cannot be accounted for by something physical, something of which matter is a constituent, then the only alternative is to say that it is the soul alone through which we do our conceptual thinking. It might be objected that there may be some sort of third principle in us in addition to matter and the principle by which matter is organized into a living body and that it is this third principle which accounts for conceptual thought. But the difficulty with this is that there would be no way to explain how this third principle forms a unity with the other two. Yet our rational functions clearly do constitute a unified form of life with our other life functions. Our rational thought

affects us emotionally and even physically (it makes us frightened, it makes us sweat, it makes us laugh, etc.) And the reverse is true also: what goes on in our physical life has a direct effect on our rational life. In fact, our conceptual life depends upon the state of our physical life as a necessary, if not sufficient, condition (if we did not sense, we would have nothing to think about; if we are drunk, we cannot think straight.) Therefore, whatever principle is the ultimate explanation of our physical life must also be the ultimate reason why we are capable of rational functions.

The important conclusion of this line of thought is that if the human soul performs an activity on its own which is not the activity of the union of soul and matter, then the human soul is not just a set of relationships between material components. Consider our example of shape again. Shape is a set of relations between components. But the shape of a thing performs no activity on its own; shape merely influences the actions that will be performed by the matter that has this shape. If clay is formed into a sphere it will roll down an incline; if it is formed into a cube it will not roll down an incline. A soul that can perform an activity which belongs to it directly must be more than a set of material relations but, since it is that which explains why a portion of matter has life functions, this soul must be the principle which accounts for the fact that these relations are found among these material components.

But if the claim is true that such a soul is spiritual, that is, capable of existing apart from matter, does it follow that this soul deserves to be called a thing in the full sense of the word as opposed to merely a principle, which enters into the make-up of things? We said above that whatever follows from the general definition of soul will apply to that specific kind of soul needed to explain human life. And we also said above that the definition of soul does not imply that it is a thing united with matter the way a piece of paper can be stuck onto clay. Are we taking that back in the case of the human soul? No. Although the soul may be able to exist apart from the matter which it vitalizes. It cannot come into existence except by coming into existence as a principle vitalizing matter. The soul could not exist before the body exists. It gains entrance to the domain of existence only by being the underlying principle of organization of a portion of matter. Once it is in existence, however, the view we are examining asserts that it can continue in existence after it has been separated from matter. Still it is essentially a principle by which a certain kind of thing exists, rather than a full-fledged thing in its own right, because it cannot come into existence on its own right, but can only come into existence as an explanatory factor intrinsic to something other than itself.

If then, the soul indeed performs activities that belong to it directly, it must have a direct relation to the existence it receives when it does come into existence. Things behave according to the way they exist. Dogs do not act

like men and men do not act like dogs. For dogs are not the kind of beings men are; their way of existing is not that of men. If it were, they could act the way men do. To say that human life must have its source in a principle which has its own power to act is to say that the principle which accounts for the existence of human life must be a principle with its own capability of existing. The existence of human life characteristics in a portion of matter depends on the presence in matter of a vitalizing principle which, unlike other vitalizing principles, has an existence that belongs not only to the composite of soul and matter, but also to the soul itself. In other cases the soul simply shares in the existence that belongs properly to the composite (as the shape draws its existence from its union with the clay); in the case of man the composite shares in an existence, which belongs directly and properly to its principle of life (just as it shares in an activity, conceptual thought, which belongs directly and properly to its principle of life). Again, things act according to their mode of existence. If the soul has its own action, it must have its own relation to existence. If the only way the soul were associated with existence were through its union with matter, the only way it would be associated with action would be through its union with matter. That is, the only actions would be those belonging to the composite, the body, not to the soul alone.

Through all of this we have left unanswered the question why it is believed that conceptual thinking goes on apart from matter, and that it cannot be performed by a physical agency. In other words, why must the principle of rational life, unlike other souls, be capable of performing an operation on its own? The answer must be found in the nature of reason itself. There must be something in the nature of conceptual thought, which demands that it be explained by an immaterial faculty. For, by definition all that we can know about the soul is what is necessary for it to be the source of life. We can know that the human soul is spiritual, therefore, only if we know that the nature of conceptual thought requires that its cause be something nonphysical. What is it about conceptual thought that would indicate this? The universality of our concepts!

By concept I mean the meaning of a word; the concept of man is the meaning of the word 'man'; the concept of horse is the meaning of the word 'horse'. To say our concepts are universal is to say that they apply to more than one. Tom is a man; Dick is a man; Harry is a man. In these three sentences the word 'man' is applied to three distinct individuals. Tom is not Dick; Dick is not Harry; Harry is not Tom. Yet when we predicate 'man' of each of these three different persons, we are not saying something different about them; what we are saying about Tom is the same as what we are saying about Dick and Harry. What remains the same in each of these three sentences is the meaning of the word 'man'. This common meaning is sometimes called the connotation or intension of a concept, i.e., the set of characteristics, in this case rationality, animality or whatever characteristics enter into the idea of man, which are

expressed by the word and attributed whenever the word is predicated of something. In contrast, the denotation or extension of a concept is the particular entity or set of particular entities in which these characteristics are found, or of which they are predicated, in this case Tom, Dick and Harry. Clearly the connotation of a common noun, verb or adjective is something that can be true of more than one individual. Hence our concepts are universal. They do not grasp merely individuals but characteristics and sets of characteristics that are capable of existing in many individuals. In Tom or Dick or Harry, human nature is the nature of one and only one thing. Human nature exists in Tom, but exists there only as the nature of Tom, not as the nature of Dick. It exists there as what Tom is and not what anything else is. All other men could perish but human nature would exist in Tom just as it does now. As grasped by conceptual thought, however, human nature does not exist as the nature of just this individual man or just that individual man.

But how does universality show immateriality? Here is the argument in a nutshell:

A) Whatever is material is individual.

B) Concepts are not individual.

C) Therefore, concepts are not material.

Compare:    Whatever is D is E.

                  F is not E.

                  Therefore, F is not D.

or: 1) Nothing material is universal.

      2) Concepts are universal.

      3) Therefore, concepts are not material.

Compare:    Nothing D is G.

                  F is G.

                  Therefore, F is not D.

To say that concepts are universal is to say that the meaning of words like ‘man’, ‘horse’, ‘fast’, ‘red’, etc. are universal. And to say that the meaning of these words is universal is to compare the way these objects of thought exist as grasped by our concepts with the way they exist in the things we experience. As present in our conceptual consciousness, they are not confined to being that which in any one individual thing is while they are so confined insofar as they are present in the things we experience.

What it means to say that everything material is individual or that nothing material is universal is correlative to

this. It is to say that, insofar as objects of thought such as man, horse, fast, red, etc. are present in matter they are confined to being that which some one individual thing is. Insofar as they are present in something of which matter is a constituent, they exist as the nature or attribute of that one thing and nothing else. If matter is an essential element of the thing in which these objects exist, whether we are talking about existence in consciousness or outside of consciousness, then these objects do not exist in a state in which they are applicable to many, are not present in a state in which it can be said that they are explicitly true of many or explicitly express what many things are. Red, for instance, can be present in both perceptual consciousness and conceptual consciousness. I can imagine the red of the American flag (perceptual consciousness) and I can form a concept of red, which will apply to many other shades of red. As it exists in my imagination, red is confined to being this individual red; as it exists in conception, red is not so confined. The argument is that imagination is a function of the body, is a function of something of which matter is an essential constituent; therefore the object of imagination is always present as that which one and only one thing is.

Thus, when it is asserted that whatever is present in matter is individual, it doesn't make any difference whether we are talking about something existing outside of consciousness altogether, or talking about something insofar as it exists in perceptual consciousness. For another example, when trying to prove a theorem in geometry we usually draw the corresponding figure as an aid to our thought. Once drawn, the figure would exist outside of consciousness. But if we have nothing to draw with or nothing to write on, we will have to settle for representing the figure in our imagination. This would be existence in perceptual consciousness. Say the theorem we are working on concerns triangles; we therefore imagine a triangle. The triangle we are imagining will be only one out of an infinite number we could have imagined. It may be an equilateral triangle, for instance, or it may be a right-angled triangle or a scalene triangle. Whatever it is, there are an infinite number of other triangular shapes we could be imagining. On the other hand, the theorem we are proving is not confined to being true of this one triangle we are imagining. If it is true, the theorem will apply to all triangles. And we are quite capable of being conscious of the fact that it applies to all triangles. Therefore the psychic function which accounts for the presence of the triangle in our imagination cannot account for our knowledge of the theorem. There must be distinct psychic operations going on. For imagination is limited to making us conscious of one and only one triangular shape while our knowledge of the theorem relates us consciously to an infinite number of triangular shapes. This illustrates the difference between perceptual thought and conceptual thought. Even if I imagined several different triangles at one time, I would not be duplicating conceptual thought. In conceptual thought I grasp not this triangle and that triangle, but triangularity. I grasp something that each of these individuals is but in such a way that it no longer exists as what just this or that individual is. In conceptual thought each of these triangles is present in a way that is precisely the opposite of the way it is present in



imagination. Triangularity is present in imagination but only as embodied in distinct individual visual triangles. This difference between conceptual and perceptual thought is the definition of the difference between universality and individuality.

We have seen how we can justify the claim the concepts are universal. But how do we justify the claim that presence in matter limits an object of thought to being a characteristic of one and only one Individual? Justifying this claim will complete the argument that concepts are spiritual. That individuality is linked to materiality is another claim that can be argued for in many ways. For our purposes we again choose the simpler way of establishing this view even though there are other ways of doing it that are philosophically more profound.

Occupying space is one of the essential characteristics of physical things, and we are going to see that occupying space is one of the necessary conditions for the individuation of physical things. Since whatever is material occupies space and whatever occupies space is individuated, whatever is material is individuated and not universal. To see how individuation is connected with being extended in space, consider the saying, “Those two are as much alike as two peas in a pod.” This is an exaggerated way of emphasizing the similarity between the things, the sameness rather than the distinction. Obviously two peas in a pod are generally the same in all important respects, the same from any point of view that really matters. Yet there must remain a minimal difference between the two peas. Without some difference, no matter how slight, we could not make a comparison between them. When all the similarities between them have been noted, there remains a rock-bottom difference between them. In what does this difference consist?

Clearly essential to this difference is the fact that the two peas take up different portions of space; one pea is here; the other is there. If this were not true there would not be two peas but one. This is an illustration of the general principle that no two bodies can occupy the same place at the same time. Bodies that have exactly the same extension in space are not two bodies (physical, material things) but one. The current President of the United States and the former center for the University of Michigan football team can be in the same place at the same time but only because they are not two distinct physical things but one physical thing. Now, the state of universality is contrasted to the state of individuality precisely in that what is universal is applicable to many distinct things. These distinct things are what we call individuals. Separability in spatial extension is a necessary condition for material things to be distinct from one another; in order to be distinct individuals, physical things must occupy different portions of space.

Conversely whatever is material will occupy its own portion of space, for whatever is material will have three-dimensional extension. Since extension is one of the properties essential to being material, every material thing will have its certain extension as one of its characteristics. But whatever has its own extension will take up a different portion of space from anything else which has its own extension. Therefore the spatiality of material things makes

every material thing an individual distinct from other material things. No two bodies can be in the same place at the same time. But there can be two or three bodies precisely because none of them is in the same place at the same time but rather each of them is in its own place. In sum: Whatever is spatial is individual and whatever is material is spatial. Therefore, whatever is material is individual. So statements A and 1 from the arguments above have been established.

Our use of common nouns, verbs, and adjectives demonstrates that we perform a psychological function, namely conceptual thinking, through which characteristics of the physical world are present to our consciousness in a state of universality. If this type of consciousness were the result of a physical operation, then these objects of thought could not be present in a universal state. When we grasp an object of thought by means of a universal concept, that object of thought is separated from matter. For if it existed in matter, it would not be universal but be individual. When an object of thought like 'man' exists in matter, it exists as the nature of one and only one, individual man. When it exists in conceptual consciousness, however, it does not exist as the nature of only one individual, but as multipliable in an indefinite number of individuals. Therefore, when the nature 'man' exists in conceptual thought it does not exist in matter, is not present in a physical thing.

The psychological function of thinking with concepts is not an operation performed by a physical agent, as are remembering, imagining and seeing. Yet conceptual thinking is a function that belongs to us, just as those other functions do, as we are physical things. How can this be? We perform those other functions by means of various parts of ourselves – we see with our eyes a not with our feet – with what part of ourselves could we physical things perform a non-physical operation? Only with some part of ourselves that is itself non-physical, some part of ourselves of which matter is not a constituent. What part of ourselves could that be? Or better, how could there be such a part of a physical thing? Our definition of soul provides the only answer to this question. The principle of life in man must contain the explanation of man's conceptual life. If there were different principles of life in us to account for different modes of our life, rational and non-rational, our life would not form a unity and our rational processes would not form an integrated whole with the rest of our life. And the definition of soul shows how it is possible for there to be a non-physical operation in man. For the source of life in a body is not composed of matter but is a principle, which is correlative with matter. The source of life is the structural principle by which matter is organized into a body capable of life functions rather than into an inanimate body. Perhaps that principle is simply the set of relations that structure the fundamental parts of the body. But in the case of non-physical functions, the principle of life must be capable of operations of its own. Since it, and not some part of the body of which it is the principle, performs the operations of conceptual thought, the soul's existence must transcend the matter it animates; its existence is not confined to being that of the relations according to which matter is structured. If it has its own distinct relation to some action it must have its distinct relation to existence. There is no reason to believe, therefore, that it ceases to exist when the body ceases to be

animated by it. It can continue to exist when the body dies, i.e., when the body loses the soul. Further argument could show that the soul not only can continue to exist after the body, but it must continue to so exist. That would require a little more work than we have time for here. But the argument we have sketched here is the basic part of the argument showing that the principle of human life, the soul, is immortal.