


The Real Nature of the Soul

by Rebecca Bynum (August 2014)

For millennia mankind has referred to the soul as a human spiritual entity destined to survive the death of the body. Progressive religious experience includes the consciousness of a growing inner reality, something which is *born* and which develops within. Like a grain of wheat within the husk, which, after the threshing (death), that grain (the soul) is gathered into the barn (heaven) and saved. The husk (the body) is then good for nothing, but to be bound together and burnt, to be returned to the elements from which it came. It is the soul which has value, the soul which is saved. This basic narrative has been fairly universal and constant over the centuries, though it has been thought that the body must be resurrected as a vehicle for the soul's continuance in many theological systems.

Those who confidently assert that the soul is simply a "myth" must answer the question as  to why so many people are willing to testify as to the existence of their souls living within them today and how that experience extends back as far as there is written history to record it. The religions of man have long recognized that there was something in addition to the divine spirit living within human beings. In ancient Egypt we find the concept of the ka (the spirit – though at first only kings were thought to be touched by the divine and to be in possession of a ka) and the ba (soul) just as the yin and yang are found in ancient China in a similar relation.

The soul may be understood as the offspring of the mortal mind and the divine spirit. When the Father bestows personhood upon the human animal, he creates a center of gravity – a force for integrating and harmonizing the systems of matter, mind and spirit into one being. The mind may be envisioned as resting upon the electro-chemical energies of the brain below and impinging upon spiritual energies above. During life, we are entirely unconscious of the electrical sparking of the neurons and the effects of various hormones acting in the brain below, likewise, are we mostly unconscious of the activities of the spirit above. What we are conscious of is mind itself. And within mind there are roughly three levels, the unconsciousness or the sub-conscious (the level of mind closest to the body), the conscious, and the super-conscious (the level of mind closest to the spirit).

It is through our decisions, first to know God, and then to follow his moral leading, thus becoming more and more self-identified with spirit, that the soul is first born and then grows increasingly real during our lifetime. The soul is thus the embryo of our future state.

Personhood, along with its prerogative of will, remains the center of gravity within the soul. When the physical body dies, the soul remains and I am convinced that memory, or at least memory most valuable to the continuation of personhood, remains as well and is transferred to a new existence. A major flaw in the idea of reincarnation is the lack of memory continuity. There is also a question as to whether memory is actually stored inside brain cells or whether the brain simply plays a part in memory retrieval. I think the latter much more likely. Memory properly belongs to mind which is non-material.

It is the soul which perceives and responds to spiritual value, that is, Truth, Beauty and Goodness. When, for example, one listens to a beautiful piece of music, what occurs is more than mere sensory perception, intellectual understanding or emotional empathy. The soul perceives and responds *directly* and the listener is *changed*. Values are always profoundly felt – they are not sensory perceptions or intellectual conclusions, they are experiences of the soul, religious experiences.

Modern scientists, in their mad rush to reduce all reality to matter, continually skip over basic questions as though they were unnecessary. For example, the “big bang theory” posits the beginning of reality as a gigantic explosion while skipping the obvious fact that spacetime must have been pre-existent in order for matter-energy to exist at all or for an explosion to occur through time within space. Matter cannot create space and time, these had to have prior existence. Thus the big bang, if it occurred, cannot be touted as “the beginning” – not even close. The basic elements of reality were already there.

Likewise, scientists, in rushing to reduce mind to brain matter, forget that all sensory experience, including scientific observation, exist as *phenomena of the mind*. Not only are the scientific observations occurring in the mind of the scientist, but the connections between those observations which denote meaning are most assuredly occurring in mind and in mind alone. Using mind to try to disprove the reality of mind is pointless at best and fraudulent at worst – likely an astonishing feat of self-deception as well.

Confidently assertive though they may be, our scientists seem to have become hopelessly lost in the weeds and are now in the position of denying basic reality just as did the Medieval Church. When Galileo testified to his experience of witnessing mountains and craters on the moon through a telescope, the Church was put in the position of either having to deny his experience (and that of others) or to broaden its philosophy. Science must now broaden its philosophy to include the non-material or it will eventually lose the fundamental respect of the common-sense populace, especially since the standard Darwinian explanations for the human condition consistently trivialize human life and the human moral struggle, formulating

conclusions that are so shallow as to be laughable. For example, that the reason people prefer water and trees in landscape painting is not because they are inherently beautiful, but because water and shelter are necessary for survival.

This by no means implies we should return to the age of miracles, or of doctrinaire, unyielding religious dogma, but is rather a plea to acknowledge the reality of the *religion of experience*. Just as the early scientists argued that doctrine cannot deny experience (specifically, observation and experiment), neither should a scientific materialistic doctrine deny the plain fact of the everyday human experience of the non-material – specifically of mind and soul. Ultimately, all experience is translated within the mind and soul and both of these are non-material phenomena. Man does not exist as matter alone.

I know my soul exists in the same way I know the desk on which I write these words exists – I experience it. Spiritual experience and divine assurance are the essential ingredients for lasting happiness, a happiness material philosophy and material pursuits can never and will never provide. The pursuit of righteousness and the growth of virtue are not the delusions of a child-like mind in fear of death, but rather the robust exercise of faith by a balanced and mature human being. Character growth is real, mind is real and the evolution of the soul is real. It is rather those who deny the reality of these things who are pursuing an illusion, and in doing so, would trap man in perpetual immaturity by denying the reality of higher values as well as the reality of mind with which he may pursue them. Philosophy and theology, must eventually transcend doctrine, and even reason, as it too is often limited by doctrine, and finally give way to the reality of experience.

Rebecca Bynum's latest book is