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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

Some Modern Views of the Soul.

By F. TOWNLEY LORD.

TO denote the spiritual factor in human personality many psychologists prefer the terms self, or mind, especially as soul "breathes the rarified atmosphere of poetry and theology."¹ The associations of the term soul are clear from Baldwin's definition: "Soul is used of the mental principle considered as a substance separate from the body, having personal individuality and identity, of which the individual mental life and development are manifestations."² The substantial fairness of this description is seen if it be compared, e.g., with the Augustinian conception. For our purpose here we retain the term soul, without necessarily committing ourselves to all the elements in the ecclesiastical conception. We follow Laird when he says: "Generally speaking, the words person, soul, or mind, may be regarded as synonyms for the self, and it would be mere pedantry to avoid using them as synonymous, unless there is some special liability to ambiguity in the particular context in which they are employed."³ And our use of the term soul has significance as against the movement which is often designated "psychology without a soul."

The idea of the soul as spiritual substance was emphasised in ecclesiastical thought, and Hume's strength was directed against the conception. Although much of the philosophic thought after Hume was emphatic on the metaphysical reality of spirit, we have to take account of a tendency in modern psychology which is really a new insistence on the validity of Hume's work. Bradley sums up this tendency in a passage where he says that a view of the soul "that pretends to be anything either before or beyond its concrete psychical filling is a gross fiction."⁴ William James declared his position in clear and frank language. The opening chapter in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism* is entitled, "Does Consciousness Exist?" and the main thesis of that chapter is the contention that consciousness does not stand for an *entity* but for a *function*. "For twenty years past I have mistrusted consciousness as an entity; for seven

¹ John Laird, *Problems of the Self*, vii.

² Dict. of Phil and Psych. ii. 557.

³ *Problems of the Self*, 7.

⁴ *Appearance and Reality*, 89.

or eight years past I have suggested its non-existence to my students . . . it seems to me that the hour is ripe for it to be openly and universally discarded.”⁵ The metaphysical basis of James’ view is that the world is made up not out of raw material of two sorts, matter and mind, but that the prior and neutral stuff is arranged in different patterns by its interrelations, some arrangements being called mental, others physical. Paint, for example, in a paint shop is so much saleable matter. When spread on a canvas it represents a feature in a picture and performs a spiritual function. “Just so, I maintain, does a given portion of experience, taken in one context of associates, play the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of ‘consciousness’; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective ‘content.’”⁶

James has been followed very closely by a more recent writer, Bertrand Russell. In his *Analysis of Mind*, in the section “Recent Criticisms of Consciousness,” he quotes Meinong’s analysis of thought into three elements, the act of thinking, the content of thought, the object. Meinong supposes that the act of thinking is the act of a person. “It is supposed that thoughts cannot just come and go, but need a person to think them. Now of course it is true that thoughts can be collected into bundles, so that one bundle is my thoughts, another is your thoughts, and a third is the thoughts of Mr. Jones. But I think the person is not an ingredient in the single thought: he is rather constituted by the relations of the thoughts to each other and to the body.”⁷ Bertrand Russell’s ground for this view is that the person in thought is not empirically discoverable, nor can it be deduced from what we observe. It is clear that on this point he is in sympathy with the Behaviourists, who, able to account for the behaviour of animals without, they claim, resorting to consciousness, apply the same principle to the study of human behaviour. The result is, they claim, that we make an unwarranted inference when we infer that other people have something non-physical, called mind or thought. Bertrand Russell does not limit himself to thought, but goes on to say that it might be maintained that desire is really most characteristic of mind. Desire, he says, is of the nature of a convenient fiction for describing shortly certain laws of behaviour.⁸ He agrees with Freud that a man’s actions and beliefs may be wholly dominated by a desire of which he is unconscious. Nor does he give much place to moral considerations in the investigation of the matter, for “moral considerations

⁵ Page 3. The essay was first printed in 1904.

⁶ 9, 10.

⁷ 18.

⁸ *Analysis of Mind*, 32.

are the worst enemies of the scientific spirit, and we must dismiss them from our minds if we wish to arrive at truth."

This, at least, has the merit of frankness, but it is frankness that has little in common with the implications of the Christian view of man. As far as the Christian conception of the soul is concerned, it would be suicidal to eliminate the moral values and their considerations, for these are the highest considerations of all. We see here a suggestion of the tendency in some quarters to subvert the Christian standard of values, and this tendency calls for careful examination.

It must not be supposed, however, that "psychology without a soul" is in clear possession of the field. In spite of attacks of which we have quoted types, the idea of the soul as an entity has eminent defenders, and a brief survey of one or two of them will serve the double purpose of exhibiting both the strength and the weakness of the ecclesiastical conception.

In Professor John Laird's *Problems of the Self*⁹ we have an interesting presentation of the problem. He admits that psychology without a soul is theoretically conceivable, but remarks that to ignore the problem of the soul is not to solve it.¹⁰ He sets himself to examine the content of the soul or self at any given time, and finds that any cross section of conscious life contains a unity of cognition, feeling and endeavour. Introspection reveals psychological experiences: these experiences are real; they are substances, having stuff in them—they cannot be regarded as mere qualities of anything else. "We have no evidence, or at least very insufficient evidence, to prove that any experience whatever can exist except as part of a self . . . this unity of experience is the soul. Its substantiality is the ultimate fact that any given experience must form part of a distinctive unity of experiences. It is therefore a substance in the same sense as other things are substances, though it is a distinctive kind of substance whose parts are experiences."¹¹ "When I say that I resolve, I mean that any given resolve is part of that unity of experiences which is myself."¹² Referring to immortality, he says, "Unless there is a unity and continuity of experiences, and the kind of unity which is personality, there is no soul."¹³ "The simplest expression of the nature of a substance is to say that it is an xa, or an xb, where x stands for the stuff, and a or b for the form of the substance."¹⁴ The stuff of the soul is experiences, and these experiences gathered

⁹ See also his *Idea of the Soul*.

¹⁰ *Problems of the Self*, 337.

¹¹ 359f.

¹² 367.

¹³ 369.

¹⁴ 348.

together in essential unity form the substantial soul. "If there is a soul, it must be a substance, immaterial, and existing in time. When any of these features is lacking there is no longer a soul, but something else."¹⁵ Laird deals with the same issues in his *The Idea of the Soul*, and we make the following illustrative points from that book. He makes it clear that we must not regard the soul as something unchanging. "The self is a changing thing, a continuant, not an invariant or a permanent, and in this it resembles other changing things."¹⁶ Moreover, the unity of the self is a thing of degrees. There are exceptional cases of "dissociated personality," grounds for supposing that there are many selves in place of a single one. "Violent inexplicable changes, sudden astonishing lapses of memory, states of weariness and sleepiness, where thought seems a jumble and mere consecution of fragmentary experiences tending nowhither and not united—something of the kind is found in all of us, and is plainly a menace to our singularity and integrity."¹⁷ Yet "What I am asserting is that, so far as we can determine, every experience forms part of some self. A person or mind or soul or self—for there is no great difference between these terms, although they look at their subject from a different angle—is a genuine continuant which has a peculiar tenacity in its texture, and is therefore a substance or a thing. Our ordinary notions have not misled us in this particular. We are justified in calling ourselves 'I,' and in treating our fellows accordingly."¹⁸

McDougall, in his *Body and Mind*, has urged the inadequacy of mechanism in physiology, in evolution, in human behaviour. We cannot do better than quote his own words: "The Animist who believes that the soul is something more than the fleeting stream of consciousness maintains that the consciousness of any individual is or has a unity of a unique kind which has no analogue in the physical realm, and that it cannot be properly regarded as consisting of elements, units, or atoms of consciousness, put together or compounded in any way. He maintains that the unity of individual consciousness is a fundamental and primary fact, and that we are logically bound to infer some ground of this unity other than consciousness itself; he holds that each man's consciousness is a unitary whole, and is separate and distinct from the consciousness of every other organism just because it is a state or activity of a psychical subject, the ego, soul or spirit, which is essentially a unitary and distinct being."¹⁹

¹⁵ 337.

¹⁶ *Idea of the Soul*, 152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁸ *Idea of the Soul*, 162f.

¹⁹ 282f.

McDougall, however, hesitates to designate this unitary soul as spiritual substance. The word substance retains, he thinks, a scholastic flavour, and he cannot accept the scholastic sense as implying a core or substratum underlying and distinct from all the attributes of a thing.²⁰ He prefers to avoid the term substance and use in place the term being or thing. Thus he defines the soul as a being that possesses or is the sum of definite capacities for psychical activity and psycho physical interaction, of which the most fundamental are

. . . the capacity of producing the whole range of sensation qualities in response to physical stimuli.

. . . the capacity of responding to sensation complexes with the production of meanings, such as spatial meanings.

. . . the capacity of responding to these sensations and meanings with feeling or conation or effort, under the spur of which further meanings may be brought to consciousness in accordance with the laws of reproduction of similars and of reasoning.

. . . the capacity of reacting upon brain processes to modify their course in a way which we cannot clearly define, but which we may provisionally conceive as a process of guidance by which streams of nervous energy may be concentrated in a way that antagonises the tendency of all physical energy to dissipation and degradation.

The view that the soul is this sum of psychic capacities we express by saying that the soul is a psychic being.²¹

In addition to this insistence on the reality of souls as psychic beings there are certain points in McDougall's treatment which merit close attention. We may refer to four points.

(a) the important part played by the body in the development of the soul—"the soul is a system of capacities which are fully present as latent potentialities from the beginning of the individual's life; and these potentialities are realised or brought into play only in proportion as the brain mechanisms become developed and specialised."²²

(b) our evidence at this stage only allows us to say that the soul thinks or is conscious when interacting with some bodily organism—an interesting point when related to the Hebrew conception of the unified personality.

(c) "though it is not possible for us to say just how much of what we call personality is rooted in bodily habits, and how much in psychical dispositions, yet it is open to us to believe that the soul, if it survives the dissolution of the body, carries with it some large part of that which has been gained by intellectual and

²⁰ 364.

²¹ 365.

²² 370.

moral effort" ²³—a suggestion which may be compared with the idea of Eckhart that the soul may gather up into itself the powers of the bodily life. (d) McDougall regards it as conceivable that in connection with the future life the soul "might find under other conditions (possibly in association with some other bodily organism) a sphere for the application and actualisation of the capacities developed in it during its life in the body."²⁴

Laird retains the conception of soul as immaterial substance. McDougall, while preferring to drop the term substance retains the idea of the soul as a psychic being. We proceed to Pringle-Pattison, who attacks the notion of substance as applied to soul, and dismisses it altogether from his system. This antipathy to the soul-substance conception is strongly expressed in his *Idea of Immortality*, and owes much to Hume's analysis of the self which, says Pringle-Pattison, contains far more truth than is commonly conceded to it.²⁵ "As for the churchly doctrine of a rational soul implanted in each individual organism, by all means let us think of the individual life history, no less than of the cosmic development, as a divinely directed process, to which, in view of its issue, no fitter word than creation can be applied. But do not let us imagine a divine figure standing by to inject a bit of supernatural stuff into the bodily mixture at the appropriate moment."²⁶ His objection to the soul as a bit of supernatural stuff rests on two main grounds: such a view regards the soul as unchanged throughout the changes of experience, and it retains a materialistic flavour. The idea of soul-substance represents an animistic survival, and many thinkers are doubtless led to it by their interest in human survival. He accepts Locke's demonstration of "the futility of such a substance as the bearer or support of the conscious life during our earthly span."²⁷

But Pringle-Pattison is just as keen about human survival as any of those thinkers who have urged the simplicity of the substantial soul as the way to it, and therefore he must find some satisfactory theory of the soul. He finds help in Aristotle—the conception of soul as the entelechy of the body. We may almost say that the body grows itself a soul, and the concrete reality with which we have to deal is the living body. "If we start with the living body as the embodied soul, the problem of interaction ceases to exist, and laboured schemes of parallelism become unnecessary."²⁸ If we take these (and similar statements) as they stand, we might almost assume that for Pringle-

²³ 372.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Idea of Immortality*, 96.

²⁶ 72.

²⁷ 74.

²⁸ 92.

Pattison the soul is merely a function of the body. So, for instance, the statement, "if we must indulge our imagination with the picture of some bearer of the conscious life, let us be satisfied with the body, in which that life is certainly rooted in a very real sense."²⁹ But it is clear that Pringle-Pattison does regard the soul, when it is produced, as something other than the body and capable of surviving it. "The body, ceasing to be a living body, may relapse into its elements when it has 'fulfilled' itself, while the true individual, in which that fulfilment consisted, pursues his destiny under new conditions."³⁰ "A man's self will then be for us the coherent mind and character which is the result of the discipline of time, not some substantial unit or identical subject present in his body all along."³¹ "The self-conscious life is the pre-eminent reality which the body in its structure and organisation exists to actualise."³² From this it is clear that his main anxiety is to avoid the idea of the soul as a static unity which remains purely static during the changes of conscious life. But this should not blind us to the fact that he retains the idea of the soul as possessing an internal unity as a single self or subject. Witness his remarks, in another connection, in his Gifford Lectures on the Idea of God. In criticising the views of Bosanquet and Bradley (who "insist on taking the individual as an adjective, thereby reducing it to a conflux of universals or qualities") he says: "The self or subject . . . is not to be conceived as an entity over and above the content, or as a point of bare existence to which the content is, as it were, attached, or even as an eye placed in position over against its objects to pass them in review. The unity of the subject, we may agree, simply expresses this peculiar organisation or systematization of the content. But it is not simply the unity which a systematic whole of content might possess as an object, or for a spectator. Its content . . . has become a unity for itself, a subject. This is, in very general terms, what we mean by a finite centre, a soul or, in its highest form, a self."³³

It may be doubted whether Pringle-Pattison is quite fair to the historic notion of soul-substance. His objection to soul substance as something which persists unchanged throughout the flux of our mental experiences would not hold against all the ecclesiastical writers. As McTaggart says,³⁴ "Those philosophers who thought that there was time and change have always accepted the fact that substances changed, while preserving their identity

²⁹ 103-4.

³⁰ 105.

³¹ 105.

³² 105.

³³ *Idea of God*, 285.

³⁴ In *Mind*, 1923, p. 221.

through change." Nor is it a fair reading of the scholastic period to say that the idea of soul substance retains a materialistic flavour. The great scholastics who believed in the substantial soul were far from being corporealists, nor does their argument re the incorruptibility of the substantial form necessarily rely on the conception of an indiscerptible atom.³⁵ Some of the scholastic writers, Aquinas, for example, took pains to show that the development of the soul depends on its commerce with the body: it is a separable form, created as a potentiality, depending for its actuality on its association with a material organism. In any case, whether Pringle-Pattison's criticism of the scholastic view is fair or not, it cannot be regarded as destructive of the Christian view of the soul. The New Testament does not commit us to any particular philosophic theory; in its pages there is no philosophic presentation at all. We are not concerned to regard the soul as a kind of metaphysical atom, quite distinct from its experiences, a looker-on, so to speak, at the ebb and flow of conscious life. Nor does it matter whether we refer to the soul as "substance" or not. All that the conserving of New Testament values insists upon is the notion of the soul as a real subject, personal, developing through its experiences, and persisting after death. This Pringle-Pattison appears to accept, and there is much value also in his argument that soul and body are presented as a unity in the actual commerce of life.

If we take our stand upon the ground of New Testament values, we cannot regard it as illusory that we are real agents. A conception like that of Professor Holt that mind is merely the integration of the organism's motor response to stimuli³⁶ will not suffice. The soul, however it may have been formed, is *sui generis*, a self-contained entity, as Tansley points out.³⁷ No conception less than this will satisfy the demands of Christian experience. To quote James Ward: "Experience . . . is always owned. To talk of motives conflicting of themselves is as absurd as to talk of commodities competing in the absence of traders."³⁸ "Let us then make bold to regard our self-conscious life not as a flux of accidents, pertaining, with we know not what all beside, to some substratum or other, but as the actions and reactions of a thing *per se*, or rather of a subject in a world of such, as the intercourse of such a subject with other subjects."³⁹

³⁵ Cf. A. E. Taylor in *Hibbert Journal*, xxii, 3, 599.

³⁶ E. B. Holt, *The Freudian Wish*. Chap. 2. "Thought is the labile interplay of motor settings, which goes on almost constantly and which differs from overt conduct in that the energy involved is too small to produce gross bodily movements."

³⁷ *The New Psychology*, 30, 32.

³⁸ *The Realm of Ends*, 290, 291.

³⁹ 391, 2.