ROUTLEDGE

From Soul to Self

Edited by M. James C. Crabbe

FROM SOUL TO SELF

'*From Soul to Self* is a fascinating survey of thought about the Soul/Body relationship. It ranges boldly from Shamanism and ancient Philosophy through Greek Christianity to Augustine and Descartes to the latest thinking in science and philosophy. It makes one vividly aware of the complexity of issues involved.'

Paul Badham, *University of Wales*

From Soul to Self takes us on a fascinating journey through philosophy, theology, religious studies, and physiological sciences. Each of the essays, drawing from a number of different fields, focuses on the idea of the soul and of our sense of ourselves. The contributors are leading experts from a number of distinct fields, including Richard Sorabji from Ancient Philosophy, Anthony Kenny from Medieval Philosophy, Susan Greenfield from neuroscience, and Kallistos Ware from Theology.

A stellar line-up of authors explore the relationship between a variety of ideas that have arisen in philosophy, religion and science, each idea seeking to explain why we think we are as individuals somehow distinct and unique.

M. James C. Crabbe is Professor of Protein Biochemistry, and Head of the Division of Cell and Molecular Biology at the University of Reading. He is also a fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford.

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Peter Rivière is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Linacre College. His lifetime research interest has been the native people of Amazonia with particular reference to the north-eastern part of the region where he has undertaken numerous field trips. His attention has mainly focused on kinship, social and symbolic classification, mythology, the nature of personhood (including ideas about conception and death), and causality. His main published monographs are *Marriage Among the Trio* (1969), *The Forgotten Frontier* (1972), *Individual and Society in Guiana* (1984), and *Absent-minded Imperialism* (1995).

Richard Sorabji was brought up in Oxford, so had great pleasure in returning as a Supernumerary Fellow to Wolfson College. In the interim, he taught first at The Sage School of Philosophy in Cornell University and since 1970 in the Philosophy Department at King's College, London, where he is a Professor of Ancient Philosophy. His books include a trilogy on physics (*Necessity, Cause and Blame*; *Time, Creation and the Continuum*; *Matter, Space and Motion*) and a planned trilogy on mind and ethics (*Animal*

Minds and Human Morals; *From Emotion to Temptation* (forthcoming); and a next book on *Ancient Concepts of the Self*). He was for five years Director of the Institute of Classical Studies in London, and is currently holder of one of the British Academy's two Research Professorships. He is a fellow of the British Academy, foreign honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a C.B.E.

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PREFACE

Implicit in the title of this book is a journey; or, perhaps more accurately, an exploration. Travel into unexplored territory requires some assistance, and this volume aims to act as a guide book to an area which links philosophy, theology, religious studies, history, anthropology and physiological sciences. It is a journey travelled both by individuals and by societies made up of those individuals. It is not, however, a simple journey, a progression from A to B, starting with the soul and ending at the self. Rather, the chapters in this book are a series of rigorous discussions of ideas of the soul and of our sense of ourselves, written from different viewpoints. They are comments on changing perceptions, of ourselves as individuals and of our capacities for living.

The book had its origins in a series of lectures given at Wolfson College, Oxford, in 1996, as one of the annual Wolfson College Lecture Series. Each chapter is written by one of the distinguished speakers who were asked to give a general survey of their topic to an audience who were not specialists in the lecturer's own field of study. The essays are based on those lectures, but with many new additions and cross-references. They aim to appeal to the general reader and specialist alike; to philosophers, historians, scientists, anthropologists and students of religions of the world. While most chapters contain a list of references, there is also a select bibliography for those who wish to read further about any aspect of the subjects covered in this book. I hope this volume can convey something of the *frisson* and excitement which the speakers succeeded in conveying to their audience, both during the lectures, and afterwards at the discussion sessions.

Apart from the authors themselves, I am indebted to the President of Wolfson College, Sir David Smith and to his wife, the members of the Academic Policy Committee at Wolfson, Professor Richard

Sorabji, Professor Richard Gombrich, Dr Michael Argyle, Dr John Ashton and Dr David Edge for their excellent advice, and particularly to a former vicegerent of the College, Professor Jim Kennedy and to his successor, Dr John Penny, who have given their unfailing support and encouragement.

M. James C. Crabbe

1

INTRODUCTION

M. James C. Crabbe

Nature that fram'd us of four elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:
Our soul, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous Architecture of the world . . .
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless Spheres.
(*Conquests of Tamburlaine*, Christopher Marlowe (1564–93))

A high degree of order is one of the basic characteristics of life. Order exists not only at levels which we may perceive, for example in the fingers on a hand, but also at levels which we cannot perceive without aid, such as in the organization of cells within the tissues of the body. This organization is based on a hierarchy of structural levels, each level building on the one below it, just as levels within society are ultimately built upon the individual. Atoms, the chemical building blocks of nature, are ordered into complex biological molecules such as proteins and nucleic acids. As we step up the hierarchy of order, novel properties emerge that were not present at simpler levels of organization. These emergent properties result from interactions between components that make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. Unique properties arise from how parts are arranged and interact, not from supernatural powers.

But is this true for the highest properties of the mind? Dualism – the idea that there are two worlds – maintains that there is the physical world, which contains matter and all the tangible components of the Universe, and another psychical world. In the latter world, mental states and events are inaccessible to observation. The essence of mind is consciousness, and the relationship between mental phenomena and physical phenomena has exercised thinkers

over many centuries; recently it has become known as the mind–body problem. For those seeking a connection between the mental and physical worlds, then there they may find the soul. The German philosopher Hegel (1770–1831) regarded the soul as the lowest, sensory manifestation of the spirit in its connection with matter. The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines the soul as: 'The immaterial "I" that possesses conscious experience, controls passion, desire, and action, and maintains a perfect identity from birth (or before) to death (or after).'

One may view the soul from a number of perspectives; philosophical, historical, theological and scientific. None of the chapters in this volume aims to be completely comprehensive; rather, they seek to give a flavour of the important interdisciplinary studies that make up our understanding of the nature of the soul. This interdisciplinary approach has a long and well-attested provenance. The early masters at Oxford, many of whom had studied in Paris, brought together interests in theology, philosophy and natural science. Greek and Arabic sources of philosophy, natural science and medicine had come into the West in translation from about the second half of the twelfth century, often via Spain, where the reconquest of Toledo by the Christians in 1085 opened the way for access to material preserved and developed by Islamic scholars. One item of special interest to the medieval Latin-speaking scholars was the nature and power of the soul. Ideas on the soul were often derived from the works of the Greeks Heraclitus (*fl.* 504 BC), Socrates (470–399 BC), Plato (427–347 BC), and Aristotle (384–322 BC), and from Arabic sources such as the De anima of Avicenna.

Adam of Buckfield (*fl.* 1238–1278) is an interesting example of an Oxford master of the mid-thirteenth century; his intelligent expositions were widely appreciated at the time, and his commentaries anticipated those of Thomas Aquinas. The Oxford master propounded the view that the intellective soul of man was separable from matter, and was therefore of a different nature from lower forms, which also animated man. Arguments continued between theologians and philosophers as to whether there was a unified soul, or whether the intellective, sensitive and vegetative souls were distinct substances in man. These controversies have continued since medieval times; indeed they recur throughout this book, and in many manifestations.

Some of the questions being posed today may have changed in form, but not materially in substance, from those discussed by earlier

philosophers. Do we have souls? Are souls sources of life or of mind? If souls exist are they material or immortal? Can the soul be distinguished from the self? What criteria do we use for individual identity? Can animal souls be distinguished from human souls? How much do we need a concept of the soul in order to fulfil ourselves as human beings?

These questions lead naturally to a number of themes which appear, like philosophical leitmotivs, throughout this book. Four major themes, which are orchestrated in different ways by the authors, deal with process, language, maps and consciousness. These four themes may be summarized in four questions. Is the soul a thing or a process? Is there an asymmetry between language comprehension and production? Can the philosopher and the scientist provide valid maps of the mind? How much is the sense of self a product of conscious reasoning or of the imagination? The chapters in this volume also illustrate the point that philosophical, theological and scientific discussions on these and related issues are not merely of academic interest; they are useful both as guidelines for individual actions, and for mapping out areas for further study.

While each chapter is self-sufficient, a preliminary note on each may help the reader with some of the themes and topics discussed in the book. In Chapter 2, Richard Sorabji amplifies ideas on the soul and the self from the perspective of the Greek philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle in the fourth century BC to Plotinus and the later Neoplatonists of the fifth and sixth centuries AD. In the first section of his chapter, he discusses ideas of philosophers who initiated studies on what we might now consider as the relationships between the soul, the mind, and the brain. The soul was divisible into a number of forms; the intellective soul, the sensitive soul, the nutritive soul. Democritus (*c.* 460–*c.*371 BC), regarded the soul as something secondary to, and dependent upon, the body, while reducing its activity to mechanical or physico-chemical processes. The idea of an immortal soul was a subject for discussion, and often fitted in with the current religious and cosmological view. The atomists thought that the soul consisted of 'atoms' moving easily throughout the body, and that the soul was dispersed after death; part of the aim of this idea was to free men and women from a superstitious fearful belief in an afterlife involving punishment. Original views were often subject to distortion by later philosophers. For example, according to Aristotle, Alcmaeon (fifth century BC) held that the soul was immortal because it was like the immortals, insofar as it is always in motion; the divinities were

always in constant motion – the moon, the sun, the stars and the whole heaven. Later Christian theological ideas were to build on much of the earlier Greek philosophical concepts. In the second section of his chapter, Sorabji develops a number of classical ideas of the self, including those of personality and personal identity over time, that are also discussed in the final chapter by Galen Strawson.

In Chapter 3 Anthony Kenny reviews the writings of Aquinas on the soul. While St Thomas Aquinas interpreted Greek philosophy in accord with Christian teaching, he was no less a philosopher than Descartes (1596–1650) or Russell (1872–1970). In the medieval period, there was often a tension between the insights of natural knowledge derived from the natural cognitive powers of the intellect and the senses, and the insights into supernatural knowledge derived from (divine) revelation. Aquinas recognized the importance of the relationship between the intellect and the imagination. He developed a complicated map of the mind to help chart this relationship. The development of such a 'philosophical map' (and that of Aquinas was superior to that of many other philosophers) should be helpful if considered along with a 'scientific map', which could be produced using scientific scanning of individual neurone connections. An approach to the latter concept is developed further in the chapter by Susan Greenfield. Kenny believes that there is no separate self; rather that 'myself is just myself'. This notion is discussed in some detail in the chapters by Richard Sorabji and Galen Strawson.

In Chapter 4, Kallistos Ware, a Bishop in the Greek Orthodox Church, argues that many of the Early Fathers based their ideas on Greek philosophy, modified by Christian teaching. For some of them, the image, a starting point with potential, was not the same as the likeness, an actuality and an endpoint. Growth of man's soul, however it was constructed, and whichever part of the body – often the heart – it was associated with, was a journey from the image (of God) to the likeness (of God), and this growth could continue throughout eternity. Such growth – a process of rebirth – implies a process of progression, described by Sorabji as an attractive view of the immortal soul. Here we move into areas of mystery. Often it is difficult to draw the line between affirming mystery and talking nonsense. When does one cross the line? One of the tests may be in terms of prayer and worship, rather than of strict philosophy. Crossing a threshold into a religious space takes us beyond the rational need to manipulate dissect, calibrate or observe. In the words of the sociologist, the Revd. Professor David Martin:

> Across that threshold observation gives place to insight, object becomes emblem, and the givens of analysis manifest themselves as pure gift. In such space a sign language focuses vision, because without focus vision vanishes, though it is not its nature to impose itself in the way propositions and observations impose themselves. Signs invite us to *dis*cover or *un*cover what is meant by disintegration and integrity, frustration and fulfillment, chaos and order, evil and good, scarcity and plenitude, absence and presence. Horizons open up, with pointers of deformation and markers of transformation
>
> (From a sermon delivered at Jesus College, Cambridge)

We leave the confines of the literary and civilized traditions of the Western world in Chapter 5, where anthropologist Peter Rivière describes some of the beliefs relevant to the soul held by various peoples of South America, particularly those people living around the Amazon Basin. His ethnographic work draws out many philosophical parallels between cultures like the Trio people in Brazil and Surinam without any historical continuity, and cultures with historical traditions like our own in Europe. He also argues that there are parallels in ideas of 'consciousness and the soul' held by the Bororo peoples of Central Brazil and the Cashinahua peoples of Brazil and Peru, with our modern scientifically based views of human consciousness and the mind, as developed in the chapter by Susan Greenfield.

Similar parallels exist in other societies and with other religions; for example Buddhism. For the Buddhist, soul and self are (linguistically) identical, and denoted by the word ätman. Rebirth is also an important concept in Indian philosophy, the ätman undergoing a number of 'rebirths', or transmigrations, en route to attaining a pure goal:

> Know thou the self (*ätman*) as riding in a chariot,
> The body as the chariot.
> Know thou the intellect (*buddhi*) as the chariot-driver,
> And the mind as the reins.
> The senses, they say, are the horses;
> The objects of sense, what they range over.
> The self combined with senses and mind
> Wise men call 'the enjoyer'.
> He, however, who has not understanding,

Who is unmindful and ever impure,
Reaches not the goal,
But goes on to rebirth [transmigration].
He, however, who has understanding,
Who is mindful and ever pure,
Reaches the goal
From which he is born no more
(*Katha Upanishad* II, 18–20.
8th–7th century BC)

As implied by many authors in this volume, the goal would be a rather unattractive one to us if it were simply frozen in time, and did not in itself involve progression or rebirth.

The Buddha was essentially a practical philosopher who got down to basic essentials of life without over-emphasizing metaphysical ideas. For the Buddha, the five 'bundles' (skandha) – aspects dealing with physical laws, sensations, apperceptions, volitions and consciousness (all ideas we come across in other chapters in this volume, from philosophers with very different traditions) were not *things* but *processes*, relevant to human experience. In Buddhism, the most important things go on in the mind. Rather than being a simple 'no soul doctrine', Buddhism implies that it is better to lose concern in one's self (soul) in concern for other suffering beings.

In Chapter 6, Gary Matthews discusses the ideas of animal souls in the writings of St Augustine (354–430 AD) and Descartes (1596–1650). Matthews develops the 'argument from analogy' in Augustine to arrive at the thesis: 'The mind of each of us know what a mind is simply and solely by knowing itself.' He then amplifies Descartes's argument for Dualism, and shows that Descartes's ideas are incompatible with a psychological continuity between humans and animals. In dualistic doctrines, such as Descartes's, the soul was looked on as something that has independent existence, that exists alongside the body. Descartes used language arguments to illustrate his theme, but neglects a key difference between linguistic comprehension and production. The Augustinian view of animal souls is more compatible with a continuity in the animal kingdom, rather than a single cut-off point between humans and the rest. The argument for continuity is also more in line with our understanding derived from current science, and these ideas are developed further in Chapter 7 by Susan Greenfield.

Greenfield argues that consciousness is a continuum, and while there is no 'conscious centre' that can be mapped specifically in the