

HUMAN BODY, ITS EPISTEMOLOGICAL CAPACITIES AND RELATIONS TO HUMAN SOUL: AN OUTLOOK

Jude C Udenkwo Ph.D

Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka
Chibuzotj@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the human soul's epistemological capacities, examining its relationship with the body and its role in knowledge acquisition. The soul is considered the essential, immaterial aspect of a person, while the body is the temporary, physical aspect. The paper draws on philosophical analysis to support its assertions, citing various historical literature on the human body, soul, and epistemology. It concludes that in human soul lies the capacity of knowing and that the soul is as important as the body. That the soul only manifest its activities through the body.

Introduction

Man, a creature of the world, is demarcated by his intellectual status from brute nature, placing him honourably in the class of supernatural intelligence. Through man's power of comprehensive anthropological names such as homo intellectus and homo loquens, man owes to this power of intellectuality. Man is in the class of intellectual substances, but he possesses the weakest intellect. The object of human intellect is the truth. The intellectual capacity of the human intellect is far limited in comparison with that of God or the angels. Hence, it does not know Infinity because infinity is not written material things. This is what some philosophers averred as the limitation of human knowledge. In the union of soul and body, the superiority of the Soul cannot be in doubt and this is from the order of functionality¹.

The soul is the principle of life: It confers life to an organic body. However, the excellence of the soul does not in any way belittle the value of the human body.²

The body is strictly part of the human person. Aquinas Avers as follows, "I cannot sense without my body, my body is part of me"³

The human soul is such that cannot live without a body. The epistemological functions of the body cannot be taken for granted. As such, the soul performs intellectual operations not by ageless forms in Neo-Platonist ideas but through the body of which it is the form. The body is the door of interaction with the external. The body possesses inevitable functions for the cognitive activities of the human person.⁴

The study of the soul would make a useful contribution to the knowledge of Truth in general, which is sought by the other sciences. It would be a remarkable favour to another part of philosophy. Again it would be difficult to arrive at the knowledge of the Divine and highest courses unless through those things we acquired, thanks to the power of intellect. Ignorance of the power of the soul would lead to the ignorance of the immaterial substances.

More so, the science of morals requires the power of the soul. Human beings are distinguished from brute nature by their intellectual status, placing them in the class of supernatural intelligence. This paper revisits the concept of the human soul, exploring its nature, epistemological capacities, and relationship with the body.

The Human Body

The human body is the form through which the soul performs its functions without which the soul cannot function. Some philosophers like Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas reiterated the understanding of the body as an inevitable instrument in the relationship and functions of the trio- the body, spirit and soul. In his works, Augustine averred that man is fundamentally composed of body and soul and that neither could exist without the other.⁵ He was convinced that man, as a result of his impossible individual existence without the other, it was neither essentially to the soul nor essentially to the body: That the human person is essentially the composite of the two, Augustine's subsequent views about the body denigrated it against the soul. Amaku noted that, though the two compose the human person; lured by his platonic thinking, Augustine made remarks that exalted the soul far above the body. Augustine defined man as a rational soul (capable of wisdom and virtue) far above the body. Augustine defined man as a rational soul using a mortal and earthly body. He further defined the soul as a substance endowed with reason and fitted to rule a body.⁶

According to Auton.C. Pegis, the monks of the twelfth century cannot be accused of violating the integrity of the human composite.⁷ Their aim was rather to magnify the soul and to suggest how, if man remembered his spiritual dignity, he could learn to hold the substance of his whole life fixed within the divine image that linked him to eternity.

Thomas Aquinas leaning on the peripatetic persuasions averred that the human person is substantially composed of body and soul: but he did not distance himself much from the platonic Augustine conception of human person with reference to the soul. The human person is essentially composed of body and soul.⁸ Aquinas, in discussing man, instructs that theologians should centre their In Aristotle's view, substance can be understood in three ways; Matter, which represents potentiality; form, "that in virtue of which a thing is called this matter & form. The nature of the soul can only be discussed among these things which manifest signs of life."¹²

Therefore, with regard to things which have life, the soul cannot be a body since a body is the subject (matter) and not what is attributed to it. The soul must be then "a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially within it. The implication of this statement is that a living body has no life on its own apart from the soul: it belongs to the nature of the soul so the soul must be the actuality of a living body. Here, Aristotle explains his position by distinguishing two kinds of actuality, acknowledgements and the act of reflecting. The soul then is the first actuality like of a natural body endowed with organ. Aristotle says that the soul is that by which we live, perceive and think."¹³

St. Augustine was one of the protagonists of the doctrine that man is mainly the soul, though he was aware that man is composed of body and soul. Furthering the platonic tradition, Augustine thought that the soul is quite a separate substance from the body and far superior to it. For Augustine the soul is superior to the body and only makes use of the body.

For Augustine, the soul is looked at as spiritual substance, "Principle of life, intelligent and immortal. Aquinas is regarded as the promoter of the nobility of the human soul. His intellectual formation was shaped by platonic to Augustinian persuasions, the Aristotelian tradition and Christian belief. His ambition was to weave all these into one system of thought, which is manifest in his doctrine on the human soul.

Philosophers before him, the stoics and the Epicurean corporealize the soul, but Aquinas

avers that the soul is not entirely spiritual (against Plato). Plato over spiritualize the soul by situating it outside the body and positing it as one of the forms inhabiting the world of ideas. Aquinas only accepted the fact and views of his predecessor that the soul is a principle of life but differs regarding the essential nature of soul.¹⁴

Due influence by Plato and Aristotle mainly, his treatment of the soul adopts the Aristotelian hylemorphism but assumes platonic bends when necessary. Having agreed with his predecessor that the soul is the principle of life averred that the soul as the principle of life cannot be a body (*anima non et corpus*). It was an error to say that the soul is corporeal.

The principle of knowledge and movement cannot be something corporeal. Aquinas argues that if soul were a body each vital principle would be itself a soul; thus the eye, for example would be a soul, as it is the principle of sight; the heart would be a soul as it is the principle of life for the lower animals. The soul is in the body but as the act of the body. Aquinas toed Aristotelian line when he averred the living and non-living things have differences. The soul can only be spoken of in relation to living things, since non living things are without a soul. (*anima enim viventia dicimus, res vere inanimata vita carentes*). The soul is the form of a living body, it implies that the term soul for Aquinas means principle of life, the first act of a living body. (the essence of a living body). ;the substantial form of a composite substance. Form is that which a thing is constituted in a proper species.

Without the soul a living things seizes to be such. The human soul is immaterial, it is a perfect form. The soul is a particular thing in the genus of substance. The soul is an intellectual substance, it understands itself. The soul is the spirit or immaterial part of man, the seat of human personality, intellect will and emotions, regarded as an entity that survives the body after death.

The soul is of three parts- the mind, the will and the emotion. This is clearly and definitely proved by the word of God. "Proverb 2:10" gives us the spiritual ground to prove that the mind is a part of the soul.

The human soul according to Averroes, is a substance brought into being by human generation and it perishes at death.¹⁵ Intuitively and almost universally man acknowledges an essential difference between living and non living things. The intrinsic force, or principle of movement by which man live perceives and thinks. All cultures and civilization have been convinced that man is not a purely material being; rather, they recognized that man possess within himself some element that is relatively independent of the body, giving complete life and inexhaustible power to the body. The nature of this principle was not however always understood clearly. It was often compared to air, wind or spirit. It is necessary to xray further the beacon of human epistemological capacities.

On Human Epistemological Capacities.

The nature of natural things which cannot know are far more contracted and limited in as much as their existence is restricted within their individual autonomy. A thing which can know can still perfect its nature by acquiring the form of other things. The human soul is in a sense everything (*totus ens*) because thanks to its possible intellect, is in potency to receiving all perfections, the forms of all things from both the sensible and intellectual world. It is not restricted to any kind of perfection. This intellectual capacity of the human soul highlights its immateriality and Infinity implying that the soul's intellectual capacity

knows no bounds. The soul is capable of knowing whatever is knowable.¹⁶

For Aristotle the soul is one, but endowed with five groups of faculties; the vegetative concerned with maintenance and development of organic life; the appetite or the tendency to any good. The faculty of sense perception and the locomotive faculty which proceeds over the various bodily movement and reasons.

For the scholastic, body and soul are united in one complete substance. The soul is the formal substantialis, the vital principle, the source of all activities. Since Kant, a tripartite division is more commonly accepted, namely cognitive, affective, and conative faculties. Plato defined the faculties of the soul in terms of threefold division "the intellect (Nous; the Nobler affections, Thumos and the appetite or passions. The faculties of the Soul are the individual characteristics attributed to a soul. Aquinas in that line of thought underlines the universality, totality and all-embracing power of the human soul.¹⁷

The soul in Amaku possesses a potential openness to the knowledge of all things and capable of acquiring the forms of other things without losing its being. It is therefore to the dignity of the human soul that it transcribed the whole order of the universe and of its courses

The epistemological capacities of the human soul acts as a background to the justification of its capacity to attend to the knowledge of the ultimate goal of life. The human soul is deemed to be a centripetal force between two entirely separate worlds; the spiritual and the corporeal world. The human Soul by the power of its operation tends to be located at the boundary of these divergent worlds. It does interact with both spiritual and corporeal due to the diversity of power it possesses. The soul is a link. Aquinas averred that the human soul is the horizon between eternity and temporality below eternity but above time.¹⁸ Though inhabiting the world of time, its nature project it far above temporality. The human soul has both virtue of understanding and power of self-consciousness. The soul's auto-cognition takes place from the manner in which the soul knows itself directly on account of itself. However, this type of self-knowledge exists as a private experience of an individual human person.

Aquinas position saw a division of cognition into active cognition and habitual cognition. Active knowledge refers to the actual knowledge which someone convinces oneself of a particular experience; for instance, that one has a soul. Habitual cognition indicates that the power is present to itself with reference to any external object of knowledge. The soul perceives itself to be and arrives at the knowledge of that which takes place in it. It does not need a particular power. It suffices that, the essence of the soul be mentally present to itself. Through the acts of knowing extra mental objects, the human soul understands itself. A knower's ability to return to its essence implies that its essence is not something that is easily dispensable, but something stable and concrete in its own nature.

The Relation of Human Body to the Soul.

The soul is ontologically inseparable from the body to the extent that certain functions of the soul cannot be actualized without corresponding bodily parts. That is to say, if certain functions of the body were destroyed, then certain functions of the soul would be destroyed, also. In various religious and philosophical traditions, the soul is the non-material essence of a person, which includes one's identity, personality and memories, an immaterial aspect of a living being that is believed to be able to survive

physical deaths.¹⁹ The concept of the soul is generally applied to humans, although it can also be applied to other living or even non-living entities.

Greek Philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle understood that the soul must have a logical faculty. Socrates summarized his teachings as nothing other than an exhortation for his fellow Athenians. Aristotle reasons that a man's body and Soul were his matter and form, respectively. The body is a collection of elements and the soul is the essence²⁰

The ancient Greeks used the term ensouled to represent the concept of being alive. The Soul was considered the incorporeal or spiritual breath that animates the living organism. Francis M. Cornford quotes Pindar by saying that the Soul sleeps while the limbs are active.²¹

Plato considered the psyche to be the essence of a person, being that which decides how humans behave. He considered this essence to be incorporeal, eternal occupant of our being. Plato said that even after death, the soul exists and can think. He believed that as bodies die, the soul is continually reborn. The Platonic soul consists of 1) logos, 2) Thymos 3) The eros. Aristotle believed that only one part of the soul is immortal namely the intellect (logos).^{22, 23}

Epistemology explores how we acquire knowledge. The human body plays a crucial role in shaping epistemological capacities such as Perception, Cognition and Embodied cognition.

Appraisal

The relationship between the human body, soul and epistemological capacities is complex and continues to be debated. Some arguments include.

The Body -Soul distinctions are necessary for understanding human experience and moral agency. Dualism posits the existence of two fundamental substances or realms: mind(soul) and matter(body). The perspective argues that the soul is a non-physical entity that interacts with the body but maintains its own identity.

The body's influence on Cognition and Perception highlights the importance of embodied experience in knowledge acquisition. In Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Antonio Damasio challenged the mind and body dualism by Rene Descartes. Damasio argued that...Emotions play a crucial role in decision-making and rational thoughts. That the body's physiological responses influence our cognitive experience. The relationship between body and soul raises questions about consciousness, free will, personal identity and mortality. It is pertinent to say that the mystery of the soul's nature and relationship to the body remains exploring. The perspective and questions will deepen our understanding of human existence and human experience.²⁴

Conclusion

This work so far shows that in human soul lies capacity of knowing. There are some philosophers that agreed to this fact that human person is composed of body and soul, thanks to the Pythagoreans, though having influenced by orphic religion they ended up arrogating the human soul as the only essential part of man. This work has been able to establish the fact that despite Plato's adoption of this Pythagoreans view, Aquinas' view on the nobility of the human soul and the importance of the body coincides with most

contemporary view that the soul is as important as the body. The epistemological power of human lies on the intellectual capacity of the human soul. This view is because the soul knows no bound and highlight its immateriality. The soul possesses a potential openness to knowledge of all things and capable of acquiring the forms. The body on the other hand has no sensibility without the immaterial. However, the body derives its importance from the fact that the soul only manifest its activities through the body.

References

1. Amaku, E. (2009). The ontological foundations of humanity in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Victojo Production Service.
2. Allen, A. (1985). Philosophy for understanding theology. SCM Press Ltd.
3. S.T.L.Q(76), Art 1c.
4. Aristotle. (Trans.). De anima Bk 1. 405a 1a.
5. Gilson, E. (1960). The Christian philosophy of St. Augustine. Random House.
6. Augustine, St. (2008). On the quantity of the soul (P. King, Trans.). Oxford University.
7. Pegis, A. C. (1963). St Augustine and Augustine's tradition. Macmillan Co.
8. Bledsoe, J. P. (1973). Aquinas on the soul. Macmillan.
9. Frede, D. (1978). The final proof of the immortality of the soul in Plato's Phaedo 102a-107a. *Phronesis*, 24(1), 27-41.
10. Heraclitus. (2001). Fragments (T. M. Robinson, Trans.). University of Toronto Press.
11. Aristotle. On the soul. Book III, chapter 1, pp. 201a10-25.
12. Merleau-Ponty, P. M. (1962). Phenomenology of perception (C. Smith, Trans.). Routledge.
13. Plato. (Trans.). Republic. Book 1, 353d. (Found in Campbell, 2021).
14. Marias, J. (n.d.). History of philosophy. Dover Pub. Inc.
15. Nahyan, A. G. F. (2006). Pulmonary transit and body resurrection: The interactions of medicine, philosophy, and religion in the works of Ibn al-Nafis (1288).
16. (link unavailable) (n.d.). Origin of the soul. Retrieved February 11, 2024, from (link unavailable)
17. Davies, B. (1993). The thought of Thomas Aquinas. (link unavailable). 207-226
18. Broadie, S. (2001). Soul and body in Plato and Descartes. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Tradition*, 101, 295-308.
19. Francis, M. Cornford. (n.d.). Greek Religion. (p. 64, referring to Pindar fragments 131).
20. Campbell, D. (2021). Self-motion and cognition: Plato's theory of the soul. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 59, 524-544.
21. Damasio, A. R. (1994). Descartes' error: Emotion, reason, and the human brain. Penguin.