Chapter 18
On the Soul, the Death of the Soul, and the Nature of Evil

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Mind, the Body, and the Soul

In this synoptic paper I should like to contribute to the formation and defence of a secular conception of the soul, to elucidate the relation between the mind and the soul, as well as the relations between mind and body, and soul and the flesh. In the course of so doing, I shall invoke arguments that I have elaborated elsewhere.[1]

The mind is not a something, but not a nothing either, because it is not a thing (or, more pretentiously, an 'entity') of any kind. All our talk of the mind boils down to talk of our distinctive intellectual powers and of our intellectual capacities (second-order powers to acquire intellectual powers through learning and experience) and their exercise. These powers are corollaries or consequences of the fact that human beings are essentially language-using animals (*homo loquens* rather than *homo sapiens*). In this sense of 'mind' (which approximates Aristotle's 'rational *psuchē*'), animals do not have minds, since they are not language-users and they lack the intellectual powers distinctive of human beings. They also lack souls, since only animals with a mind can have a soul—and that too is a conceptual, constitutive, truth. For only creatures capable of knowing the difference between good and evil can be said to have a soul.

Beings that possess a mind and a soul are bodies, in one sense of that polysemic word. More specifically, they are living bodies. They are spatio-temporal continuants consisting of matter that are self-moving, sentient, self-conscious, in possession of intellect and (rational) will. Human beings are *not* embodied, but rather, as Aristotle said, they are *ensouled*. Although they *are* bodies, they also *have* bodies, but the body a human being *has* is distinct from the body the human being

[1]In particular in the three volumes of my tetralogy on human nature: Hacker (2007, 2013, 2018).

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is (*HNCF* Chap. 9). To be sure, the body a human being has is not a distinct *body* from the body he is. Rather, all talk of the body someone has, all talk of someone's beautiful, athletic, aged, feeble, bruised, sunburnt body is no more than talk of *somatic characteristics* of the human being in question. Everything true of our body is true of ourselves, but not everything true of ourselves is true of our body. I may be thinking, but my body cannot be, since thinking is not a somatic characteristic. Talk of our body is therefore complementary to talk of our mind, which is concerned with the intellectual powers that a human being possesses and exercises. There is no *relation* between my mind and my body, since the somatic properties and the intellectual powers of a living animal are not relata. How then does talk of the soul fit into this schema?

Like 'mind', 'person', 'self' and 'body', 'soul' too is polysemic. 'She is a merry old soul' is synonymous to 'She is a merry old body' in Scottish English—both meaning person. In 'There were 276 souls on board when the ship went down' it means human beings. In 'The estate near Moscow was sold together with more than 300 souls' it means serfs. In 'He sighed, and breathed no more—his soul had departed this world' it means no more than 'he died'—'the soul' here signifying the principle of life. These uses are of no interest to us in this context. Nor, in general, are dualist conceptions of the soul as a temporarily embodied substance that is logically independent of the body, that pre-exists human incarnation or that survives the death of the body, or both. This is the domain of religion (Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam[2]), theology and much metaphysics. The notion of the soul as a unitary spiritual substance that can exist in disembodied form is incoherent (*HNCF* Chap. 8). It lacks criteria of identity and individuation, and presupposes the intelligibility of possessing psychological attributes dissociated from the logical possibility of behavioural expression, as well as the intelligibility of possessing concepts of psychological attributes without grasping the criteria for their ascription to others. However, the Platonic metaphysical conception of the soul is of great interest despite the fact that it informs both ancient and renaissance neo-Platonist ideas about the soul and its immortality, and, via Augustine, moulds the misconceived Cartesian conception of the soul as a spiritual thinking substance causally connected with, but separable from, the physical organism. The reason it is of interest is that it contains much insight into human beings and their doing evil. These insights can be stripped of their ontological and metaphysical trappings. Correctly formulated, this notion of a soul fills a gap left by the Aristotelian conception of the rational *psuchē*. It answers to a need in forming our conception of human nature.

[2]Judaism is equivocal about an afterlife, the belief sitting more comfortably with Kabbalistic mystical Judaism (post eleventh century AD) than with traditional mainstream rabbinical Judaism. Hints of an afterlife of sorts occur in the Pentateuch, *she'ol* being mentioned a few times. Replete with twittering shades, it was evidently akin to the Homeric Hades but played no evident role in the ethics of the Pentateuch. During and after the period of the Second Temple subordinate movements within Judaism display elements of Zoroastrian principles assimilated during the Babylonian exile, including belief in eternal life, apocalyptic beliefs, and dualist beliefs concerning the powers of good and the powers of evil, and, in the fullness of time, beliefs in demons. But all these, though they characterized mainstream Christianity, were not part of dominant rabbinical Jewish belief.

The Soul and the Moral Powers of Man

In the *Crito* (47c), Socrates remarks that the soul is 'that part of us which is improved by right conduct and destroyed by wrong'.[3] So human beings have a soul. This demands clarification since the question arises of the relationship between the mind, which is to be understood as the set of intellectual and volitional powers of man and their exercise, and the soul, which is associated with good and evil, our powers to do right and wrong, our sense of justice, our susceptibility to remorse, and our feelings of compassion. Socrates presents the soul as *a part* of a human being, but we must take the idea of part here with a pinch of salt, since parts are smaller than the wholes of which they are parts, and the soul is neither smaller nor larger than the human being whose soul it is, nor the same size either. Finally, according to Socrates, the soul of a human being can be destroyed by doing wrong. This too needs elucidation, since it follows that human beings may lose their soul, and they may exist without souls. These three points will be examined.

In the sequel Socrates elaborates:

> There is a part of us which is improved by healthy actions and ruined by unhealthy ones. If we spoil it by taking the advice of non-experts, will life be worth living once this part is ruined? The part I mean is the body. …
>
> What about that part of us which is mutilated by wrong actions and benefited by right ones? Is life worth living with this part ruined? Or do we believe that this part of us, whatever it may be, in which right and wrong operate, is of less importance than the body? (*Crito* 47e)

The medical analogy is profound. We care a great deal about our good health and physical integrity. We view loss of a limb as a great misfortune, depriving us of the ability to function as a normal human being. Plato presses the analogy: are there not parts of our non-somatic nature that can be damaged, perhaps irremediably damaged, by abuse and misuse—by doing evil? Should we not care for our soul at least as much as we care for our physical constitution and health?

In the *Phaedo* (66a), Plato draws another construction line:

> The body fills us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense with the result that we literally never get an opportunity to think at all about anything … we are slaves to its service.

In the sequel Socrates takes this line of argument too far, imagining the bliss of the soul without the body. We need not go down that dead-end: it is, on analysis,

[3]Of course, the term used is *psuchē*, but the Socratic and Platonic conception of the *psuchē* is quite distinct from the Aristotelian one. The latter is primarily a biological concept, the former is largely a metaphysical and ethical one.

unintelligible. But refusing to follow such fanciful asceticism does not prevent one from recognizing that the appetites, which we share with animals, are firmly bound to our physical nature, needs and cravings. The appetites may hold us in bondage if egotism, self-indulgence, and hedonism constantly triumph over rationality, reasonableness, and self-restraint. We may be enthralled by our acquired appetite for (addiction to) alcohol; we may be victims of our own gluttony; and we may be enslaved by concupiscence. These are not somatic characteristics—one's body (the body one has) is not gluttonous, nor is it an alcoholic or beset with the priapic afflictions of Don Juan. It is for this purpose that we have the expression 'the flesh', which we contrast not with the mind, but with the soul. For the dividing line between the soul and the flesh is quite different from that between the mind and the body. Not being somatic features of human beings, the appetites are not allocated to the body, but they are not allocated to the mind either, since they are not associated with intellectual powers. Animals, which lack minds are similarly subject to appetites, addictions and cravings (see *TP* pp. 7–12). But, not having minds, we do not allocate their appetites to the flesh by contrast to the mind.

Human beings have a soul. That is not an empirical statement, but a conceptual, constitutive one. It characterizes the nature of mankind, as does the statement that human beings have a mind. These are not informative propositions, but explicative ones. They may serve to remind one that if a creature can be said to be a human being, then it follows that it can *intelligibly* be said to have a mind and a soul. This is, in effect, a rule for the use of the expressions, 'human being', 'mind', and 'soul'. Does it follow that *every* human being has a mind or soul? No—only that it *makes sense* to speak of the mind or soul of any being that is human, and that it is part of the *species nature* to have a mind and to have a soul. But one may lose one's mind (go mad) and one's mind may be destroyed by severe injury to the brain or by Alzheimer's disease. So too one may lose one's soul (while keeping one's mental faculties intact), one may destroy one's soul, and one's soul may be irretrievably damaged, twisted, or scarred either by one's own evil actions or by what one has been forced to undergo. (But one's soul cannot be damaged, twisted or scarred by doing good.)

Is every human being born with a soul? This is a delicate matter, akin to the question of whether neonates are persons. It is clear that new born children are no more sensitive to moral and aesthetic considerations than they are able to engage in reasoning and are sensitive to reasons. On the other hand, just as they are born with the capacity to acquire the powers of reason, so too they are born with the capacities to acquire a moral conscience, knowledge of good and evil, and a moral and aesthetic sensibility. For various reasons pertaining to how small children must be treated, one may resolve to characterize them as having minds and souls in virtue of their innate second-order powers. Alternatively, one may hold that they will naturally acquire a mind as they master a language, learn to reason, begin to raise the question 'Why?' in all its endless multiplicity. One may claim that children only gradually develop a soul as they come to know the difference between right and wrong, acquire a sense of justice and fairness, and learn to assume responsibility for their deeds. Their soul evolves side by side with their personality as they slowly

grow out of the egocentricity of childhood. Does this mean that *if* there are children who are born psychopaths, naturally and irremediably indifferent to moral and perhaps aesthetic considerations, then they are born without a soul and without the potentiality for one? Alas, it does. Given that nature occasionally produces physically and mentally profoundly defective children, it should hardly be surprising that it produces innately morally defective creatures too. But one must bear in mind the fact that not all psychopaths become evil. Some may become highly effective front-line troops, or lions of industry and tigers of finance who keep within the law.

Socrates averred that the soul is that part of a human being that is improved by right conduct and damaged by wrong-doing. I noted that 'part' sits uneasily here. But we may quietly discard the mereology and speak of *the moral powers* and *susceptibilities* of a human being. We should conceive of the soul along lines similar to the manner in which we conceive of the mind (*HNCF*, Chaps. 8–10), namely as a diffuse set of non-somatic powers that are fruitfully collected together by the epithet 'mind' in as much as they are all linked to sensitivity to reasons and the ability to reason. Similarly, the soul is not an 'entity' of any kind, but a set of capacities, abilities, and susceptibilities distinctive of mature human beings, acquired in a community in the course of maturation, through practice, training, teaching, experience, and reflection. They too involve reasoning and recognition of reasons. Hence possession of a soul presupposes possession of a mind. But the powers of the soul are moral powers and moral sensibility. They include knowledge of good and evil (knowledge being a diffuse power (*IP*, Chap. 4).[4] This is the most important knowledge that a human being can attain. Indeed, *it is what makes us human*. Knowing the difference between right and wrong is *practical knowledge*, as Aristotle noted and Ryle explained. It is exhibited in the way one lives, in the forms of one's self-awareness, in the attitudes one assumes, and in one's relations with one's fellow human beings.

With the soul are associated not merely knowledge of good and evil, but also the moral virtues and vices, the former (to continue Socrates's medical analogy) being marks of the health of the soul and the latter signs of ill-health, diseases of the soul, and of corruption. It was not for nothing that the medievals characterized the worst vices (as they saw matters) as 'mortal sins', for they spell the death of the soul. Possession of a conscience is a feature of the soul of man, not of the mind. A conscience is acquired in the course of internalizing moral norms and values and *making them one's own*. It *should be* refined by experience and reflection. One's moral sensibility should increase with age. Susceptibility to guilt, remorse, and repentance are corollaries of a conscience and are constituent passive powers of the soul. The powers of the soul are strengthened by transcending the demands of selfishness, self-centredness, and narcissism, by gratitude, loyalty, trust, respect for others and self-respect, by a sense of justice and fairness, by compassion, and by the humility that is essential for honesty with oneself, self-knowledge and self-understanding. To achieve moral maturity is an asymptotic *telos* of the life of a human being.

[4]The soul also incorporates aesthetic sensibility, but the latter appears to be independent of moral sensibility. It will not be discussed here.

The Death of the Soul

In his book *East/West Street*, Philippe Sands relates that when the Nazis occupied Lemberg (Lvov) in Galicia, the savage persecution of Jews began immediately. Professor Maurycy Allerhand, a distinguished professor of law at the University of Lemberg was immediately interned. Seeing a German guard mercilessly beating another inmate, Allerhand went up to the German and asked '*Have you no soul*?', whereupon the German took out his revolver and shot Allerhand dead. Martha Gellhorn, in her report on the Eichmann trial, remarked that Eichmann is a warning to us all that we must *guard our own souls*.[5] In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz peers into the *darkness of his own soul* and can find there nothing but horror. In Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* (2006, Chap. 18), Anna Semyonovna, in her last letter to her son Viktor Shtrum before she was murdered by the Nazis, wrote:

> I've seen that the people who shout most loudly about delivering Russia from the Jews are the very ones who cringe like lackeys before the Germans, ready to betray their country for thirty pieces of German silver. And strange people from the outskirts of the town seize our rooms, our blankets, our clothes. It must have been people like them who killed doctors at the time of the cholera riots. And then there are people *whose souls have just withered*, people who are ready to go along with anything evil—anything so as not to be suspected of disagreeing with whoever's in power. (Grossman 2006, 66) (My italics)

None of these writers are religious. That they all invoke the soul of man is striking and important. To do evil is to destroy one's own soul. This is not a causal statement. Evil-doing is intrinsically related to the death of the soul.

The soul, Socrates averred, can be damaged, mutilated, and destroyed. This idea is completely detachable from theological considerations, but it requires elucidation. I wish to draw a distinction between what is wicked and what is evil by reference to the idea that doing evil crosses definitive boundaries that, once transgressed, allow of no return, whereas doing what is wicked allows for remorse, repentance, and making good the wrong done. One who does evil destroys his own soul. The wicked damage their souls. The morally indifferent, the by-standers to evil, allow their souls to wither. What does this mean?

[5] 'We consider this man, and everything he stands for, with justified fear. We belong to the same species. Is the human race able—at any time, anywhere—to spew up others like him? Why not? Adolf Eichmann is the most dire warning to us all. He is a warning to guard our own souls; to refuse utterly and forever to give allegiance without question, to obey orders silently, to scream slogans.' Gellhorn (1962, 52–59) Her report is far more thoughtful than Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt 1963).

To do evil is to lose one's soul. In so doing, one becomes indifferent to inflicting terrible suffering and humiliation on others and to the slaughter of others. One may become depraved, and positively take pleasure in the suffering one inflicts and the slaughter one effects, delight in the power one wields and the sense of superiority it gives one. One destroys one's moral sensibility. This was patently true of the Nazi murderers. It is striking that hardly any of the Nazi war criminals expressed any remorse for their deeds. Nor, as far as I know, has anything been heard of the remorse of the Turkish *genoçidaires* for their slaughter of Armenians, or from Soviet Cheka, OGPU, NKVD, or KGB officers or commissars guilty of crimes against humanity. One may also lose one's soul or one's soul may wither through the terrible suffering one *undergoes*, in which one's moral sensibilities are battered to dust and from which one cannot recover. This was surely true of countless psychologically scarred survivors. It was powerfully and harrowingly depicted by Rod Steiger in Sidney Lumet's film *The Pawnbroker*.

In deliberately doing evil one destroys one's soul, setting oneself beyond the pale of humanity. Powerful expression of *one form* of this thought is given by Vasily Grossman's Anna Sergeyevna:

> I asked you how the Germans could send Jewish children to die in the gas chambers. How, I asked, could they live with themselves after that? Was there really no judgement passed on them by man or god? And you said: Only one judgement is passed on the executioner – he ceases to be a human being. Through looking on his victim as less than human, he becomes his own executioner; he executes the human being inside himself. (Grossman 2011,128)

It does not follow that one is aware of having destroyed one's soul. (Someone who has become addicted to pornography will probably have destroyed the possibility of a loving, mature, sexual relationship with another person, but they may be wholly unaware of this.) The barriers of evil one has constructed around oneself may exclude any understanding of the good—it has become, one might say, *invisible*. Or it may be distorted, as in a hall of mirrors, appearing to the evil-doer as a form of weakness and stupidity. Or the ramparts of evil that one has constructed around one by adopting or acquiescing in an evil ideology or bigoted religion may relieve one's conscience of the evil of what one does or of what one fails to do. The results of one's blindness are awful. In living an evil life, one shuts oneself off from genuine love, from truth and honesty with others and with oneself, from having an open heart, from shame, guilt and remorse, and it deadens whatever compassion one may have had. One stultifies one's own life, cleaving to childhood egocentricity ('I am the centre of the world') and narcissism, and assuring the impossibility of any kind of maturation and self-fulfilment as a human being.

A solitary evil-doer in a normal society, condemns himself to fear of being discovered, to suspicion of his neighbours who may disclose his evil deeds. He commits himself to a life of lies and deceit, as he strives to conceal the wrong he has done. A Mafiosi or member of a gang that systematically engages in evil-doing, doubtless enjoys the camaraderie and excitement of destruction and domination, as well as the booty. But he will lie and cheat to protect himself and his co-criminals

from retaliation. He will very likely be paranoid in his fear of rivals and of betrayal. He will not be able to trust even his closest comrades for fear of double-cross in the struggle to maintain his position or to rise in the criminal hierarchy.

A member of an evil-doing militia such as the Brownshirts, or the Cossack bands described by Isaac Babel, will be arrogant—he will look upon others who lack the power he has with contempt. He will be ruthless and merciless, for he can show no 'weakness' before his fellow evil-doers. But can he 'look himself in the face'? Can he look into his own soul (as Conrad's Kurtz did in *The Heart of Darkness*)? Can he be honest with himself? Can he disclose his hidden fears and nightmares to anyone to gain relief from them? He cannot even admit to himself that he is doing evil.

A successful leader of a nation dedicated to evil will be exhilarated by his successes, self-satisfied and arrogant. He will be egocentric, for evil is in general the dominion of the ego (Freud) and the domination of self-centredness (sometimes denominated 'the self'). Vindictiveness, vengefulness, greed, hatred, envy, malice, ingratitude, lust, indifference to justice and fairness, contempt for the powerless, are all characteristic of wickedness and manifestations of egocentricity. Arrogance, by contrast with self-esteem, is a hallmark of dictators and tyrants, who need to feel important, powerful, and envied. Others are there but to serve their purposes. Members of an evil leader's entourage are to be manipulated and controlled, and if they stand in his way, they are to be destroyed. But he will live in fear of being toppled from the pinnacle of power he has achieved, he will seek for plots everywhere, and if he finds none, he will confabulate them (as Stalin did).

The subjective consequences of doing evil doubtless differ when someone continues his life of evil-doing as opposed to putting that life behind him. In the latter case, as exemplified by ex-Nazis who evaded punishment, human psychological defence mechanisms do their work. Memories are suppressed and when revived are distorted. No doubt camaraderie was felt and exhibited in SS reunions, where Nazi songs were bellowed in inebriation, and memories were shared—but the reminiscences would have been highly selective—not of burning people alive and bayoneting children, but rather of recollected tomfoolery, of dangers shared and hardships jointly overcome. Such people returned to normal life in a normally functioning society, for the most part casting a curtain of silence over their evil deeds. They may return to a family life with children, take up civilian jobs and have distinguished careers. How then can they be said to have destroyed their soul?

One may say that by the evil they have done they have foreclosed the possibility of being a member of a moral community, no matter how respectable a member of the social community they may have become. For were they to retrieve their own moral sensibilities, which they destroyed by their evil deeds, they would be unable to forgive themselves for what they have done. They would, so to say, have to damn themselves as evil men. They cannot but compartmentalize their lives, drive the evil of their past underground, exercise a highly selective and distorting memory, conceal their past from their children and grandchildren and fear its disclosure. They cannot face themselves, but only lie to themselves as they deceive others. Can they not redeem themselves? Can they not admit their evil to others and to themselves and strive to live a morally good life? Can they not be forgiven? After all,

Christians believe that God can forgive all sins, given appropriate remorse and repentance.

This, I think, is a disturbing doctrine. Not even God, if there were a God, would have the right to forgive moral monsters who have committed atrocities, no matter how much they might come to feel remorse and strive for atonement. Were he to do so, the dead would rise up and curse him. But there is no God. Can't the wicked redeem themselves? An example will help our reflections—the Leopold/Loeb case: Nathan Leopold (1904–71) and Richard Loeb (1905–36), exceptionally intelligent and gifted students, murdered fourteen year old Robert Frank in 1924, simply to prove that they could commit the perfect crime and that they were Nietzschean supermen who had passed beyond the constraints of good and evil. Both in prison, and after his release on parole in 1958, Leopold dedicated himself wholeheartedly and unremittingly to good works in prison and for the benefit of prisoners. Did he not thereby redeem himself, return across the dreadful boundary between wickedness and evil and earn forgiveness? Could others forgive him? Could the parents of the murdered boy forgive him? It seems to me that they would have no right to do so. Only Robert Frank might have done so, but he was the murdered victim. Might Leopold forgive himself? Not if he had come to understand the difference between good and evil, and to grasp the enormity of his deed. This he did. He evidently strove mightily to redeem himself, but surely with the knowledge that what he had done was unforgivable—that he himself could not forgive himself. To do evil is not to incur a debt that may subsequently be discharged.

One may not destroy one's soul, but, as Anna Semyonovna observed, one may merely allow it to wither. It is in this sense that Ian Kershaw said that the road to Auschwitz was paved with indifference. It is this that was manifest, as Victor Klemperer (1998) so vividly described, when his fellow academics crossed to the other side of the street when they saw him coming, after he had been excluded from his university post by Nazi decree against Jews. The withering of one's soul may ultimately lead to its death, as was patent in the Kielce pogrom in Poland in 1946 in which Jewish survivors from death camps, who returned to the Polish village that had been their home were murdered by the Polish villagers who had expropriated their houses and possessions.

But one's soul may shrivel and darken even when one is a bystander to evil without actively engaging in it, but when one *fails to stand up*. In his last novel *Everything Flows*, Vasily Grossman chillingly describes a successful scientist Nikolay Andreyevitch as he realizes that he has become smug in his refusal to support evil:

> The divine impeccability of the immortal State turned out not only to have repressed individual human beings but also to have defended them, to have comforted them in their weakness, to have justified their insignificance. The State had taken on its iron shoulders the entire weight of responsibility; it had liberated people from the chimera of conscience. …
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> Examination of one's own self – how very unpleasant it was. The list of one's despicable acts was unbelievably odious.

> It included general meetings of the Institute; sessions of the scientific council; solemn meetings on important anniversaries; routine meetings in the laboratory; banquets; celebrations in the homes of the important and evil; jokes told during dinners; conversations with directors of personnel departments; letters he had signed; an audience with the minister.
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> And the scroll of his life contained all too many letters of another kind: letters unwritten – although it had been his sacred duty to write them. Silence – when it had been his sacred duty to speak; a telephone number it was imperative to ring, and that he had not rung; visits it was sinful not to pay, and that he had not paid; telegrams never sent; money never sent. Many, many things were missing from the scroll of his life.
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> And, now that he was naked, it was absurd to take pride in what he had always prided himself on: that he had never denounced anyone; that he had refused, when summoned to the Lubyanka, to provide compromising information about an arrested colleague; that instead of turning away when he happened to meet the wife of an exiled colleague, he had shaken her hand and asked after the health of their children.
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> No, he did not have so very much to feel proud about… (Grossman 2011, 28–30)

The moot question now is what judgement to pass when the political circumstances become so dire that one needs to be a hero, perhaps even a suicidal hero, to stand up to be counted. Boris Pasternak was, out of the blue, telephoned by Stalin, who asked him for his opinion of his friend the great poet Osip Mandelstam, who had been arrested for sedition. Pasternak was so terrified that he merely stuttered and stammered, too frightened to stand up for his friend. Stalin had Mandelstam shot. It seems to me that in such cases, *we* have no right to criticize Pasternak—but Pasternak could never forgive himself. Had Mandelstam been sentenced to decades in the Gulag, *he* might have forgiven Pasternak on his release. But would that have allowed Pasternak to forgive himself?

From Soul to Soul: Trisecting an Angle with Compass and Rule

The idea of a secular notion of the soul is useful and fruitful. It enriches the ways we talk our moral life and its nature. It facilitates clarity of thought about evil and evil doers, enabling us to draw distinctions and emphasize features that are deep and important, just as our talk of the mind *properly understood* enables us to emphasize distinctive aspects of the intellectual and volitional powers of mankind. I have emphasized 'properly understood', for the conception of the mind that I have advanced is very far removed from the notions of the mind that have dominated European philosophy from Descartes to Wittgenstein (for detailed discussion, see *HNCF* Chaps. 8–10) and benightedly continue to do so. The concept of a soul that has been deployed in this section is no less far removed from the received conception of the soul in philosophy. How are they related? How can one make the transition from the traditional idea of the soul as a simple, immaterial, spiritual,

immortal substance to the secular conception of the soul? Perhaps a Wittgensteinian analogy will help.

Mathematicians in ancient Greece raised a deceptively simple question concerning Euclidean plane geometry. It is very simple to show that there is a way of constructing a bisection of an arbitrary angle with a compass and rule. But is it possible to construct a trisection? Mathematicians struggled with the problem for centuries. The solution (which is that it is not possible) was discovered only in 1837 by Pierre Laurent Wantzel, who transformed the geometrical problem into a question in algebra and trigonometry. He showed that a certain cubic equation taking trigonometric values cannot be solved by any of the four basic arithmetical operations or by taking square roots (which are the limits of what can be represented by constructions with a compass and rule). This proof would not have been intelligible to ancient Greek mathematicians, ignorant as they were of algebra and co-ordinate geometry. But suppose we were patiently to explain to a pupil, who knew no more than a competent ancient Greek mathematician, the basic principles of algebra, the principles of co-ordinate geometry, and the methods of solving cubic equations, and then explained Wantzel's proof to him. He would accept it without ado (he is, after all, perfectly competent). And now we might say, we have changed his idea of what he was trying to do. Indeed, we should have changed his idea of trisection. We should have changed his way of looking at the problem. He might even say 'I see! *That* was what I was really trying to do', although to be sure, that was not what he was trying to do. But his way of looking at the problem has changed fundamentally.[6]

One might say something similar about the relation between the ancient Platonic, neo-Platonic, and Christian notions of the soul and the secular concept of the soul. For we might show someone who has the ancient conception that actually the notion of an immortal soul that is the locus of good and evil makes no sense. We might also prove to this person that the very notion of an immaterial substance that is the locus of good and evil makes no sense. We might go on to demonstrate to him that the very idea that there is such a soul that stands in a causal relation to the brain makes no sense. But we might then explain to him that, as he knows perfectly well, among the powers of a normal human being is knowledge of good and evil, possession of a conscience, the potentiality to feel compassion and selfless love, the susceptibility to shame, guilt and remorse. And we might show him that it is fruitful and illuminating to subsume such powers and their exercise under the concept of a soul, just as we have subsumed the intellectual and volitional powers of man under the concept of mind, *as long as it is understood* that neither concepts are concepts of 'things' of any kind, but rather elements of a fruitful form of representation. And, if we have displayed the requisite Socratic skills, our pupil might indeed say 'Ah, so that was really what I trying to say' or 'That was what I really had in mind'. For we should have led our pupil from one symbolism to another *with his consent*.

[6] See Wittgenstein (1980, 387–92, 1975, 87–90, 2009. §334, 1969, 41).

Does this show that the concept of a soul is *necessary* or *unavoidable*? No, of course not. It is no more necessary and unavoidable that the concept of a mind. But it is an exceedingly useful concept for the purpose of talking about the lives of human beings and their engagement with each other, and it carries a weight that would be absent if we were to do without it. Were it to become obsolete that would betoken a gross impoverishment of our thought and of our nature.

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