

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro. *A Brief History of the Soul*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

In an age where naturalistic views of the world and physicalist views of persons conceal the notion of the soul, Taliaferro and Goetz offer a comprehensive defense of the soul as substance. Both show that the concept of a soul comes from a rich tradition of thought, is enjoying a present resurgence and has a promising future. Systematically, the authors discuss a range of views concerning personhood. Carefully and critically Taliaferro and Goetz move from Plato in Ancient times through the Continental thought up to present contemporary literature on souls. While it is historical it is not simply a commentary of views but it is intimately tied to present-day problems and insights as seen in cognitive science, philosophy of mind and philosophical theology, which Taliaferro and Goetz persuasively argue. Clearly, the book is a defense more specifically of substance dualism (3-4). This is the notion that fundamentally there are two kinds of things in reference to human persons.

The structure includes Ancient Greek thought, Medieval Christian thought, Continental thought, Modern thought, contemporary problems raised against the soul and future considerations and projects concerning the soul. First, Taliaferro and Goetz consider the two most prominent figures in the history of thought on the Soul, namely Plato and Aristotle in Greek thought. Second, the authors work through the Medieval Christian views of Augustine and Aquinas by linking their theological construction to the philosophical perspectives of both Plato and Aristotle. Third, the authors consider the thought of Descartes,

Malebranche and Leibniz in the chapter on Continental thought. Fourth, in Modern thought of the 18th century the authors consider the dialectic oscillating around the concerns raised by Descartes and mechanistic philosophy. The primary thinkers considering these issues include: Locke, Butler, Reid, Hume and Kant. Fifth, Taliaferro and Goetz consider historical and contemporary objections against the soul such as the problem of soul-body interaction, the problem of science, neural dependence, personal identity and evolution. Finally, Taliaferro and Goetz consider the prospects of the soul as a metaphysical concept and its ramifications for other concerns.

Taliaferro and Goetz offer a historical survey of the soul for the purposes of contemporary constructive development against materialist objections and against materialist biases toward reductive explanations of persons (4). Human persons, broadly speaking, are composed of two substances⁵ both an immaterial substance/mind or soul, and a material substance – body/brain. The soul and mind are often used interchangeably throughout the book although this is not an exact portrayal of some variations of substance dualism that hold the mind to be a faculty of the soul, namely the hylomorphism of thinkers like Aristotle and Thomas. Nonetheless, substance dualism is broadly the position that is being surveyed and defended here. The most obvious evidences in favor of substance dualism offered include the fundamental and distinct nature of physical and non-physical things (1-3) and the common-sense view of persons (3). Taliaferro and Goetz argue that the natures of physical things and non-physical things are clearly distinct. Souls are essentially characterized and defined by subjectivity, phenomenological experience, first-person knowledge, internal knowledge and teleological causal explanation (see especially chapter 6). Whereas physical things, for which we are less clear, are essentially characterized or defined by mechanistic process, energy transfer (chapter 6), third-person knowledge (187-190), relational and extrinsic properties (see chapter 4, 147-149, 206), and complex systematic arrangement of particles (194-197). The authors support these assumptions and the distinction between the substances when commenting on Papineau's view of the mental and non-mental: "In short, according to Papineau we cannot say for sure what it is to be physical, but we can be sure about what it is not: it is not something that is ultimately mental in nature. Instead, it is something that is ultimately nonmentally identifiable (207)." In agreement with Armstrong on the nature of the physical, Taliaferro and Goetz argue: "any final appeal

to mental entities such as purposes would count as a falsification of naturalism (207).” Thus, arguably, there are two distinct kinds of things hence substance dualism.

There are two noteworthy arguments in support of substance dualism that are argued for throughout: first-person consciousness and the unity-of-consciousness. The first-person consciousness argument is an argument that has rich historical precedence, but is still widely used today in contemporary literature. The argument shows distinctions of mental things with physical things and physical processes. The authors describe first-person consciousness as self-awareness or the perspective from introspection (i.e. looking inward) when discussing Plato’s view of the self and knowledge (15; see especially Plato’s *Phaedo*). Next, the author’s discuss it in the context of Augustine’s view of the self, which foreshadows Descartes’ famous *cogito ergo sum*. According to Augustine on the basis of first-person knowledge we know that we are simple in nature, one, aware of the self and its distinction from the body (34-36; see for example *Confessions*, VIII.4.9; *On Free Choice of the Will*, II.3). Next, the authors discuss Descartes’ view on pages 83-88. On pages 155-156, Taliaferro and Goetz offer an argument from first-person consciousness that this kind of knowledge has greater certainty than scientific knowledge, or in the least is presupposed with scientific knowledge. Second, the authors make use of the unity of consciousness argument as an apologetic for the soul’s existence, which too has a rich history and is commonly referred to in contemporary literature. This is the argument that suggests that physical things are unable to account for the unity of awareness because it is the kind of thing that is not a set of externally related neurons, but one unified thing that binds together all the aspects of the neural system (18). The author’s justify the fact of its being a historical argument with Plato (17-18), Aristotle (23-24), Descartes (85-87), and Kant (126-127). It is also widely used today in the philosophy of mind, mind-brain correlations and consciousness studies (18 and 156).

In the process of making a defense for substance dualism the reader will notice a clear bias, which will prove positive or negative depending on the reader’s presuppositions. The authors move beyond substance dualism to arguing for a ‘pure’ or ‘strict’ dualism against a ‘compound’ or ‘complex’ dualism. Pure dualism is the notion that I am strictly identified with my soul substance, which is keeping with a broadly Cartesian account of persons. The support for this claim is seen in their movement toward making a case for a simple soul, the survival of the

person (3-4), Person-body dualism (see 190-192), Personal Identity as a simple enduring continuant in the spirit of Chisholm (see 199) and the fact that we are non-physical like God (see 176). Finally, this is demonstrated in their explicit and specific defense of dualism in the Plato-Augustine-Descartes tradition (see especially 155 and 213-214). The benefits of this approach are clear, but it is not without difficulty. Those inclined to a more metaphysically holistic view of the mind-body might find themselves longing for further exploration and development of a more explicit compound dualism, hylomorphism or emergent dualism. Consequently, this is one potential downfall.

The highlights of this historical survey on the soul are numerous. I will consider three here. The first highlight is a defense of substance dualism utilizing 'integrative' dualism. Second, Taliaferro and Goetz exemplify a constructive method of doing philosophy and theology by drawing from historical sources. Third, Taliaferro and Goetz contribute to the discussion by providing a foundation and suggesting further areas of exploration.

One very significant and interesting issue is the notion of "integrative" dualism and realism. 'Integrative' is a term used in reference to dualism by Taliaferro in his book *Consciousness and the Mind of God*. It is a view that ties together the notions of duality and unity. Although there are two substances at work with a person, at least while embodied, there is a functional unity at work as well. So the physicalist's insight that a person is one functioning unit or system, which seems confirmed by the empirical sciences, is coherently accounted for in integrative dualism. This notion in itself is not foreign to the notion of the soul throughout history, but it is codified more succinctly by Taliaferro and Goetz due to the pressing concerns and pressure from contemporary physicalists (this I believe is a helpful pressure). A gem that expresses the beauty of an integrative dualism is seen in their discussions of cognition and perception. Goetz and Taliaferro offer a view that is mid-way between direct realism and representational realism known as 'integrative realism,' which corresponds quite well to their integrative view of dualism. The authors put forth this solution as a response to an objection to substance dualism by Jaegwon Kim (144-146). Kim objects that it is incoherent for a soul and body to occupy the same space, for which, Taliaferro and Goetz respond by offering their solution of 'integrative realism.' They argue there is nothing on the face of it controversial or contradictory about a soul (as a simple) occupying the same space as a body if in fact

the soul is spatial in some sense. Noting the problems and insights in both direct realism and representational realism they offer a mediating view that is an analogue for solving the 'joint occupancy dilemma.' They define integrative realism as such: "when you see us coming to greet you, you do not have a representation of us and then have to infer that you see us, but rather we appear to you through your sensory modalities. In veridical (reliable) experiences, there is an integration and proper functioning of organs and sensations such that, when you have the visual, auditory, and tactile sense of our greeting you by name and of our shaking your hand, these constitute the reality of what is taking place... Under these circumstances, we are truly interacting physically and mentally (145)."

A second highlight is the use of a constructive method as stated in the introduction (4). When reflecting on this I am reminded of the great late medieval philosopher-historian Etienne Gilson. In his work *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* he exemplifies a constructive method for doing philosophy by drawing from the resources in history to adequately address the present dialectical situation. This is similar to the approach taken by Taliaferro and Goetz. By offering a comprehensive survey from history the authors are able to address the issues and solutions from the past, connect the same issues from the past with the present and offer perspective on how to move forward. First-person arguments and the unity of consciousness argument are prime examples of historical resources that provide evidence for the distinctions in matter and non-matter appropriated in the past yet alive in the present dialectic between dualism and physicalism.

Approaching the notion of soul in this way will have two effects. First, it is a counter influence to the overwhelming pressure from the ethos and pathos found in scientism and physicalism. The influence is due in part to its substantive nature that is presented in a readable and approachable manner. Second, it may have an impact on the academic disciplines centering on philosophy of mind/personal identity, philosophical theology and ontology. I say this because it is comprehensive in its historical scope and it demonstrates the pervasive nature of studies on the soul throughout history not only as a theological concept, but also as a philosophical concept. Goetz and Taliaferro nicely supply the groundwork for this, thus raising the awareness of some of the issues still in need of hard theoretical and/or empirical work. Specifically what comes to mind is the notion of a simple soul yet with a complex of

properties. It is uncertain how a simple soul could in fact have a complex of properties without also having parts. Other issues include the notion of a soul and cognition, the notion that a soul is a complete substance and the notion of physical energy in physics and the role of the soul's relation to it in causation. These and many other issues are deserving of further exploration, clarification and justification.

A third highlight overlaps with the previous highlight concerning a constructive method. The authors carry the contemporary discussion forward in chapter 8. Taliaferro and Goetz predict that the soul will illuminate four areas of study: worldview studies, the nature of the physical, cultural studies and values. One specific example relates values to the soul by considering '*qualia*'. Taliaferro and Goetz raise concerns for physicalism in accounting for values and '*qualia*' by arguing that even physicalists see these as incompatible with strong forms of physicalism. The implication is that the soul offers a better way forward, thus warranting careful study.

There are two theological issues concerning the soul, not directly intimated by Taliaferro and Goetz, that are deserving of further attention in relation to mind-on-brain dependence and evolutionary thought. The first issue is how to make sense of the origin of souls if in fact souls seem to depend on properly functioning brains and are organically linked to other physical organisms in the evolutionary process. Second is the potential problem the mind on brain dependence and evolution pose for the idea of natural immortality. Natural immortality may have been a laughable issue in the past century, but if a simple soul substance is a viable option in the philosophy of mind then natural immortality is still a *viable option*. It could offer some help in accounting for other theological conundrums like the notion of the image of God, disembodied existence and a coherent and plausible account of the resurrection. Immortality is still a topic worth discussing in contemporary times, which is motivated by historical precedence in the likes of Plato, Augustine and Calvin to name a few.

The reader may find some of the solutions to objections raised against substance dualism incomplete. Take for example the objection from evolution (see 200-201). In it the authors raise the objection but only consider one facet of the problem, namely the possibility of animal souls. Taliaferro and Goetz affirm the likelihood of animal souls, but do not consider other related problems. Other problems include the intuitive qualitative distinction between man and beast with the seeming unity of

physical organisms, and the compatibility of soul-creation with evolution. It might have been helpful to see a story addressing these issues that are seemingly in tension. But, given the brevity of length here the topic of evolution and substance dualism may require treatment elsewhere.

A Brief History of the Soul is a helpful contribution to philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, and for philosophy in general. Courses in the philosophy of mind/personal identity, seminars on the soul, and theological anthropology would be wise to interact with this work due to its historical focus, clarity and insight. Taliaferro and Goetz demonstrate the viability and persistence of the soul concept in philosophy, as something the physicalist should consider more seriously.