

M. A. Krapiec Theory of Eternal Life of Human and Infinite Immanence

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In order to give a good answer to the question of whether the human being lives eternally, it is necessary to ask a more basic question, namely: “What is the being called the human being?” “What is the structure of this being?” (In this connection, it is also possible to consider the issue of human death—after resolving the question of whether man is composed of matter, of spirit, or—as a material-spiritual being—of both.) However, to be able to approach this question in a sensible way, it is necessary to answer another one first: How is the universe built? Is it made of many coordinate components (pluralism)? Is it homogeneous (monism)? Does it contain spiritual and material elements? The article will follow the convention of moving from core and central issues to more specific ones to reach the final conclusion (though this will be done in correspondence with empiricism, with experience being taken into account, it will be based on logical argumentation in favor of human immortality).

The first of the proposals attempting to explain reality is the belief that reality consists of various elements—beings irreducible to a common denominator. It should be asked at this point whether such a position does not lead to the absurdity that was not avoided by Jean-Paul Sartre, who assumed that the subject in the current state is already a different one than that very subject from the past. Is it not the case that doing away with the permanent layer of the self as the center and keystone of human identity (as suggested by pluralism, a theory of many beings without a core, center, or keystone), which is what Sartre did in his theory, leads to the absurd impossibility of punishing a criminal for wrongdoing [after all, it is not the criminal as he or she currently is who committed the crime (?!)]?

The second proposed explanation of the structure of the Universe, which the author of this article—interpreting Krapiec’s theory of human immortality, refers to as the monistic argument from infinite immanence (or, interchangeably, infinite transcendence). The main idea of the above argument is the question of whether the Universe is expanding to infinity (the expansion of the Universe is assumed in modern physics). If the Universe is expanding, as we know it is, then why would it not expand (not only spatially) infinitely (or head for its spatial center infinitely)? Answering these questions positively may imply one of many forms of pantheism.¹

A good answer (remaining within the framework of dualism) to the question asked in the previous paragraph is that God is not identical with the world, because for the world to exist there must be the basis of the world (God), and the basis is the basis of something that has its basis; the very language of common sense

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suggests that the basis is something other than that of which it is the basis. Moreover, the author of the paper claims that God is a personal being. That personal nature of God consists in the belief that a basis is not only the basis of something, but also the basis for something. For its modus to come into existence, the basis must be creative in relation to the being derived from it. This creativity presupposes relational access to the created being, because if there was no such access (from being to being), the “central” being (let us call it that), would be closed in its infinite immanence, unable to influence anything apart from itself. The cause would not produce an effect.

As I have stressed above, a basis must be the basis of something, and vice versa: If something exists, it must have its basis. It is also possible to ask whether that something is a real being or a possible being. Answering this question, one must bear in mind that Krąpiec is an epistemic realist.² Why? It is because he understands the fact that, in order to exist at all, a possibility must always be a possibility of something, hence, the existential priority of the real being over the possible being.

In the context of the affirmation of the third explanation of the world (highlighted both by Krąpiec and by the author of this text), I would like to perform the first extrapolation (one of two extrapolations in my paper) as Krąpiec’s interpretation of how the human soul comes into being. In other words, I would like to answer the question of why a person has a soul (instead of being only the soul or only the body). As natural sciences inform us, the organization of matter consists of the compounding, concentration, or grouping of its elements through qualitative transformations. It should be stressed that, to undergo these transformations, a being must come into existence first, and in the Thomist system the reason for the existence and, consequently, for the organization of matter is the human soul. Being immaterial, the soul³ cannot be subject to such transformations (because it is composed of potency and act; uniting the two would result in the emergence of God, and the human soul is not God). Yet, it does exist, and—being contingent—cannot be the existential cause for itself. How to solve this problem? What turns out to be helpful is Saint Thomas Aquinas’s theory of the creation of the human soul (or, more broadly, the creation of being as such) from non-being. According to this theory, only existence identical with essence can be its own source as well as the cause of the remaining beings.

In this section of my paper, I would like to refer to a certain double (meta-objective and objective) extrapolation as Krąpiec’s interpretation of the concept of immortality of the human being. For the benefit of those readers who do not know what extrapolation is, let me cite a few definitions. The first one is the understanding of extrapolation as predicting what will happen in Set B conditions, unknown to us, on the basis of what happened in Set A conditions, which we know, with Set B treated as analogous to Set A. According to the second understanding, analogous to the first, extrapolation consists in establishing what is located outside Set A based on what is inside Set A. According to the third understanding, analogous to the first two, extrapolation is seen as the inference of what exists, for example, in the Universe on the basis of one element of the Universe, important for some reason. Let us move on to the double (meta-objective and objective) extrapolation. Krąpiec was aware of the fact that the human body decomposes at the moment of death (though not only at that particular moment, since Krąpiec was also aware of the phenomenon of dissimilation—but let us consider the moment of death). At the moment of death, the human body decomposes completely. The soul, by contrast, is simple to such a degree that cannot decompose completely, even though it is composed of act and potency. If the soul decomposed into potency and act, two being would emerge: pure potency and pure act. The soul could not be pure act because it is not God, and there is no such a thing as pure potency. The body is also composed of potency and act (just like the soul), but it does decompose. How to solve this problem? Saint

Thomas Aquinas's theory of the person proves helpful. According to Aquinas, the person who is existentially stronger in the hierarchy of beings is the one in who act prevails over potency to a greater extent than in an existentially weaker person. This means the human soul has an act of existence strong enough to be characterized by immortality. The human soul is a totally non-decomposable being, and as such, it exists forever. Why did I stress that the extrapolation specified above is not only objective but also meta-objective? That is because, in a way, it involves a methodological analogy: First, the decomposition of the body is reflected on from the biological point of view, and then—by analogy—the possibility (in fact, as the conclusion shows, the impossibility) of the decomposition of the soul is considered already from the philosophical point of view.

Attempting to present the conclusion of the paper, it is necessary to answer the question of whether the double extrapolation that I have presented does not induce us to think of man a soul operating the body rather than as a compound of body and soul. I will venture to say that extrapolation does not entangle a thinking person in dualism. Why not? After all, I have presented the soul, the body, and their compounds by performing double extrapolation, in two orders (that of act and potency and that of the components of matter). In response to these questions, I can only defend my case by saying that this is just a purely logical experiment belonging to the order of thought (not to the order of existence), which by no means negates the truth about the being that exists in reality and is not necessarily in conflict with that truth.

Notes

1. One of the most brilliant monist pantheists was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. According to Hegel, being has an inherent inclination to integrate and disintegrate structurally, with the two processes taking place in constant dynamism. This means being is in constant conflict with itself. In other words, progressing towards a synthesis of its elements, it at the same time restores distance between them. This is conflict as well, since being tends towards a final synthesis of its component parts, which it cannot achieve—and the other way around: It tends towards an antithesis of those parts, which it never achieves either. Brilliant though it is, Hegel's theory fails to take experience into account and thus remains a reductionist speculation (reductionist because it reduces the entire reality to a logical theory only). In this context, It is possible to respond to such speculations by asking if I, the person writing this text a moment ago, existed only in my own mind (as Sartre would have it). Or perhaps it was I, independent (in some sense and to some extent—physically) of my own imagination, who was writing this paper and, consequently, should be considered responsible for its contents.

2. According to Krapiec, and in my opinion too, ontological and epistemic realism is the only rational solution among the attempts presented in this paper to answer the questions of what reality is and how it is structured.

3. We define the soul as something that is in opposition to the body, distinct from the body (to some extent, in terms of content), but connected with it (having a common form)—as non-matter.