

Challenging Dualisms

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Abstract

Domination is rooted in a common ideology based on the control of reason over nature, and on the separation of the spiritual world from the material world based on the separation of our beings into soul and body.

In analyzing domination, all forms share certain features: 1. A radical exclusion, making the 'other' known as both inferior and separate. For instance, women possess an inferior nature, and nature is ontologically other. 2. Homogenization, differences and diversity within the otherness is disregarded and domination appears as natural. 3. Women and nature act as backgrounds to the main, masculine activities, and slaves exist as background to the dominant group. 4. In addition, incorporation means to identify the other in relation to the man as central, and 5. Instrumentalism means that social worth is derived instrumentally according to the desires of the ruler. This substructure provides an analytical tool.

Domination is rooted in a common ideology based on the control of reason over nature, and on the separation of the spiritual world from the material world based on the separation of our beings into soul and body. The origins of domination are buried in both an enigmatic past and within the depths of human consciousness. The theoretical work though, brings to consciousness the past as basic to knowing the present. To re-consider human persons as ecological persons is to rethink the dualistic philosophy on which western cultures were built. Ecofeminist theologians use new cosmologies and anthropologies in seeking a theology beyond dualisms. They seek a cosmology that embraces a liberationist methodology; an eco-social justice view; a sacredness and integrity of creation; a holiness of body that includes sexuality and sensuality; and a spirituality that exalts God's transcendence /immanence.

Dualisms correspond to gender, class, race, and nature vs human domination. We are trapped within our cultures that honor comparison, competition, and antagonism. Maybe the most destructive dualistic form in relation to our perception of nature was the result of the mechanistic worldview, when the earth was seen as a machine, God as its designer, and humans as created to run the machine for their use.¹ Dualisms result in unhealthy, distorted relationships within our own selves, with other human beings, with the rest of creation, and with God. I address the eco-social problem, as a split within our own being as mind/soul, and the way out of 'split selves' towards 'whole, socio-ecological selves.'

DUALISMS 'WITHIN' THE HUMAN PERSON: SOUL-BODY

If human society needs to find a home in nature, then the human soul needs to find a home in the bodily existence of each human being.² To speak of the body and the psyche, or of spirit and matter includes any dimension of a being, existing in, for, from and with all the other dimensions of its being, each dimension interrelated in its differentiation with all the other dimensions of its being. A person thinks with his/her mind, body, feelings, ideas, intentions, decisions linked with the bodily organs. The primacy of soul is alien to such an understanding; soul and body exist as a whole being. We are all 'body,' all 'psyche,' all 'soul'.

SOUL: ΨΥΧΗ IN THE GREEK WORLD

Already from 3000 BC the Egyptians were discussing the existence of ψυχή, and Life. Ψυχή-psyche was known as the source of life of the cosmos. Psychological philosophy studies those

issues helped by Metaphysics that include the ontological, the cosmological and the theological questions. In Homer's texts,³ there are no words for our concepts of body and soul. Ψυχή was the vital force, expressed as breath, life and power.⁴ According to Aristotle, Democritus identifies 'mind' with ψυχή⁵ believing that the impressions of the senses are true since the philosopher identifies mentality with sensation and sensation with change.⁶ For ancient Greeks, the parts of the body were agents of intellectual and spiritual functions. There was no master-concept of the soul.

Ψυχή became the term for the newly found master-concept in the 6th century BC. This is connected with the belief in retribution in the hereafter that became widespread from the 7th century onwards. The ψυχή has to guarantee the continuity of life in this world and life in the hereafter. In close connection with the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul, it is found for the first time as a part of Pythagorean ethics. After 500 BC ψυχή was used as a term for human thought, will, and emotion and also for the essential core of a person that can be separated from the body and that does not share in the dissolution of the body. Ψυχή becomes the epitome of the self, apart from the body and of greater worth.⁷ During the 5th and 6th BC centuries, the autonomy and higher worth of the soul are taken for granted. From the 5th century on, medicine presupposes the division of body from soul. Ψυχή as the seat of spiritual and moral qualities is the self of a person.⁸

ΨΥΧΗ IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF PLATO

Plato starts with this Socratic idea: the parts of the soul have varied worth according to ontological categories. The demiurge created ψυχή before creating the body, so that ψυχή would rule over the body and not the body to rule over ψυχή. The demiurge placed the mind-Λογιστικό within the ψυχή; while placing ψυχή within the body the world was created.⁹ The Λογιστικό communicates with pure being, accessible to thought; επιθυμητικόν is bound to the sense-world. In endless struggle for truth, a person must ensure for λογιστικόν its control over the other parts of the soul. Moral struggle is a flight from the world of sense; it is an approach to intelligible being-God. As the soul's pre-eminent part belongs to transcendent being, it is pre-existent and immortal. According to Plato, influenced by the Pythagorean idea about the hereafter, the structure of the soul must exist also in a true soul-model, presupposing a connection between the individual and the cosmic soul, the world being a living, ordered organism.¹⁰ The hereafter soul's home corresponds to the immanent star-world, outside true experience. The rational sphere of the soul is human; the impulsive sphere humans share with animals; and the vegetative sphere they share with both animals and plants.

Most Platonists cling to the immortality of the soul as part of intelligible being in the process of its transient union with a body. For the Peripatetics, the immaterial soul is the origin of the form, life, and activity of the total being. According to Epicureans and Stoics, the soul is material. Any soul is a broken off part of the world soul which will be reunited with at death. Middle Platonism discerns mind-νοῦς from ψυχή. The soul proceeded from and has a part in νοῦς of intelligible being. Νοῦς affects ψυχή at a higher level and ψυχή affects σῶμα-body at a lower one. The core of humans is νοῦς-mind. In the Hellenistic period ψυχή denotes all the functions of mind and soul. As distinct from νοῦς ψυχή can be devaluated; it no longer denotes pure spirituality.¹¹

SOUL ΨΥΧΗ IN THE BIBLE

The Hebrew root nepes-ψυχή means 'respire,' 'breath,' 'life'; 'self'; 'person'; 'desire'; to be refreshed;¹² in connection with the Sabbath rest which consists of rest and activity; breathing denotes the life always threatened and re-won in the cosmos. Nepes denotes the vital force, giving priority to the anthropological wording. Gen 2.7 expresses this idea when it calls a human being in its totality, a living being. Nepes does not exist apart from the body: Gen 27.25. According to

Hebrew anthropology, the totality can be concentrated in a part. The collectivist element never restricts in Judaism the significance of the individual who is quickened by a unitary life. The metaphor of nepes as the substructure of the anthropological wording shows life as breathing exercise. If God ceases to breath into humans, life stops for them.¹³

The LXX¹⁴ interprets the living being as living soul: ψυχήν ζώσαν. It essentially means 'life'. The relations of breath and life take a semantic step when nepes denotes the living being itself¹⁵ in referring to the self.¹⁶ The LXX never uses 'soul', as in a Platonic dualism, opposite to 'body'. Humans in the Old Testament (OT) do not think in a subject-object relationship. With its translation of psyche, the LXX considers nepes as a key anthropological idea of the OT.¹⁷ Soul in the New Testament (NT) means life, embracing the whole being of a person. In Mark 10.45 we read that Christ came to give his life-ψυχή as a ransom for many. In the NT, soul is the seat of life or life itself (Mark 8:36-8).¹⁸ The soul as it is spoken of in the NT goes beyond Greek thought, as the seat of the religious life and of a person's relationship to God.¹⁹ According to Apostle Paul, a human being is a psychosomatic unity with integrated rational, emotional and physical functions.

In the twentieth century some scholars claimed that Paul was influenced by Greek platonic philosophy. Scholars now insist that Paul's anthropology must be seen in the light of his own historical and cultural context, meaning that Paul opposed the non Jewish teaching. Rather the influences upon him apart from Jesus and Christianity were the OT and Palestinian Judaism. Ψυχή is the life of the whole person.²⁰ Rooted in the OT are Paul's anthropological terms as ἀνθρώπος-human being²¹ to define corporeality.²²

ΨΥΧΗ DURING THE PATRISTIC ERA

Gnosticism, in the 2nd century AC,²³ teaches that the self of a redeemable person is part of the transcendent world of light entangled in this cosmos. The insight into its origin was brought by an extra-terrestrial agent of salvation and enables the self in a cosmic process to free itself and to return to its home. In Greek Gnosticism, the philosophical doctrine of the soul is used in anthropology. Gnostics adopt the hierarchy of the Platonic non-corporeal world. In this view ψυχή or the inward core of an empirical person is subjected to a cosmos, separated from the good world of light, which is made by a god of lesser rank.²⁴ From matter and psyche the Demiurge forms heaven, earth and the creatures inhabiting it as well as carnal humans breathing into them Demiurge's own psychic substance. Salvation consists in the liberation of spirit from the lower psychic/carnal elements of humanity that ascend to the Father through Christ.²⁵

According to **Origen** (182-254) the body is the prison of the pre-existent soul. His teachings were studied by monks embracing Platonic theories, trying by asceticism to escape the prison of the material world.²⁶ God could be approached only by the soul and the mind; the cosmos is alive and sustained by the Λόγος functioning as the platonic cosmos. The living beings within the cosmos, like stars, will offer future dwelling to some human souls. God created free and logical spiritual beings that made bad use of their freedom. So God created the material cosmos to punish them, offering to each being a degree of corporeality. The aim of the revealed Λόγος through the prophets and Christ was for Origen the redemption of souls from their bodies.²⁷

According to **Augustine** (354-430) the theology of Christianity was prefigured in Neo-Platonism. Christianity added the belief in incarnation and salvation.²⁸ All living beings have souls, but Augustine was interested in the human-rational soul. In his early writings, he defines the human soul in a Platonic way, as partaking in reason, yet suited to rule the body. For Augustine, a human being is a rational soul with a mortal, earthly body; our souls must be used for sovereignty and the body for service. Our souls are what we have in common with gods, the other with beasts.²⁹ Later Augustine emphasized the unity of the human being since a soul with a body does not make two persons, but one being.³⁰

In the field of medical sciences, the term ‘psychosomatic diseases’, was used to express the interrelatedness of the psyche and the body. According to the psychiatrist George Engel, the psychiatric and the somatic diseases, were two sides of the same coin because of the influence of biological, psychological, and psychosocial factors. Thus, all diseases were thought of as psychosomatic. Later on, the diagnosis of a disease as psychosomatic was thought as if it indirectly reinforces the dualistic notion that separates psyche and body. In the latest classifying systems of psychiatry, the diagnosis of a disease as ‘psychosomatic’ does not appear, because any disease must be known holistically.³¹

In the early twentieth century, scientists were trying to explain life in its entirety on the basis of the scientific data. The psychologists and the psychiatrists study ψυχή. They consider various views and reject or adopt those that logic and the natural laws can prove. This view started with W. Wundt (1832-1920), founder of experimental psychology, which studies human behaviour while questioning ψυχή as metaphysic existence. Its tools are the findings of natural sciences, neurology, psychology, both the human genetic code and its environment as experiences and interrelations. Experimental psychology defines life and death, looking for organic sources of their existence.³² Developments in psychology and other fields resulted in dropping the language of soul from our lexicons. Whether the question is who we are or what we are to become, the idea of ‘soul’ conveys a sense of being as God-given, morally freighted in our selves, transcending all natural categories. We must restore the ψυχή in our theology.³³

Ecofeminist Reflections on ψυχή

Plato defines the primal dualism of reality: its division into the invisible eternal, primal, original realm of thought and the visible and temporal realm of corporeality. In the beginning, there existed alongside the invisible realm, the unshaped matrix of the visible realm. In between them was the creator; the metaphor for the cosmogenesis is taken from the work of the artisan who shapes things from inanimate matter and not from reproductive process. According to Ruether³⁴ the messages of the Platonic creation story³⁵ are: reality is divided between mind and body. The soul is primal, eternal, and good; the body is a source of evil. The natural sensations must be mastered by the immortal, godlike mind. The world was created alive with soul and mind. Humans share in the divine nature by having mind; the soul’s home is the eternal star-world.³⁶ In contrast, the body is the source of mortality. The hierarchy of mind over body is reflected in the hierarchy of male over female, of human over animals, and in the class hierarchy of rulers over workers. In Plato’s *Republic*, the ordered society corresponds to the hierarchy of the well ordered self, with mind in control and the will under the lead of reason. Similarly hierarchy occurs with the social castes of first, the philosophers-rulers, then the guardian-warriors, and at the bottom: manual workers or slaves.³⁷ Women belong to all the castes as inferior members. Physically a woman could do any job, but she is in all-weaker than men.³⁸ In Plato, male domination, class hierarchy, and inferiorization of nature were parts of the social order, showing the primal division of reality into soul over body. Ruling-class males, at the top of the hierarchy mirrored the world of the eternal ideas with the gods sharing in the animating principle of the cosmic soul. Plato adds the cultural attitude of alienation from the body and the earth, as the lowest level of a cosmic hierarchy. The body is the ‘prison’ of the soul; earth is the collective prison of incarnated souls that must move out of this fallen state to their ‘true home’ in the stars. Earth and body are in the quest of the male mind to secure immortal life.³⁹

In feminist theologies, the body reminds us of the unredeemed world. A study of the synoptic stories involving women, are a corrective. The issues at stake are the presence of salvation, healing and of making whole. In Matt 15:28, Mark 5:34, Luke 13:12, each record the healing of a woman by touch, offering another view. The unity of a person takes place in the context where

salvation/wholeness is present; where the body is an experienced locus of the divine. Feminist theology that is rooted only on the disclosure of the discredited body is missing the entirety of the biblical foundation.⁴⁰

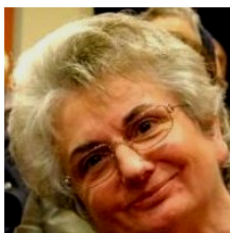
Feminists need to retrieve the idea of soul in Homer where there is no master-concept of soul, and dissociate the anthropological LXX use of 'soul' from the Platonic dualism. Instead they should consider the biblical tradition where humans are seen as related to their own selves, an idea found in the OT usage of *nepes*. Feminists must retrieve the NT meaning of the soul as a person's relationship to God and the other. They can study the connection between ψυχήν ζῶσαν-living being and εικόνα-image of God leading to a relational creation connected to the Creator who breathes into the human nostrils the breath of life. The image of God, in which both men and women are included, offers justice to women, unlike Plato who discriminates on the basis of soul-body.

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Citation: Dr Ioanna Sahinidou (2015) *Challenging Dualisms*. *IJHSSE* 2(5), pp: 14-19.