

DNA, brain, mind, and soul according to Christian Teaching

Paul I. Lee



Professor, Sogang University and Nicholas Cardinal Cheong Graduate School for Life, and the Catholic University of Korea, Seoul, South Korea.

It is a very interesting and familiar concept of soul and familism in Confucianism. Concept of *qi, bun and po* sounds somewhat similar but different from Christian concept, and the Confucian concept of family after death is different from Christian's. Let me briefly describe some differences in Christian teachings from Confucianism in reference to a human nature and after death.

1. Human nature

To understand Christian view of an account of human nature, it is important to look at the theological and anthropological concept what the Fathers of the Church believed. Origen (185-254), one of the greatest Christian theologian and philosopher, shows that a man is made of spirit (*pneuma, spiritus*), soul (*psyche, anima*) and body (*soma, corpus*). His understanding of a man is based on St. Paul's teaching and understanding of a man who is made of three components written in the 1 Thessalonians, 5: 23: "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Origen believes that a man can only cognize surely through the bibles¹. He further says "We believe it is truth that there is no other true possibility (in regard to hermeneutics) besides the bibles which were written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; the Gospels, the Epistles, the Laws and the Prophets"². His anthropology revealing three components of a man is not a philo-

sophical proof and analysis but theological demonstration to understand mystery of a man toward the God.

Soul in the bibles expresses the meaning of Hebrew 'nefesh' and Greek 'psyche' and there are four different meanings in 'nefesh'. The first meaning is it is a necessary organ to maintain a life, such as esophagus for swallowing food and trachea for breathing. Second meaning is a desire for material (Mic 7: 1), the actual human (2 Sam 3: 21; Jer 21: 27), desire and feeling of human for human act (1 Sa 20: 4) or longing toward the God (Ps 24: 1; 41: 2). Third meaning is a life itself (Ps 29: 4) and the last is an actual living person (Lev 2: 1). It gives rise to misunderstanding if the individual concept of meaning is translated into simply 'body', 'spirit' or 'soul'. 'Body', 'spirit' and 'soul' in the bibles expresses a whole person as a combined single concept. According to Origen's anthropology, a man is created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and 'spirit' and 'soul' are part or components of a human being but not a human being itself. A complete human being is a man who is unified with soul received the Holy Spirit. It is also important to appeal to St. Thomas Aquinas's metaphysical account of human nature to understand a person³. Aquinas's metaphysical account of human nature includes, although it is not limited to, three interrelated theses: a human person is a substance composed of an immaterial soul informing a material body; a human person is not identical to an immaterial spiritual substance; and 'animality' is fundamental to human nature.

A human being is a person according to Aquinas. He adopts the definition of personhood developed by Boethius: “An individual substance of a rational nature”⁴ (“*Persona est naturae rationalis individua substantia.*”) (*ST*, Ia. 29. 1). Being a rational nature distinguishes human beings from other material substances (*SCG*, II. 60; *QDA*, III). A human being is not only rational but also a sensitive, animate, and corporeal substance and human beings have a material nature (*In BDT*, V. 3). He thus distinguishes human beings from other types of persons⁵ as ‘rational animals’ (*In M*, VII. 3. 1326). A human body is unique among various kinds of animal bodies in that it is organized not only to support the capacity for sense-perception, but also the capacity for rational thought. The disposition of a human body is determined by having a rational soul as its ‘substantial form’⁶. As a substantial form, a rational soul is responsible for the existence of a human being, the actualization of the matter that composes a human being, and the unity of existence and activity in a human being (*SCG*, II. 68; *In DA*, II. 2). A substantial form is a ‘principle of organization’ for a human body in contemporary term. Varieties of parts of a human being operate independently and function collectively to support the existence and activity of a living, sensing, and thinking being. Both independent operations of a body’s organ and functional unity with other organs are governed by the formal, or functional, unity of the organism itself.

A rational soul and the material body of which is the substantial form are not two separately existing substances. A substantial form is the actualization of a material body. Aquinas asserts:

Body and soul are not two actually existing substances, but from these two is made one actually existing substance. For the body of a human being is not actually the same in the soul’s presence and absence, but the soul makes it to be actually (*SCG*, II. 69).

A substantial form is a principle of organization for a human body in contemporary term

A human being is not merely an aggregate of body and soul, for neither alone counts as a substance. A human being does not naturally exist without being composed of both a material body and a rational soul. According to the ‘hylo-morphic theory’ of Aquinas, when matter is informed by a rational soul, a new ontological entity, a human being, comes into existence (*CT*, 211). A rational soul’s special mode of being, however, does not entail complete independence from its mate-

rial body. Some capacities of a rational soul, its vegetative and sensitive capacities that non-human animal also have, act through material organs. A rational soul requires a material body to function completely for all of its capacities to be actualized. Aquinas

further argues that a rational soul communicates its being to a material body such that there is one being of the composite substance, a human being. Hence, a soul must be immediately joined to such a body (*QDA*, I. ad 1). A soul’s rational operation does not itself require a bodily organ (*ST*, Ia. 78. 4) and the objects of rational operation (what the mind thinks about) are universal, intelligible forms abstracted from phantasm⁷. The mind has such phantasms through sense perception of particular material substances. Since the activity of sense perception requires of particular organs, such as eyes, ears, nose, etc., a human mind has need of a material human body (*ST*, Ia. 101. 2; *SCG*, II. 83; *QDA*, II). Furthermore, a rational soul is naturally united to a particular body as its substantial form (*ST*, Ia. 76. 1; *SCG*, II. 68; *In DA*, II. 2). Aquinas claims that it is not a mind itself that understands, nor the soul which is the foundation for the mind’s rational capacities. Rather, human beings understand by means of the rational capacities they have by virtue of their souls; just as they see by means of the capacity for sight they have by virtue of their eyes and visual cortex (*SCG*, II. 76; *In DA*, III. 7). Therefore, because a human being naturally exists as composed of both

soul and body, a rational soul's existence and operation are most properly in union with a particular material body.

Simply because Aquinas argues that a rational soul is immaterial (*ST*, Ia. 75.5), incorruptible (*ST*, Ia. 75.6), and capable of subsistence apart from a material body, he is not a substance dualist. He contends that a rational soul is the substantial form of a material body, and it appears that he would define a human being as a fundamentally biological organism. He asserts:

Animal is predicated of a human being essentially, not accidentally, and human is not placed in the definition of an animal, but conversely. Therefore, it must be the same form by which something is animal and by which it is human. Otherwise, a human being would not truly be that which is animal,

such that animal would be essentially predicated of a human being...so neither is Socrates human by one soul and animal by another, but by one and the same (*ST*, Ia. 76.3). Aquinas, however, does not agree with the reduction of a human being to their animality. While a well-functioning cerebral cortex is required for a human mind's operation, due to the mind's dependence upon phantasms generated through sense perception, it is not essential for the mind's operation of cognizing the universal, intelligible forms abstracted from phantasm (*SCG*, II. 62; *QDA*, II). A mind is not identical to a brain, nor is rational operation merely firing of neurons in a cerebral cortex; a human being's rational capacity cannot be wholly explained in merely neuro-physical terms⁸.

2. *With regards to After Death*

It would be appropriate to discuss about 'death' or 'after death' in Christian belief by metaphysical analysis and possibly with natural law theory, however, only brief presentation of teaching in the bibles will be mentioned

here since only limited time is allowed for this presentation.

In Christianity, human beings are created in the image of God and likeness (Gen 1: 26-27). Jesus Christ, Incarnated Word, who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation and in him all things hold together (Col 1: 15-17; Eph 1: 3-5) became a man for redemption of sinners, our human beings. The basis of fundamental value and existential reason (existential ends) for Christian life is to become children of God by personal union with God (Rom 8: 14) and

to live with eternal glory (2 Tim 2: 8-13). Created human beings continue to pray with 'Hope' and 'Faith' to go into the kingdom of God, the heaven, through continuous creation and recreation process (autocostruzione) by living and guidance of the Spirit,

not by flesh (Gal 5: 18-25) through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ. Just as Jesus Christ was resurrected, we will be resurrected as a spiritual body after our death (1 Cor 15: 44). Importance of family and filial relationships are underscored (Eph 5: 21-33, 6: 1-4), however, there is no earthly relationship as we are misled in the heaven. At the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels in heaven (Mat 22: 29-30).

3. *In Conclusion*

Body and soul are both produced by the power of God, though the formation of the body is of God through the intermediate instrumentality of the power of the natural semen, while the soul He produces immediately (*SCG*, II. 89). A rational soul, while separable from its body by virtue of one of its essential capacities, is naturally united to a human body for the sake of its other capacities because it is the substantial form of the body. Because of this natural unity, human body's organic structures are disposed toward sub-

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serving the rational soul's capacities including the mind (*ST*, Ia. 91.3; *QDA*, X. ad 1-2; *DA*, II. 1, II. 19). Neither a rational soul nor the matter it informs is a complete substance on its own. Rather the two together compose a complete substance, a human being. (*ST*, Ia. 29.1. ad 5; *ST*, Ia. 75. 4. ad 2). A mind is not identical to a brain, nor is rational operation merely the function of neurons in a cerebral cortex, though there are intimate relationships between the two (*ST*, Ia. 78.4). It is why Christian doctrine rejects reductionist and materialistic idea of Neurobioscience and Neurotechnology, though there may be many materialistic advantages according to our human knowledge. St. Paul says, "no one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God. And we speak about them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit, describing spiritual realities in spiritual terms." Accordingly, Christians pray to God to forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us. (Lk 11:2-4)

NOTE

¹ Origen, *Homilies on Mathew*, 18; *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1, 7; *Homilies on Ezekiel*, 2, 5. Origen did not believe much of an ability of reason and had an opinion that reason is quite uncertain. (refer to Origen, *De Principiis*, 1, 7, 1; 1, 7, 4; 2, 2, 2; 4, 1, 1.)

² Origen, *De Principiis*, 1, 3, 1.

³ THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274) was a Dominican friar, Catholic priest, Doctor of the Church. He was

an immensely influential theologian, philosopher, and jurist in the tradition of scholasticism. His influence on Western thought is considerable, and much of modern philosophy particularly in the areas of ethics, natural law, metaphysics, and political theory. His major attributes include *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

⁴ S. BOETHIUS, "Contra Eutyches et Nestorius," in *The theological tractates*, tr. H.F. STEWART - A. DIGIREADS. Com Book 2007, 29.

⁵ Aquinas recognizes three types of beings as persons. He claims angels are persons and that God exists as three distinct persons: Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

⁶ Following Aristotle, Aquinas defines a 'rational soul' as a soul that has the relevant capacities for life, sensation, and rational thought and as the type of soul proper to the human species. A 'sensitive soul', on the other hand, has the relevant capacities for only life and sensation, and is the type of soul proper to all nonhuman species of the animal genus. A 'vegetative soul' has the relevant capacities for life alone and is proper to all non-animal living organisms (Aristotle, 1984, 414a30-415a14).

⁷ The purpose of phantasm is to be available for the mind to use in abstracting the universal, intelligible forms of perceived things. Phantasms are thus between the immediate mental impression of an object perceived by sensation and rational understanding of that object's nature as abstracted from any individuating characteristics (R. PASNAU, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, Cambridge University, New York 2002, 278-295).

⁸ N. KREZMAN, *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentile, II*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1999, 350-368.