

1. Explore the different facets of our ordinary, pre-philosophical idea of the soul, giving examples that relate to your own experience. What impact does philosophical inquiry have on those ideas?

Materialism holds that all things in the universe, from the ordinary objects we encounter every day to the ground on which we stand and even ourselves, the humans who experience these things, is made up of matter. Absolute idealism is the philosophical position that, like with the Hindu Atman, that there is a deeper reality beyond what may be perceived as complex configurations of matter. In Hinduism, Atman, in my opinion, is the idea that the minds and souls of all people are unified as parts and extensions of the soul of Shiva: the highest God.

Today, not many people believe in absolute idealism or similar concepts like the atman. We live our life as individuals; we feel proud to think of ourselves in ways that leave us disconnected from others in the ways that ancient people related to others. One strength of this modern acceptance of materialism is that science is able to explain many things that are relevant to our lives. Science can explain how our bodies and brains work in many ways. Everything in the world has atoms as its root substance. I think materialism most affects the world today compared with other philosophical ideas because of how useful these explanations are. But the soul, is not usually considered in scientific studies that are based on materialism. I hear more about the mind as a product of the brain than of us have a consciousness that is grounded in the soul.

Many religions believe human beings have a soul that will allow us to live after our physical deaths. Souls are said to exist in states that are dependant upon our actions in our worldly lives. In my daily life, I think of how society may most effectively function, how to make every member of

society stay in the line. Otherwise, everything will turn to chaos. What will stop humans doing what they want – the quality of our soul and best return when we die. But this line of thinking is more religious than philosophical or scientific. I believe in modern physicalists and their ability to explain many things. But even as I believe this, I believe that there are things they may not be able to explain. The soul is one thing that I think they cannot be explained in a scientific way.

I agree with dualism; my direct experience tells me about two different things in me. These two things sometimes seem to connect and sometimes not. When I have a fever I feel weak; what I choose to do in my mind is undermined by my physical feelings. I give up many things easily when I am sick. Sometimes when my physical body gets hurt, my mind acts differently. My ability to put my thoughts into action is affected by if my body or my brain work well. Many times I have cut myself accidentally but I have not felt anything. I've not noticed anything and continued watching television or talking with my friend until someone has told me or I have observed this. Suddenly, I feel pain immediately. It seems there is a disconnection for me between my physical body and my mind or soul.

If it is true as many religions suggest that people have souls that will continue to survive after the death of our bodies, I'm not sure it still continues after I die. Or is it like the data unit in computer memory and disappears when I turn the computer off? If I try to prove my soul is different from my body, I have to make sure it's two different things. Can I think it's in my mind as two things separately? Yes, I think I can. Maybe because of my Buddhist religion when I think about the soul I think about a ghost image. But ghosts or souls in my religion are everywhere. We have spirits in some big trees that people pay respect to. We have spirits or ghosts in the river. It's pretty clear for me that it's two different things with my body.

Dualism says the soul can continue after death. Many stories that I hear about refer to the reincarnation issue. They feature people that insist that they are people from the past born to this life as another person. Can that alone prove the soul continues from a past life to a new life? If we can have memory of our last life does it mean we are still in the same soul as our last life? I'm not yet sure about that; nothing can make me feel trust or believe enough about that. Again, there are many stories about people that have the ability to move their own soul out from their body to travel to another place. Maybe it sounds like fiction in the West but in Buddhism it is natural that if you practise meditation enough you will have the ability to move your soul or mind out from your body to another place. But we need to philosophize it.