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## The Heresy of Immaterialism

By **Hiram Crespo**, editor.

*“To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, God, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no God, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise: but I believe I am supported in my creed of materialism by Locke, Tracy, and Stewart.*

*At what age of the Christian church this heresy of immaterialism, this masked atheism, crept in, I do not know. But a heresy it certainly is. Jesus told us indeed that ‘God is a spirit,’ but he has not defined what a spirit is, nor said that it is not matter. And the ancient fathers generally, if not universally, held it to be matter: light and thin indeed, an ethereal gas; but still matter.”*

– Thomas Jefferson, in his *Letter to John Adams*, August 15, 1820

While most modern materialists consider themselves atheists, there has been a long tradition of Deist materialism. It’s appropriate to address the subject of the physicality of the soul during October, when our culture is cheerfully preparing to celebrate the Night of All Souls / Halloween. What is a soul, after all? What are we celebrating?

Epicurus taught that the mortal soul is material and atomic. When I first approached other Epicureans about the physicality of the soul, it was explained to me that the soul, like the body, was atomic and that the atoms that make up our neural network (brain, nerves) constitute our physical soul, which dies along with the body when we expire.

There is no immortal soul: that is a myth, but the soul does exist and it is a natural (and, most importantly, observable) phenomenon. There exists, therefore, a science or knowledge of the soul, and we cannot hope to effectively dismantle the fraud and the false doctrines of immaterialism unless and until the scientific, naturalist study of the soul becomes commonplace.

There are foods that are particularly good for the brain (chocolate being one of them, also any food that contains Omega 3 oils) and, as with the body, we are to take care of the health of the soul: it must be kept healthy, and philosophy is the main tool for keeping our souls healthy.

The word used by Jesus, *Ruach*, refers to Breath which is shared by all living entities and is a symptom of interbeing: animals exhale the carbon that trees inhale, and trees exhale the oxygen that animals inhale in a symbiotic cycle. All life evolved as increasingly complex symbiotic relationships.

Our bodies contain billions of bacteria and cells that, together, compose our being. We need bacteria to help us digest our food. We do not exist in isolation: nothing does. The Buddhists have a doctrine of co-dependent origination which is mirrored, in a way, in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things), which explains that all things are composed of progressively complex combinations of particles.

Spirit (Ruach, Breath) is, therefore, an animating, organic, observable phenomenon within nature that can be studied. The breath is the ability to consume energy, and it usually takes the form of a dynamic exchange between organic entities that need each other to survive (we inhale the oxygen that the trees exhale).

While all material things are accurately said to exist and are real insofar as they are made of atoms, breathing and animated material beings exist and organize reality in a peculiar way. It is the breath that distinguishes the living from the dead. This is why it is said that God is Spirit (Breath) and that God is the God of the Living. Nature can be inert or living (characterized by Spirit, breath, consumption), but it is only the living entities that are able to experience and seek pleasure.

The goal of pleasure and the goal of life are non-different. Life seeks its perpetuity through pleasure: by it we eat, by it we mate, by it we thrive. This is why Epicurus taught that Nature guides us via pleasure: the tendency to seek pleasure is non-different from the tendency to seek Life. The mode of nature in which pleasure is not sought is inertia, non-Life ... but we are not inert, we are breathing, living spirits. Therefore, we seek pleasure, which is a sign of a healthy body and soul.

Because the study of the breath is available to the senses and because the breath is a natural phenomenon, a radical redefinition and demythification of the true, impersonal Go(o)d is needed. While the breath is not a person, it does endow living entities with agency, animation and with the ability to utilize the senses and other faculties, and with the accompanying dignity and enhanced tendency of self-preservation that comes with personhood or animation.

Notice that, in the meditative traditions of yoga and Zen, the entire science of the soul is founded on the contemplation, control, or attentive study of the breath. We may go days without eating, but we may only go minutes without breathing: it is our main source of animating life-force. Zen teaches that the ultimate katastemic pleasure (a hedonism of being, not of doing or thinking) is the most simple pleasure derived from wholesome breathing which, because it is the most necessary of natural desires, should enjoy a place of primacy within our hedonic regimen. Contemplative breathing practices constitute the quintessential abiding pleasure.

The original expression of Christianity contained a strong shamanic component that included natural healing practices such as fasting. We lose appetite when we are sick so that the body may stop investing the vast amounts of energy it invests in digestion and dedicate itself to healing. Many in the live-foods lifestyle periodically fast in order to reset the body's natural healing abilities, with the understanding that the body has the wisdom to heal itself.

Wisdom derived from the study of nature, which we often find in religious traditions, is clearly distinct from superstition. While there are many false views tied to Biblical belief, there is an ecological component to the God of Jesus, who is imagined as feeding the birds daily.

*Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? – Matthew 6:26*

In the midst of (and in spite of) the death cult, there is another Christian tradition: one that is life-affirming, that derives insight from the study of nature and that recognizes the numenic in nature: Nature's God is an euphemism for impersonal Mother Nature. It is nature, not a supernatural agent or God, that feeds the birds daily: via natural selection, they have all the needed faculties to survive in their environment. The impersonality of nature is no less numenic or inspiring. We Epicureans know that nature is indeed a benevolent teacher who inspires gratitude.

Indeed, the very belief in the incarnation in Christ, and his mystery of the eucharist, is an affirmation of the need for the physicality of God. Like the Hindus, who consume consecrated food known as prasadam (mercy) that is believed to contain the essence of Go(o)d/Vishnu the Preserver, the Christians recognize a fraction of the numenic, of Nature's sustaining Go(o)d, in the holy meal, and in Go(o)d made flesh. How can the Go(o)d of the Living be separated from the act of consumption, which feeds life?

*He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!* - Jesus, in Mark 12:27

Even Jesus, who appears to not have known his human father, projected his own hunger for a father figure against the personality of Godhead, making Nature's God into a Heavenly Father, and not the impersonal God of Nature. But this is an innocent expression of the error of attaching agency, personality and volition to Nature. Sadly, many vulgar myths that incorporate even awful things such as genocide and child sacrifice have woven themselves into theistic beliefs and obscured the possibility of a naturalist experience of the numenic.

The heresy of immaterialism is non-different from any of the death cults: the ones that promise virgins upon completion of holy warfare, the ones that propose the zombie apocalypse, these are all variations of the heresy of immaterialism. They are not about life. They do not derive insights from the study of nature, but deny nature. They attribute life to non-being, to non-existence, to things that are not there. They are Platonic, unnatural. The true doctrine is a philosophy of Life that is rooted in reality.

It's probably inappropriate to refer to Nature as a God. In our tradition, Nature is impersonal, it is not an agent and has no volition. But if anything is numenic, it is Nature. If anything is real, it is Nature. And if anything has spirit, or breath, is it natural, living entities.

Notice how, during the fall, the leaves die and fall and are reabsorbed into nature and feed the life of other beings: plants, worms, fungi. There is nothing to fear in non-being. There are no monsters under the bed, or in the closet, no ghosts visiting us from the world beyond this All Hollows' Eve. There are no immaterial beings. Immaterial things, by definition, do not exist. Non-being, death, is not and does not exist. We are the spirits, the ghosts. We are the ones who possess our bodies. We are the ones who are breathing and consuming and who are woven into Nature's quilt of interbeing. The Night of All Souls is our night! Have a joyous Halloween!