Introduction

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We possess or are possessed by a narrative sensibility, an inner chronicler capable of entertaining actions and potential outcomes based on recollected observation and experience. Such consciousness allows a body to consider its present situation as Shakespeare's Macbeth does: as if standing upon a "bank and shoal of time" while observing the flow of events from past to future (1.7.6). The bodily benefit of a reflecting, interested intelligence, coherent and more or less continuous, seems obvious. From the standpoint of evolutionary biology it appears as a dynamic adaptation that has greatly improved humanity's odds of survival, at least in the short run. Yet it is also destabilizing. The inherent ability to recount and recalculate one's current position in the course of life eventually produces a chilling awareness of an inescapable and universal destination. The persistent intelligence abetting the instinct to survive never stops reminding us that we shall not. On the one hand, literary culture greatly enhances the resources available to our inner chroniclers and thus equips us to live, as Kenneth Burke has claimed, by providing an ample repository of situational prudence.[1] On the other hand, it bears the inscrutable impression of a long and varied struggle to cope with the perceived inevitability of death. This collection considers early modern points of reference for this more complicated cultural impulse.

In early modern Europe the predominant cultural system for accommodating the stubborn fact of mortality was Christianity, specifically its promise of salvation. The rational soul of orthodox Christian theology may be taken as a rough psychological equivalent to what is now signified by consciousness or the conscious self. Confronted by the prospect of death as the end of that self, the genius of the Christian religion is to beg the question by simply assuming the immortality of the soul. Belief in the ghostly

[1] Kenneth Burke, "Literature as Equipment for Living," in *Philosophy of the Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 3rd edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 293–304.

persistence of a spiritual essence or shade was after all not uncommon in the ancient world. Resurrection of the *body* rather than mere continuance of the self's spiritual essence became the essential article of Christian faith, and from its earliest days. In the middle of the first century, decades before the gospels appear, Saint Paul argues in a logical chain of conditional propositions that refusal to believe in resurrection of the body entails refusal to believe in either Christ's own resurrection or the efficacy of his sacrifice: "if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (1 Cor. 15:13–18). Paul insists not on immortality of the soul, which he assumes, but resurrection of the body. The Christian idea of salvation retains the crucial sense of the Latin word from which the word "salvation" derives, *salvus*, "safe, unharmed," and its Indo-European root, *solh*, meaning "whole."

The fundamental tenet that the whole person undergoes resurrection from death runs counter to dualistic traditions also central to Christianity. Yet the promise of bodily salvation did not require the faithful to deny a broader ontological dualism. The divide between matter and spirit was also a tenet of orthodoxy, and belief in the existence of disembodied or purely spiritual beings was commonplace.[2] Angels were generally conceived of in this way – as free-floating intelligences. Postmortem but pre-doomsday human souls were thought to persist in an obscure, bodiless condition known as the "middle state," which was commonly thought by Protestants to anticipate but not complete the embodied soul's final status. In short, although embodiment remained for early modern believers definitive of human being specifically and critical to the faith, the orthodox ontology of Christianity was broadly dualistic. In Milton's time, however, the faith-critical tenet of holistic human being became increasingly difficult to reconcile with a philosophy of ontological dualism.

Appearing in 1637, the same year that *Lycidas* saw print, Descartes in the *Discourse on Method* first explored the distinction between mind (unextended substance) and body (extended substance), a distinction he elaborated explicitly four years later in the *Meditations on First Philosophy*.[3] For Descartes, the *mind* or *soul* (in French *âme* means both) was thus linked to

[2] On the theological development of Christianity into a state religion, see Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988) and Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

[3] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 4th edn. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998). See especially "Meditation Six: Concerning the Existence of Material Things, and the Real Distinction between Mind and Body," pp. 92–102.

but ontologically independent of the body while nonetheless consciously correlated with its physiological mechanism. Descartes's radical dualism was not generally embraced, and in England the philosophical reaction against it was swift. Soon after Descartes's death in 1650, Henry More, for example, insisted that thinking substance, though ontologically distinct, is inextricable from bodily or extended substance, "it being of the very essence of whatever is, to have parts or extension in some measure or other"; "the Soule dilates it self in the dilating of the Body, and so possesses it through all the members thereof."[4] Descartes's substantial segregation of mind and body, however, began with fundamental skepticism toward any entity outside the realm of thought, including one's own unthinking body. Insistence on the soul's "*amplitude of presence*" is in terms of More's philosophy not a counterargument to that skepticism but a contradiction on the basis of a metaphysical axiom. He merely defined being as necessarily involving extension "in some measure or other."[5] In short, More does not offer a reply on epistemological grounds to Descartes's skepticism toward the world or one's own body as part of the world.

The mind's or soul's bodily immanence is not defended on such grounds until the twentieth century, with the development of phenomenology. Edmund Husserl in establishing this school of philosophy explicitly decides to restrict himself, like Descartes, to an epistemological frame of reference. Rather than endorse Descartes's methodological skepticism regarding the outside world, however, he famously resorts to suspension (*epoché*) of ontological inquiry altogether, bracketing off any fundamental question about what exists, and therefore any skepticism toward it, to pursue instead an unfettered examination of the world as it is experienced:

> We put out of action the general thesis which belongs to the essence of the natural standpoint; we place in brackets whatever it includes respecting the nature of Being: this entire natural world therefore, which is continually "there for us," "present to our hand" and will ever remain there, is a "fact world" of which we continue to be conscious, even though it pleases us to put it in brackets.[6]

Where Descartes had begun with methodical doubt regarding the external world, including the body, and found ontological assurance only in

[4] Henry More, *Immortality of the Soul* (London, 1659), Preface 3, p. A5v, and Book 2, chapter 10, section 2, pp. 217–18.
[5] Henry More, *An Antidote against Atheism*, 3rd edn. (London, 1662), p. 172 (*Appendix*, chapter 10, section 9).
[6] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier, 1972), pp. 99–100.

thought, Husserl chose to remain oblivious to existential concerns that pertain to "the natural standpoint," and instead to accept the "fact world" as a given.

Husserl thus deliberately assumed a stance of indifference to the ontological misgivings that informed Cartesian skepticism and thereby established the discipline of phenomenology. Yet ultimately he found it difficult to account for the inquiring mind in relation to the experiencing body. The psychologically inflected body is after all also part of, and cannot be extricated from, the bracketed "fact world" of the *epoché*. To address this problem, Husserl put the embodied natural self in brackets, too, and then posited a transcendental ego as a necessary condition of experience of the embodied self in the world: "By phenomenological *epoché*, I reduce my natural human ego and my psychic life – the realm of my psychological self-experience – to my transcendental phenomenological ego, the realm of transcendental phenomenological self-experience."[7]

The very act of bracketing off, of establishing the *epoché* as a premise of phenomenological investigation, presupposes a distinctive awareness of the separateness of that which is bracketed. Husserl is compelled to account for the thinking subject's awareness of that bracketed world as transcendental: something separate and distinct from bodily experience. In the end, Husserl's transcendental ego fails to bridge – indeed presumes by deliberately deciding to ignore – the Cartesian ontological divide between body and mind.

It fell to Husserl's student Martin Heidegger to reject his teacher's signature epistemological method of bracketing off the world of "what is." Rather than avoid questions of ontology, he takes being itself as the *target* of his investigation:

> For Husserl, phenomenological reduction … is the method of leading phenomenological vision from the natural attitude of the human being whose life is involved in the world of things and persons back to the transcendental life of consciousness … For us, phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehension of a being … to the understanding of the Being of this being.[8]

In Cartesian philosophy the external world appears before the thinking subject as a discrete object of doubt and meditation, but for Heidegger the "phenomenological vision" is fundamentally implicit in and subsumed by

[7] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. D. Cairns (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 26.
[8] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 21.

the world. Nor does the world in Heidegger's view present us with objects for philosophical investigation once we intend a standpoint from which to view them, as in the case of Husserl's transcendental ego. Heidegger admits no ontologically or psychologically transcendent basis of inquiry.

Instead there is for Heidegger only apprehension of "Being in the World," an apprehension that bodily participates in that being. There is no existentially distinct psychic realm for it to occupy. "Being in the World" obviates the division between the body and the world because it includes the "mind" or "soul" that apprehends and makes conjectures about what is. This special, apprehending, and inquisitive part of "Being in the World" Heidegger refers to as *Dasein*:

> *Dasein* is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is distinguished by the fact that, in its very being, that being is an issue for it … It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its being, this being is disclosed to it. Understanding of being is itself a definite characteristic of *Dasein*'s being.[9]

The part of existence that is conscious of being and wonders about it "with and through its being" – roughly corresponding to Descartes's *cogito* or Husserl's transcendental ego – is what Heidegger means by *Dasein*.

This insistence that conscious human being ineluctably participates in "Being in the World" would not strike the post-Reformation writers included in this collection as a revolutionary claim. Indeed, with allowance for the historically distinct train of philosophical discourse that leads from the *Cogito* to *Dasein*, Heidegger's insistence on the embeddedness of *Dasein* recalls the basic theological orientation of many of the Protestant writers taken up in this collection. As a young man, Heidegger himself, though he was raised in the Roman Catholic faith, came to think of himself as a Protestant Christian theologian and identified specifically with Luther's struggle to assert a unified human subject in opposition to the systems of medieval theologians that had tended to alienate spirit from body.[10] As Ken Hiltner notes, "like Heidegger centuries later, Luther found himself mired in a tradition of duality, particularly with respect to the spirit-flesh dyadic structure propounded by the Church."[11] "Metaphysical

[9] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 12.

[10] S. J. McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), pp. 151–84. See also Edward John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[11] Ken Hiltner, *Milton and Ecology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 32.

theologians deal with a silly and crazy fiction when," Luther complained, "they invent the notion that the spirit, i.e., reason, is something absolute or separate by itself."[12] For Luther, God established the world as well as ourselves and intimately expresses himself to his creatures through it: "the whole creation is a face or mask of God," claimed Luther in his *Lectures on Galatians*.[13] A philosophy that portrays reason as an entity essentially distinct from the rest of creation, as if it were master of its own intellectual domain, abstracts an essential self from its divinely established residence – "oure erthy mancion wherin we now dwell," per Tyndale's translation of 2 Corinthians 5.1. It is at best a vain intellectual pretension and at worst a prideful separation from God, as in the case of Satan's insistence that "the mind is its own place" (*Paradise Lost* 1.254).

John Milton is more forceful even than Luther in taking Christian acceptance of the body beyond the grudging embrace of more orthodox early modern philosophers and theologians. His monism may be described as "an affront to any of the available dualistic conceptions, including the Platonic, the Christianized Aristotelian, and the Cartesian."[14] But it would be a mistake to take Milton's conception of the unity of human being as merely a logical consequence of his philosophical monism. Conviction as to "the unity of soul and body" came first for Milton, as Arthur Barker claimed; it is to this existential conviction that one must trace his monism and other related heterodoxies elaborated in his theological treatise, such as Traducianism and an utterly unique conception of the Incarnation.[15]

Milton's insistence on the coherence of body and soul is unmistakably evident in his heretical Mortalism, which denies the possibility of the soul's disembodied persistence and postmortem awareness of bodily death – such as is represented in the case of Old Hamlet's ghost, for example. In Heidegger's terminology, death is the defining limit of *Dasein*, belonging "in a distinctive sense … to the Being of *Dasein*": "With death, *Dasein* stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being … When it stands before itself in this way, all its relations to any other *Dasein* have been undone. This ownmost non-relational possibility is at the same time the uttermost one."[16] When others die, we can be aware of their deaths

[12] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, in William Pauk (ed. and trans.), *Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 214. Cited by Hiltner.
[13] *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (St. Louis, MO: Fortress Press, 1955–76), 26.227.
[14] Stephen Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 99.
[15] Arthur Barker, *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1942), p. 318.
[16] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 293–4.

and of death generally in this way; we cannot be similarly aware of our own. Confronting death as the ultimate but always present and irreducibly peculiar condition of one's being, resisting the urge to evade that definitive "non-relational" limit, is for Heidegger the basis of ontological authenticity. In Milton's case, as William Kerrigan argued in his seminal article "The Heretical Milton: From Assumption to Mortalism," the young Milton's fascination with the possibility of escaping death via bodily assumption ultimately gave way to Mortalism.[17] Yet his youthful preoccupation with ontological translation reflected the same unified vision of the human subject that in his mature work informs his heretical Mortalism. For Milton, even when he was a young man indulging the fantasy of bodily assumption, it was always all or nothing.

While we maintain that Milton's phenomenological vision of human being as indivisible was fundamental and the source of other related heresies, this distinctive understanding of human ontology is articulated in his theological system by interpretation of the biblical account of creation generally. In Book 1, chapter 7 of *Christian Doctrine* he argues on the basis of scriptural usage that creation cannot be *ex nihilo* but proceeds from the living God, who, being omnipotent, virtually possesses "corporeal power in his own substance" (*DDC* 8.1.295). Like the God whose creative power materially subsists in this "heterogeneous, multiform, and inexhaustible virtue," his creations, even those, like man, with a spiritual aspect, are one:

> Man is an animate being [*animal*], inherently and properly one and individual, not twofold or separable – or, as is commonly declared, combined or composed from two mutually and generically different and distinct natures, namely soul and body – but that the whole man is soul, and the soul is man; namely a body or substance which is individual, animated, sensitive, and rational.
>
> (*DDC* 8.1.303)

In *Paradise Lost* the angel Raphael, in explaining creation to Adam, makes the same case in an enjambment-laden passage that conveys human rationality as the deeply rooted development of a dynamic, situated, bodily process:

> O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
> All things proceed, and up to him return,
> If not depraved from good, created all
> Such to perfection, one first matter all,
> Endued with various forms, various degrees

[17] Kerrigan's landmark article, which appeared in *English Literary Renaissance*, 5 (1975), pp. 125–66, is a fundamental source for this collection.

> Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
> But more refined, more spiritous, and pure,
> As nearer to him placed or nearer tending
> Each in their several active spheres assigned,
> Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
> Proportioned to each kind. So from the root
> Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
> More airy, last the bright consummate flow'r
> Spirits odorous breathes: flow'rs and their fruit
> Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublimed
> To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
> To intellectual, give both life and sense,
> Fancy and understanding, whence the soul
> Reason receives, and reason is her being.
>
> (5.469–87)

In an elaboration of the physiology of spirits unique to Milton, *intellectual* spirits constituting the rational soul arise organically from the same bodily processes that account for all organic functions and like them are rooted in the rest of creation.[18]

Milton's insistence on the soul as an emergent, physiological phenomenon links him to the more extreme version of Christian Mortalism extant in his century, technically referred to as *thnetopsychism*. As the Greek coinage (death + soul) makes plain, it is distinguished by insistence on the death of the soul. The more moderate version of Mortalism, known as soul-sleep, is often, but without similar etymological aptitude, referred to as *psychopannychism* (Greek: soul + all night). Soul-sleep remains compatible with dualism by consigning the immortal soul of the dead person to a state of suspended animation. This was the position adopted by Luther, who despite his rejection of metaphysical speculation remained on scriptural grounds a body-and-soul dualist.[19] Admittedly, *psychopannychism* or, more properly, *hypnopsychism* is not easy to distinguish from *thnetopsychism* in seventeenth-century contexts. Both reject the notion that a human soul could survive bodily death in a conscious state.

Milton describes death as a sleep, citing scripture, and this usage would seem to align him with the soul-sleepers.[20] But the diction is misleading.

[18] We know of no precedent for what Raphael calls "intellectual" spirits as instrumentalities of reason akin to vital and animal spirits in their respective spheres. See Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers*, p. 104.

[19] On the varieties of early modern Mortalism, see Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

[20] In his writings Luther sometimes refers to three parts of human nature: body, soul, and spirit. Milton, in *Christian Doctrine* 1.13, "On the Death which is Called Bodily," acknowledges the same three-part division: "A whole person is frequently said to consist of body, spirit, and soul – in

In his chapter concerning bodily death, he observes that "many passages of scripture … deprive the dead of all vital existence" and dwells on those that most explicitly represent "the extinction of the spirit" (8.1.455). For Milton, animation of the individual human subject is unmistakably a naturally contingent phenomenon. The soul or spirit is not something subject to extraction and suspension:

> The idea of man's spirit being separated from his body, so as to exist somewhere apart, entire and intelligent, is not only not found anywhere in holy scripture, but also plainly clashes with nature and reason.
>
> (8.1.303–5)

> As to the soul, finally, whether that means the whole [human] complex, as people say, or the same as spirit, it is proved by very many testimonies that it too undergoes natural as well as violent death.
>
> (8.1.449)

Quoting lines from Euripides's *Suppliant Women* (532–4), Milton argues that at death "each dissolved part returns to its own origins, into its own elements" (8.1.455). The spiritual dimension of humanity, which he defines as "a certain breeze or divine power wafted out, suitable only for the power of life and reason and instilled in an organic body," is at the time of death carried away by "the four winds," per Matthew 24:31 (8.303, 455).

Milton describes death as a sleep only in the sense that death itself will eventually be undone. At Judgment Day the dead will "reawaken" – actually, be reconstituted – body and soul: "why not the spirits … as much as the tiniest little dust-specks of their bodies, which are often blown a very long way apart into far flung regions" (455).[21] As was first noted by Denis Saurat, Milton's position has much in common with that Richard Overton articulated in *Man's Mortalitie*, published while Milton was in the midst of writing his divorce tracts, which themselves display monist tendencies.[22]

whatever way we may finally think those parts should be distinguished from each other" (8.1.443). Luther describes soul and spirit as immaterial and therefore ontologically similar. The body in his dualistic view differs by being material. See for example his commentary on the Gospel of Luke (*Works* 21.303). Milton, by contrast, denies the immateriality of the spirit and soul and their distinct ontological status. Yet he attributes life and animation to the animated and spiritual aspects of human being while denying that the body considered in itself possesses life.

[21] For discussion of Milton's use of "sleep" to describe death, see Henry Weinfield, *The Blank-Verse Tradition from Milton to Stevens: Freethinking and the Crisis of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 59.

[22] *Man's Mortalitie* (Amsterdam, 1644) was published in a second, expanded edition under the title *Man Wholly Mortal* (London, 1655). Denis Saurat saw intellectual affinity between Overton and Milton, but his claim that Milton involved himself in Overton's work by inserting a passage into the second edition has met with skepticism. See *Milton: Man and Thinker* (London: Dial Press, 1925), pp. 320–1. On the monist tendencies of the divorce tracts, see Stephen Fallon, "The Metaphysics of Milton's

As the extended title of Overton's tract insists, the "whole Man (as a *rationall Creature*) is a Compound wholly mortall, contrary to that common distinction of *Soule* and *Body*."[23] The soul must share the fate of the body because, according to Milton's interpretation of scripture, it is an expression of it: "whatever is assigned to the body, the same is assigned to the soul: touch, … eating, … being hungry, … being thirsty, … and being captured" (8.1.303).

Milton's articulated conception of embodied human spirit – making allowance for the Protestant poet's rigorous ethical dualism – anticipates that of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who in following Descartes, Husserl, and Heidegger focuses more precisely on the bodily entanglement of consciousness in the world. Milton likewise understood the body as a pivotal site, what Merleau-Ponty calls a "chiasm," of self and world woven together: "There is a body of the mind, and a mind of the body and a chiasm between them"; "there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things." The experiences of overlapping or encroachment that characterize this "chiasm" of self and the world are for Merleau-Ponty not symptomatic of a divergence between them but the precondition of such subjectivity as we achieve. One cannot, accordingly, draw categorical distinctions between phenomena in which one acts versus those in which one is acted upon (e.g., touching versus being touched). Actual experience in his view involves constant interchange and, as in a chiasm, reversal. Embodied experience, the only experience we know, lies not on either side of the crossing but in the intersection of the lines.

To resort to a grammatical analogy, consciousness is in this view neither active nor passive, but, as in the classical Greek middle, possesses elements of both. In *Paradise Lost* it is Satan who registers experience as either active or passive, as if he were acting or being acted upon. Yet even in the account of him in Hell, this division is continually undermined. The same thing that is at one point described as having been done to him and his followers is at another described as having been done by them: "him the Almighty Power / Hurled headlong" versus "headlong themselves they

Divorce Tracts" in *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose*, ed. David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 69–83.

[23] Nicholas McDowell, "Ideas of Creation in the Writings of Richard Overton the Leveller and *Paradise Lost*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66 (2005), pp. 59–78. McDowell argues that the many similarities between the Mortalist arguments espoused by Milton and Overton are of a piece with their shared opposition to political tyranny and particularly their insistence on individual agency fostered in a reformed society as the basis of attaining salvation.