

WHAT IS SOUL?

A Comment on the Third Fundamental of *The Secret Doctrine*

In *The Secret Doctrine*, Helena Blavatsky states: “The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root.” It is stated elsewhere that the power to realize the unity of the One Universal Monad and the multiple individual monads is a primary requirement of the understanding of the mystical path. In the sense used, the terms ‘monad’ and ‘soul’ are to be understood as having the same meaning, the individual soul corresponding to the individual monad and the Over-Soul to the one Universal Monad. Thus in attaining comprehension of the identity between the multiplicity of individual souls and the Universal Over-Soul a key is found for opening the door of understanding occult science and philosophy as opposed to the externalistic science and philosophy dominantly current in the world today.

Externalistic thought tends to think of multiplicities of units as discrete collections, each member separated from every other. To be sure, this is a property of matter as it appears to us on this plane of being. But to predicate this characteristic as being a property of soul is to make an inference that is not logically valid. While matter as perceived form is objective, in contradistinction, soul is subjective. There is nothing in experience to justify the idea of discrete multiplicity in the purely subjective. In the sense here used by ‘subjective’ we do not mean merely subjective experiences such as those found in dream states, trance, etc., for such are only relatively subjective and in the metaphysical sense are still objective; but rather we mean that center which is implied in all perception whatsoever. Self-analysis shows that behind all experience is that which is aware of the experience, and that which ties the multiplicities of experience into the unity of one whole. This center is that which I am.

Mathematically it is represented by a point as it is without attribute, and the point has the characteristic of being without dimension and is therefore imponderable yet at the same time is a center of focus or bearing. If in his analysis one thinks that he had found attributes in the; center or self which perceives it is pointed out that he has failed to push his analysis far enough, for the perception of attributes in turn implies that which perceives those attributes and therefore is subjective to them. Thus the latter, whatever they are, stand as objective to that which perceives them. Thus the real subject of the search within consciousness has been lost and merely some object found. Behind all multiplicity and movement is implied that which is One and changeless as a necessary base of reference... that, I, as perceiver, am. That I am One is an unavoidable conclusion, for were I many, whether in the sense of a group of discrete perceiving centers or of a changing and thus attribute-possessing center, the very binding together of the I-ness would cease to exist and we have a manifest contradiction.

If one thinks of soul as an object, i.e., something which could be perceived or possessed, then he will at once find an insurmountable difficulty in reconciling the one Over-Soul with the many individual souls. For the unity of the Over-Soul is not simply to be conceived of as a collection drawn together in some group or class. This is implied in the phrase stating that the Over-Soul is an aspect of the Unknown Root, and that latter is defined in the first fundamental as “one Absolute Reality.” That which is Absolute is not a collection for it would then be limited, hence bounded by the relationships between its various parts. If the Over-Soul is One in the sense of being a Monad, hence indivisible, it manifestly could not then be composed of objective

parts. And as objectively, manyness implies discrete parts, it would follow that in this sense the assertion of the reality of the Over-Soul would imply the unreality of the individual souls.

Conversely, the assertion of the reality of objective individual souls implies the negation of the Over-Soul. It is a very current habit of expression to speak of “my soul” which corresponds to the concept of Soul being an object of possession. This is evidently the result of extending externalistic thinking into the domain of the inner life of man. For all whom so think the wealth of the Wisdom Religion is inaccessible.

There remains the alternative of identifying soul with the subject. This implies, “I am Soul.” Since, as has been shown, the notion of external or discrete multiplicity is unthinkable as a predicate of I-ness, there is no logical difficulty in the identification of I, as individual, with I, as Universal. But here the question may be raised, “How may Souls in the plural be identified with One Universal Oversoul?” If I am Soul and there is a plurality of Souls then it follows that there is a plurality of centers of perception. But this is contrary to the proposition that the center of perception is necessarily one. This criticism is impressive but is based upon an imperfect analysis of the proposition “I am Soul.” Considered logically, this proposition cannot be converted simply into the form “Soul is the center of perception,” with center of perception being taken as identical with the term ‘I’. The connotation of the term “Soul” is more comprehensive than the term “I.”

It must be born in mind that the Third Fundamental does not state that Souls are aspects of the Unknown Root. The word “latter” distinguishes between soul and the Universal Over-Soul and thus reveals that the status of aspect of the Unknown Root is predicated only in the case of the Over-Soul. Furthermore the teaching is the “fundamental identity,” not simply the identity “of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul.” These distinctions are significant. Fundamental identity does not imply identity in all respects. The apparent difficulty seems to be resolved if we consider Souls in the plural as the appearance of the “Over-Soul” reflected upon multiformed matter. For example, an individual may stand in a room filled with many mirrors of variously shaped surfaces. In these mirrors there will be reflections of the given individual in varying degrees of distortion. Yet fundamentally there will be an identity between the original and the reflections. The existence of the latter will be dependent upon the presence of the former. All movements and postures of the individual will be reflected in the images. Between every image and the original there will be a one-to-one correspondence of all parts. These facts imply a fundamental unity. No image would be self-existent, they would all be dependent. On the other hand, the images are multiple and more or less distorted. In this sense they are not identical with the original. In some such manner we must consider the many souls or monads in their character as multiple and variable as appearances reflected in the many faceted mirror of matter, but not therefore non-existences. Indeed they are essentially existences, as the “existence” involves dependent manifestation.

We are forced to the conclusion that it is not correct to identify the term “souls” either with objective forms or with the pure Subject. In this sense individual Soul occupies an intermediate found between the subject and the objective world of forms. In its substantial reality it is identical with pure subject or the One Universal Over-Soul, but in its appearance, which is strictly dependent, it is impressed with the multiple and variable qualities of matter.

In the illustration of the individual standing before a number of mirrors there is an important logical defect, though it served as a first approximation to suggest the idea. The

relationships were all manifestly external in an obvious physical sense. A far more perfect and logical representation is afforded in some of the mathematical properties of infinite manifold. Let the Over-Soul or the One Monad be represented by the continuum consisting of all positive real numbers. This manifold is not a discrete collection as there are not in it any two numbers which stand next to each other. Between any two numbers there is always an infinity of other numbers. A continuum has what might be called a stream-like unity, only any stream of molecules, atoms or electrons would be infinitely crude beside it. While it has no discrete parts it has the fluidity that permits of perfection of motion, and as stated in the discussion of the First Fundamental, consciousness is represented by motion. The Universal Over-Soul as an aspect of the Unknown Root is the seat of consciousness.

Now let the individual soul be represented by, say, the portion of the number continuum between 0 and 1. This apparent part of the whole continuum is logically fundamentally identical with the whole continuum. For by any one of a number of transformations it can be shown that there are as many numbers between 0 and 1 as there are between 0 and infinity. Every relationship in the whole can be reproduced in the part. The same would be true of the interval from 1 to 2 and so on, which intervals can be made to represent endless multiplicity of the individualized aspect of soul. The discrete separation of these intervals would correspond to the appearance of many souls cast on the reflecting mirrors of matter. But in the logical identity of any particular interval with the whole there is illustrated the fundamental identity of the individual souls with the Universal Over-Soul.

Again, it is said in the Eastern writings the Being is like a circle with the center everywhere and the circumference nowhere. The circumference represents the bounding line of possible manifestation. The center is the point of perception, it is the Self, pure, changeless, indivisible and inextensible Spirit. Now this circle has precisely the properties of the circle of infinite radius. The circumference would be wholly at infinity, which is equivalent to nowhere from the point of view of relative consciousness. There would be but one center as no circle ever has more than one center, yet that center would be any point whatsoever in the plane. These are purely mathematical and therefore logical properties. The points in the plane would represent all possible centers of perception, infinite in number. Each would be the unique center of the universes. For there is only one such center—indeed it is true “I AM THAT.”