


## Who am I?

It is clear, both outspoken and by implication, that nihilism is rooted in a consciousness which believes the body to be the self. It's one lifetime. 100 years. No past before that, no future beyond. So no meaning. Left? Enjoy (or die). Bodily comfort, entertainment, hedonism, power, fame and so on (and drugs and psychiatric medications to numb the pain and suppress the symptoms of alienation). Everything that gives pleasure or feelgood to the temporary body. Everything that pertains to a materialistic lifestyle. When we think of ourselves as the body and exclude everything spiritual, this is what we get 

But are we the body?

In all spiritual teachings the first premise is that we are *not* the body. We are the soul, recognized as consciousness – the “I”, temporarily in a material body, but itself eternal.

It's not possible to “prove” the existence of the soul, since “proving” normally means by science – that is, explainable

by (material) logics or verifiable by the (material) senses. Science deals with the material, and its means and tools are material. And the soul (by implication) is non-material. So if the soul exists, then it *transcends* the means for scientific proof: there, but not possible to “catch” with the intellect or senses. (But who is trying? Modern science is quite busy with “the problem of consciousness” and there is some real progress being made.)

So forget about proof for now. But there is “circumstantial evidence”, as it is called in court – things that clearly point in that direction. For instance in something as universal and everyday as language. Take the statement “My body”. In modern linguistics there is the understanding that on the deepest level, language “reflects concepts rooted in bodily experience”.<sup>6</sup> Language reflects experience. This is crucial. On the deepest level of the statement “My body” is the experience implied that there are *two* things here. The object pointed at: the body. And the pointer: a subject. My body. Subject and object. Two. The subject is not the object. The pointer is not the body. There is “I”, and there is the body.

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<sup>6</sup> Eva-Maria Graf, *The ontogenetic development of literal and metaphorical space in language* (2006)

“I” means awareness. Someone is aware. And this awareness is conscious of something. There is differentiation between two things. At a first careless observation there seems to be a body speaking. But the speaker, “I”, makes a difference between itself (subject) and the body (object).

“I” transcends the body: it’s there, but at the same time more, beyond it, in a position to point at the body. If the body were the “I”, then it would not speak of itself in terms of duality – two – and say “My body”.

There is the body – visible. And there is the “I” – consciousness. And the perspective is with the “I” – “My body”.

If language reflects experience, then here is some circumstantial evidence that the “I” (consciousness) and the body (matter) are not the same. Conglomerated, yes, but not identical. On a deep level of awareness this appears to be known. “A concept rooted in experience”. And “reflected in language”.

Among enlightened sages and mystics of the past and present this kind of practice is called self-inquiry – “Who am I?” Their conclusion is always the same, that awareness, or consciousness, is what is left when everything else has been disidentified, that this is what we are – individual units of

consciousness, and that this is the spirit soul, eternal.<sup>7</sup> (The soul is also – foremost – love, and naturally active, which equals *service*, and always looking for the perfect object of that service, but that is another book.)

Reflect for a while on “My body”, or “I have a body”. Say it loud, in your own language, and try to feel who you are.

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<sup>7</sup> Eternal it must be. Something is either temporary or eternal. What is material is temporary. If consciousness, as we have seen, transcends the material (the body), then that implies that it also transcends the temporary. Transcending the temporary means being eternal.