Assessing Students’ Opinion Regarding the Existence of the Soul

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Abstract

In the present, there are two dominant paradigms in Romania regarding life on earth. The first one is the atheist-evolutionist paradigm, and the Christian paradigm is the second one. On the anthropological level, two anthropological models correspond to these two paradigms. The first model is the materialist model, according to which the human being is completely material and the psychic is the brain’s manifestation. The second model accepts the existence of the soul and interprets the psychic as a manifestation of the soul which is connected with the brain.

The aim of this article is to estimate the students’ opinion regarding the two anthropological models. Starting from the above mentioned approaches, this paper aims to investigate the students’ opinion from two different specializations of the „Ovidius“ University of Constanta – the Faculty of Economic Sciences and the Faculty of Theology- regarding the above mentioned problems.

Keywords: paradigm; evolutionism; materialism; soul; psychic; memory; quantum phenomena; association coefficients; contingency coefficients.

1. Introduction

In the present, nobody denies the bond between the psychic and the brain. The divergences appear regarding the nature of the relation between the psychic and the brain.

The positions of the researchers can be grouped into two orientations:

• the monistic orientation, according to which the psychic is the brain’s manifestation
• the dualist orientation (the interactions’ dualism), according to which the psychic is the result of the brain’s interaction with a Quantico structure. The psychic phenomena cannot be understood without the study of the

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Quantico phenomena. The interactions’ dualism was founded by the neurophysiologist John C. Eccles, the Nobel Prize winner for medicine. We are going to use the term interactions’ dualism in order to underline the bidirectional interaction between the brain and the Quantico structure (expression of the soul) and in order to distinguish it from the philosophical dualism of Descartes, based on the idea of a unidirectional action (from soul to brain).

The interactions’ dualism is compatible with the Christian teaching regarding the body and the soul as Sandu, Gheorghe (2003) and Stănile, Dumitru (2010) argue. In Romania, it was promoted only after the 1989 revolution. In the communist period, the students were taught that the “religion represents a distorted knowing of the world, a misrepresentation of the real phenomena, a illusory and hallucinatory construction” says Popescu-Neveanu, P (1971). Tudosescu I., Florea M. and Popa C (1976) says that the materialism and the atheist psychology were promoted in all the social spheres. The concept of the materialist philosopher Julien de la Mettrie (1709-1751) according to which the man is a machine that does not need a soul in order to perform his activity is presented to the students.

In Romania, the psychology which is thought in university still follows in the present day the monistic orientation says Zlate, M (2000). Some students had access to other books and scientific articles from which they have discovered the dualist orientation sustained by the modern researches coming the Quantico physics and the neurophysiology. However, among the students, the acceptance of the existence of the soul is based more on the Christian teaching coming from the lessons of religion, due to the fact that the interactions’ dualism is not so well known.

2. Methodology

The statistic collectivity investigated is represented by the students from the „Ovidius” University from Constanta, the sample being composed out of 474 students, 397 coming from the Faculty of Economic Sciences and 77 coming from the Faculty of Theology, which determines a guarantee probability of 95% with an error limit of 5%.

In order to assure the representatively of the sample, a multistadial random sampling scheme was used, on which base the researched collectivity was divided bearing in mind the proportions that the groups occupy considering 4 criteria: the sex, the age, the specialization and the faculty. It is the best method for obtaining the sample. The used percentages for determining these segments were calculated starting from the researched data from the website of the „Ovidius” University of Constanta regarding the statistical situation of the students.

The processing of the data with the view of the centralization and systematization of the information, the calculus of the indicators which describe the intensity of the bonds, as well as the testing of their meaning was done through the informatics product SPSS.

3. Data and results

The first question refers itself to the existence of the soul.

At least in the case of Romania, this question is important due to the fact that in the communist period the students were taught that there is no soul, this being the only theory that was officially permitted in the educational system. After the December 1989 revolution, religion was permitted in school and through this the idea that there is a soul entered the educational system. Moreover, the science and philosophy books from the pre-communist era in which soul was accepted were reedited.

The question regarding the existence of the soul, asked after 22 years after the revolution, aims to estimate the influence of the communist teaching on the current conception. This question is important for the answers implications, due to the fact that the purpose of life is connected with the acceptance of the soul.

The idea of the existence of the soul is accepted by 96.4% of the students; 2.7% consider that there is no soul, and 0.8% say that they do not know.
Table 1. The soul existence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Soul Existence</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It exists</td>
<td>It does not exist</td>
<td>I do not know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Sciences</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the students from the Faculty of Economic Sciences, 95.96% admit the existence of the soul, 3.27% consider that there is no soul, 0.25% do not know. There is no student from theology that affirms that there is no soul, but one of them states that he does not know.

**The second question** refers itself to the psychic and has 3 answers:
- The human psychic is a form of manifestation of the soul which is connected with the brain;
- The human psychic is a form of manifestation of the brain;
- I do not know.

Obviously, the ones that admit that the human psychic is a form of manifestation of the soul which is connected to the brain admit the existence of the soul. The mutual is false. If the soul is admitted, it does not result the fact that the psychic has to be a manifestation of the soul which is connected with the brain. The conception of each person regarding the soul and its functions, as well as the manner in which the psychic is defined is very important. It is possible for a person to accept the existence of the soul, but not taking into account that the psychic is part of the souls’ manifestations.

The ones that say that the human psychic is a form of manifestation of the brain can consider that there is no soul or that there is a soul that has other functions.

The majority (68.77%) consider that the psychic of the human being is a way of manifestation of the soul connected with the brain, 30% consider that the psychic is way of manifestation of the brain and 1.3% do not know.

Table 2. The association between the soul existence and the psychic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soul existence</th>
<th>Psychic</th>
<th>The manner in which the brain manifests</th>
<th>The manner in which the soul manifests itself in relation to the brain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The is no soul</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a soul</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>324</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It could have been expected that the ones that admit the existence of the soul to consider that the psychic is a manner of manifestation of the soul connected with the brain. In reality, 28.63% out of the ones had admit the existence of the soul consider that the psychic is a manner of manifestation of the brain.

**The third question** refers itself to the memory and has 3 answers:
- The memory is a function of the soul that is manifested through the brain;
- The memory is a function of the brain;
- I do not know.

The previous comment towards the psychic is also applied for the memory.

The first answer was composed taking into account the fact that the orthodox Christian teaching does not approve that the memory is solely a function of the brain. Ioan Damaschin Saint (2005) says that the soul is the one that perceive the sensitivities (the senses are responsible for these ones) through the sense organs and that the memory is the perservance of the images about which the human has an opinion of a thought. Even though he presents the memory as being a function of the soul, Saint Ioan Damaschin considers that the “memory organ is the back lobe of the brain”, accepting the interaction between the soul and the brain in order to explain the memory.
Table 3. The association between the soul existence and the memory function

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soul existence</th>
<th>Function of the brain</th>
<th>Function of the soul that manifests itself in connection with the brain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is no soul</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a soul</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority 75.9% consider that the memory is a function of the brain, 22.8% consider that the memory is a function of the soul which is manifested through interaction with the brain and 1.3% do not know.

An interesting fact is that the ones that admit the existence of the soul, 77.11% consider that the memory is function of the brain.

The fourth question refers itself to love and has three answers:
- Love is an interior feeling;
- Love is due to chemical reactions in the brain;
- I do not know.

Love was chosen due to the fact that in the Christian conception it is strongly connected with the human free will. A Romanian proverb says that “forced love is impossible”. If love would be the consequence of some chemical reactions in the brain, it could not be an effect of the free will. In this situation, the human would not be responsible for the lack of love towards the other persons, due to the fact that it is absurd to be responsible for a biochemical reaction that cannot be controlled though will.

Moreover, in the Christian teaching, “love that does not have any interest is the fullness of all virtue” says Georgios Mantzaridis. In general, any virtue is manifested though the free choosing space, as Saint Vasile cel Mare argues: “virtue is done from choosing freely, not from force, and the free choosing depends on us”. The conception according to which love is not a consequence of some chemical reactions in the brain can be a precedent for considering that any virtue is a simple consequence of some biochemical reactions, fact that introduces a separation between virtues and liberty.

Another reason for which love was chosen is the fact that the question “Is love a chemical reaction?” frequently appears in the discussion between the teenagers and young people in Romaniia, mostly on the internet.

Table 4. The association between the soul existence and love

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soul existence</th>
<th>Consequence of chemical reactions coming from the brain</th>
<th>An interior feeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is no soul</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a soul</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the students (86.9%) consider that love is coming from the soul; 12.4% consider that love is a consequence of some chemical reactions coming from the brain.

Table 5. Symetric measures regarding the association between the soul existence and love

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Asymp. Std.Error</th>
<th>Approx.T</th>
<th>Approx.Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phi</td>
<td>0.258</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cramer’s V</td>
<td>0.258</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>2.659</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingency Coefficient</td>
<td>0.250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td>0.773</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Not Assuming the null hypothesis
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis
The association coefficients show that there is a significant bond between the conception regarding the existence of the soul and the conception concerning the love. 89.45% of those that accept the idea of the existence of the soul consider that love is coming from the soul.

4. Conclusions

The majority of the students (96.4%) accept the idea that there is a soul. It can be said that in this field the effect of the communist teaching was very much attenuated.

Most of the students (68.77%) consider that the human psychic is a manner of manifestation of the soul connected with the brain. However, there is a weak bond between the conception regarding the existence of the soul and the psychic, 28.63% of the ones that admit the existence of the soul consider that the psychic is a manner of manifestation of the brain.

The majority (75.9%) consider that the memory is a function of the brain. There is no bond between the conception regarding the existence of the soul and the conception regarding the memory. 77.11% of the ones that admit the existence of the soul consider that the memory is a function of the brain and not the soul. We can observe the fact that there is a strong connection between the conception regarding the existence of the soul and the conception about love, 89.45% out of the ones that accept the idea of the existence of the soul consider that love is coming from the soul.

This situation is explained through the existence of two influence centers after the revolution from December 1989: on one hand side, the biology and the evolutionist psychology, and on the other hand side the religion. Most of the students have taken from the religion the idea that the human being was created by God and that it has a soul, and from biology and the evolutionist psychology they took the idea that the memory is a function of the brain; some consider that the entire psychic is a manner of manifestation of the brain. They did not succeed to integrate this information in a unitary model.

References

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