religions

Article

We Will Not Shut Up and Dribble: LeBron James and the Tripartite Human Being

Jeffrey Scholes

Department of Philosophy, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, CO 80918, USA; jscholes@uccs.edu

Abstract: On 15 February 2018, Fox News host Laura Ingraham ended her broadcast by responding to sharply critical comments that basketball stars LeBron James and Kevin Durant made about President Trump on the issue of race. Ingraham demanded that they "shut up and dribble," to which James responded by creating a Twitter hashtag, #wewillnotshutupanddribble that adorned t-shirts worn during his next pregame warmup. In this essay, I contend that religion and sport come together throughout the "shut up and dribble" episode by way of a tripartite Christian anthropology of body, soul, and spirit that Ingraham is unwittingly conveying and James is adopting in his own way. This anthropology, as laid out in I Thessalonians and elsewhere, not only enables the reduction of Black human beings down to their body by silencing their souls, but also provides a framework for an athlete like LeBron James to counter these attacks.

Keywords: LeBron James; race; tripartite trichotomy; Christian theology; shut up and dribble; Laura Ingraham; basketball

check for updates

Citation: Scholes, Jeffrey. 2022. We Will Not Shut Up and Dribble: LeBron James and the Tripartite Human Being. *Religions* 13: 148. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020148

Academic Editors: Eric Bain-Selbo, Sean T. Coleman and Joseph C. Spears

Received: 27 November 2021
Accepted: 28 January 2022
Published: 7 February 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

On 15 February 2018, Fox News host Laura Ingraham ended her broadcast by responding to sharply critical comments that basketball stars LeBron James and Kevin Durant made about President Trump on the issue of race. Before airing the clip of the players' comments, she announced that "NBA superstar LeBron James is talking politics again. Here's his barely intelligible, not to mention ungrammatical take on President Trump." After the clip finished, she resumed,

> Must they run their mouths like that? . . . This is what happens when you attempt to leave high school a year early to join the NBA. It's always unwise to seek political advice from someone who gets paid a hundred million dollars a year to bounce a ball. Oh, and LeBron and Kevin, you're great players but no one voted for you. Millions elected Trump to be their coach. So, keep the political commentary to yourself or, as someone once said, shut up and dribble.

Her commentary and James' response that "we will not shut up and dribble," later a Twitter hashtag, quickly became a flashpoint in the, frankly, tired debate about the proper relationship between sports and politics. Either athletes should stick to playing sports alone and leave political talk to the experts or athletes should have every right, even an obligation, to use their celebrity to illuminate political issues when warranted. This debate is tired because a false dichotomy is presented in the former, and the political nature of sports is not constrained to just athletes speaking on a stage in the latter. Stadiums are already political arenas and athletes are already political figures before they open their mouths.

The case of LeBron ranting about President Trump seems to pertain to proper boundary lines for Ingraham, but it also involves political ideology and race. If James praised Trump, we likely would have heard nothing from Ingraham, save some faint praise. Conversely, Ingraham's rhetoric plays out a classic dynamic where a white person tells a Black man to keep his mouth shut and do his job. In doing so, Ingraham is attempting to sever James' mind, which produces speech, from his body and then throw each into a hierarchy that slots the body far above the mind. LeBron is merely a body that plays basketball—especially when he has the audacity to speak out against then-president Trump.

Perhaps Ingraham can be easily dismissed as a double-talking demagogue. Yet on a deeper level, her words stand as a continuation of a dark rhetorical history. Black slaves and later African Americans have routinely been castigated, beaten, and killed for using their minds to express the desire for freedom, and the silencing them has been historically effective through the reduction of a person down to a material body with no real mind. The raping, beating, and lynching of said bodies is a cruel reminder of the value and non-value of the Black body to the white community that acts to send the mind into fearful recess.

LeBron's response to Ingraham (and to others who have effectively communicated a similar message to African Americans like himself) has been registered in various ways. His response and the complex motives behind it are the focus of this essay. I argue that LeBron's retort to the historical utilization of the Black body by predominantly white fans, coaches, owners, the media, and fellow athletes for some form of profit can best be seen as a political theological expression of the Christian tripartite anthropology of body, soul, and spirit. The positioning of the divine spirit over human flesh with the innate soul being pulled towards either is unintentionally mapped onto much discourse that demands that a Black body in sports be just that: a body. Remaining a body (read: flesh) entails the housing of a mind (read: soul) that must be made small or impotent, and when potent, it must be stripped of its potency. This rhetoric can be justified when the white person's mind/soul, alternatively, is deemed to be aligned with the divine spirit that gives it unbridled political power. Therefore, beneath the imperative, "shut up and dribble" and "we will not shut up and dribble" is a type of secular theology at work. As such, I contend that LeBron James is employing his own tripartite anthropology to address this effort to diminish his mind. Mind (soul) and body must be reunited, if they were ever separated in the first place, with the aid of a functional equivalent of the divine spirit. Racial justice is that North Star for James that motivates the #wewillnotshutupanddribble hashtag and the various other expressions that he has offered to confront injustice in his own life and in the life of other African Americans. The triangulation within the Christian anthropology, as opposed to a Hebrew dichotomy or Cartesian duality, furnishes us with the kind of framework that is needed to best understand LeBron James' reaction to Ingraham's claim.

The way that I detect and extract the presence of this hierarchy between mind and body is through their political expression, not etiologically. The expectation that an African American be a body alone draws not only on slavery epoch rhetoric but also on the eugenic movement of the early twentieth century. And hegemonic white supremacist political arrangements and market logic fueled by capitalistic ideology abetted this kind of anthropology. This study merely adds religion as another possible means of appreciating the body and soul. Not that religion has exclusive rights to these terms, but given its long history of theologizing the body and soul and then deploying them in a manner that likely exceeds theology's distribution along Cartesian lines, religion was already there and hence should be a part of the discussion involving race and sports.

Even though religion does not appear to be an obvious player in this back-and-forth between James and Ingraham, I contend that it can be used to understand LeBron's evolution through the years as it pertains to racial politics up to this point. The Christian hierarchy of the human psyche, laid out most evidently in 1 Thessalonians, resonates throughout history up to the present moment. Specifically, the reduction of Black human beings down to their bodies by silencing their souls (as comprising the mind, will, and emotions) performed by whites who identify with God's spirit has driven and continues to undergird race relations. My contention in this paper is that in interpreting the command to shut up and dribble and its response only in terms of race, sports, and politics, the meaning of Lebron's efforts is lost. Moreover, the Christian anthropology that carefully tends to the soul, body, and a transcendent spirit should be useful in the apprehension of the motives behind white society consistently trying to separate the Black body from its mind, whether that of an athlete or not. While this cleaving of the Black mind and body benefits white society with a kind of divide and conquer strategy, the striving for the ideal of a whole, unified person—one that Christian theology possesses—can be used,

if unwittingly, to counter this strategy. Furthermore, when the victim of this attempt at cleavage is a famous athlete, religion and sport are able to inform one another.

The typical, though by no means exclusive, scholarly conclusions about the religion and sport relationship involve movement. The move from religion to sport often ends with the claim that sport is a religion or is at least religious in some way. The opposite direction, or what Daniel Grano calls the "profane to sacred transport," may conclude with similar findings, but one begins with sport instead of religion, looks for functions that are religious, and conjoins the two discourses thusly. These kinds of arguments, while valuable and constructive to the discipline, frequently stay above the political fray and end up treating religion and sport as epiphenomena. However, race, along with many other powerful cultural constructs such as gender and class, continues to be a critical factor in the development of both religion and sport. Indeed, race is co-constitutive of religion and sport, which yields two primary ramifications for scholarship on religion and sport. One, ignoring race and/or similar constructs that involve power and hierarchy in any discussion of the relationship between religion and sport leaves us with a hollowed out, disembedded pair of terms. Two, that race is co-constitutive of both religion and sport invites a novel way to see their association. Some of the ways that religion has been forged from racial difference and supremacy can find analogs in the way that sport has served as a crucial vehicle for such religious and political expressions.

Regarding the sports world, the "color bind meritocracy" cloak that American sports has draped itself in presumably insulates it from accusations of racism and the perpetuation of white supremacy, but in fact, sport's ability to move under the radar of critics who rightfully single out education and the prison system as institutions affected by racism is called into question when a cable news host can tell Black men to stay silent about an issue on which they likely have expertise.

That said, "shut up and dribble" is a pithy phrase that speaks a thousand words. Ingraham demands a human being to be a body alone by shutting off the spigot from the mind to the mouth. She defended her statement by contextualizing within similar comments that she has made in the past about actors and musicians with "shut up and act" and "shut up and sing." These are meant to draw a thick line between what one is known for and what one has to say about what they presumably do not know. The underlying assumption is that one should not cross over into unknown territory and speak as a resident, but the fact that LeBron James is talking about racism as a Black man, even if he is speaking about the President's rhetoric, makes him a *de facto* expert no matter his profession.

1. Shut Up and Dribble

Ingraham's statement did not come out of the blue. Her book, *Shut Up and Sing: How Elites from Hollywood, Politics, and the Media are Subverting America* (2003), takes aim at celebrities speaking out against the Bush administration in the wake of the launching of the war in Iraq. It is the "elitist" culture that has endowed celebrities with not only the authority to speak out on political matters but also with a protection in society that insulates their views, no matter how outside of their expertise with which they are speaking. She writes in her book, "(e)litism is a state of mind, not a way of life. It is first and foremost a cult of the self. Elites view themselves, as supreme, the center of all things, the highest good in life, and the ultimate judges of right and wrong."

Her position on who she considers elite is contextualized by what she considers the real elites in American history. Elites, as she defines that term, are those who, in the name of preserving themselves, reject what she sees as a more collective rendering of the Unites States. In other words, because so-called elites do not consider the collective when they do what they do, Ingraham avers that the only way to explain their pursuits is to say that they are purely selfish. "Though it's a reach to call some of them 'cultured,' Hollywood celebrities are also included in this category, because of their touching belief that being famous and rich makes them worth listening to on all issues."[1] Therefore, elites, are those whose authority to speak out on issues, including political ones, is granted to

them not on their knowledge but on their wealth and fame, and their political opinion almost always relies on a left-leaning ideology. Ingraham contrasts right-leaning non-elites with left-leaning elites in the following way: "They (elites) have outgrown America. They are ashamed of her—and us (non-elites). They are constantly having to apologize for our brutish attitudes and policies to their elitists comrades around the world. They can't take us anywhere. We simply refuse to learn."[2] The most significant aspect of this quote is how Ingraham and her cohorts conceive of themselves through these contrasted groups. Clearly, her group considers itself to comprise true Americans, and those outside of it are anti-American as expressed through their willingness to look beyond the United States for guidance. Similarly, those challenging the Bush Doctrine are against her version of the United States, or elites are those who have deliberately and destructively outgrown her notion of the American experiment, and therefore, these elites should just shut up and sing. When the Dixie Chicks dared to speak out against President Bush's War in Iraq, they learned the hard way that their conservative fans agreed with Ingraham.

Her recitation of "shut up and . . . " towards LeBron James should come, then, as no surprise; however, there is a difference here. James is an elite by her definition who is also Black. After white quarterback Drew Brees criticized players kneeling for the national anthem, predictably Ingraham did not implore him to shut up but instead praised his stance. "He is allowed to have his view about what kneeling and the flag means to him. I mean, he's a person, he has some worth, I would imagine. I mean, this is beyond football though, this is totalitarian conduct, this is Stalinist . . . this is what this moment has done to the beautiful team of the New Orleans Saints" (Bieler 2020).

Ingraham is employing a double standard at best; making a racially tinged comment at worst. Brees should not shut up and play either because he is on the right side of the political equation or because he is white, or both. In response, LeBron chose to emphasize the racist undertones of Ingraham's kid glove treatment of Brees rather than chalk her praise up to her and Brees' supposed political agreement. He angrily communicated his opinion on Twitter: "If you still haven't figured out why the protesting is going on. Why we're acting as we are is because we are simply F-N tired of this treatment right here! Can we break it down for you any simpler than this right here??? And to my people don't worry I won't stop until I see CHANGE!!! #ShutUpAndDribbleThisPowerfulBlackManComingFullSteam."

If Ingraham was accused of racism, she would likely point out that she has praised African Americans, and therefore race has nothing to do with her commentary. For instance, she praised former NFL African American running back, Hershel Walker, because he is a Republican who lauds Donald Trump. Indeed, in an interview with Walker after he gave a speech at the Republican National Convention in 2020, Ingraham told him that his was one of the "most powerful and memorable speeches of the night" (Parke 2020). Perhaps nowadays one's political views overrides skin color, or perhaps it does not. Ingraham's response to LeBron's tweet on Brees was as follows:

> Let me clear about what I believe: we are all children of God, regardless of our racial and political differences, and therefore, must be treated equally. Every American has a God given right to speak on any issue. And I think in order to heal and shed light on gross injustices, our country needs more dialogue, not less. And we need more respect, not less. (Ibid.)

It should be self-evident that it is impossible to have a dialogue when your dialogue partner is telling you to shut up.

Against Ingraham's own self-conception, I contend that her rhetoric around LeBron's political talk is laced with racial undertones. It is not just that James had the temerity to criticize then-president Trump, but recall that his delivery was "barely intelligible, not to mention ungrammatical" (it was not). Ingraham seems to suggest that her description of James has nothing to do with his race but rather that he did not attend high school and that we should not be taking seriously someone's political judgments when they are paid millions to play a sport. Why, then, does Drew Brees not receive the same treatment? After all, he collected millions to throw a ball. Yes, the same goes for Herschel Walker, but the

point is that criticizing the speech of a Black man as unintelligible draws on longstanding and destructive stereotypes about the language and syntax of African Americans, and if the words are unintelligible, then the mind must not be working well either.

Ingraham's statement was not made in a vacuum. The attempt to bifurcate the Black mind from its body has been a tactic of those trying to control Black bodies since slavery. By attempting to muzzle him, and hence impugn and silence the mind that is the source of his words, Ingraham tries to shut down his agency as a human being, for this is, in conjunction with the body, the means by which we express ourselves.

2. We Will Not Shut Up and Dribble

In this section, I hope to underline the importance of the cause of racial justice in LeBron James' life so that the last section on the Christian tripartite human being can be seen as a concept that will help us understand what motivates James and how he conceives himself and his purpose. We grasp this in LeBron's first response to Ingraham's comment on Twitter. "The best thing she did was help me create more awareness. I get to sit up here and talk about social injustice." However, this focus on injustice is relatively new for him. When James entered the league in 2003 and until 2012, he largely abided by the "Jordan Rules" named after the unspoken code of conduct for elite African American athletes established by Michael Jordan in the mid-1980s and enduring through the 1990s. These rules strongly encouraged a fealty amongst high level African American athletes to capital and the corporations that could line your pocket, and therefore an apolitical stance on social issues was the norm with few exceptions during this period. Jordan legitimated this stance by making more than any other previous superstar by a mile, and most African American athletes followed his lead. Any violation of the Jordan Rules that could potentially alienate one from the customers of corporate sponsors was a bridge deemed too far for Jordan and for those who followed in his tracks, such as Tiger Woods and LeBron James, to cross.

LeBron's early life was fraught with difficulty. Growing up in Akron, Ohio, LeBron rarely saw his father, and his mother, just sixteen when he was born, could not care for him full-time. Therefore, LeBron shuffled in and out of his grandparents' and others' homes during his adolescence and beyond. A coach happened to catch his talent, and he was off to the races. I only mention this biographical blurb because it problematizes Ingraham's comments. Her telling LeBron that he should shut up and dribble, without considering the obstacles that someone like LeBron James has overcome to achieve such heights and then to accuse him of unintelligibility in his speech because he skipped college to make the kind of money that would change his family's fortunes, is unfair to say the least.

Hence, it is understandable that LeBron jumped at the chance to sign contracts with corporations, who were chomping at the bit to land him *because* of his witnessing of his fair share of social and racial injustice, not *despite* of it. It was the murder of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in 2012 that changed everything for James. The killing of an unarmed Black teenager, while far from being the first instance of such an event, alarmed many Americans as well as James. James reflected on that troubled time.

> I think it starts with the Trayvon Martin situation and the reason it starts with that, I believe is because having kids of my own—having boys of my own—it hit home for me to see and to learn the story and to think that if my boy left home and he never returned. That kinda hit a switch. From that point on, I knew that my voice and my platform had to be used for more than just sports1. (Polacek 2018)

At the next game played for his Miami Heat, James and his teammates posed for a photo with hoodies over their faces—the same look that Zimmerman claimed Martin was striking that moved Zimmerman to approach him. The hashtag, #wearetrayvonmartin, was next to the photo.

Since then, LeBron has been extremely active and vocal in his fight to eradicate racial injustice. He contributed millions of dollars to the depressed areas of Akron. He paid the tuition for many students attending the University of Akron. He inspired the Cleveland Cavaliers to wear t-shirts with "I Can't Breathe" scrawled across their t-shirts before a game

in 2014 to protest the death of Eric Garner by a New York City police officer. He opened his own school called "I Promise" that caters to underprivileged students. Finally, James started a media company named Uninterrupted with his childhood friend, Maverick Carter, whose goal is the telling of stories that cannot be interrupted by the media. The content produced by the company is designed to allow athletes and other celebrities to speak their mind without being interrupted or having their commentary edited down without their permission. The shows vary in form and presentation, but all desire to get messages, especially those about social justice, out to the wider public. Uninterrupted released *The Shop* in 2014. Its purpose is to sit politicians, celebrities, and athletes down in barber shop seats to talk about whatever is on their minds. The company also produced *More than an Athlete*—a documentary that tracks LeBron and his three best friends as they travel from the streets of Akron as kids to the top of the basketball world together. Finally, *Shut Up and Dribble* is a three-part documentary series that focuses on the history of Black athlete activism.

The striving for racial justice is at the heart of all of Uninterrupted's productions, and the means to pursue it has quite a bit to do with athletes using their minds and voices (and not just their bodies) in an unfiltered, unvarnished manner. LeBron's production company is, in one way, attempting to put the Black mind on stage when the body is already center stage. This amounts to nothing less than an effort to stitch together mind and body through the motivation to confront racial injustice. However, how are we to understand the relationship between mind, body, and the quest for racial justice? The three are interrelated to be sure and are all thrown into relief when James is told to shut up and dribble, yet the nature of the relationship between the three is somewhat obscure. In the next section, I hope to remove some of the obfuscation with the help of religion.

3. The Tripartite Human Being

LeBron clearly was not a fractured being when he heard that someone told him to shut and dribble. By this time, his own voice and mind had been grounded long before Ingraham uttered those words. Still, her phrase irritated him, and his response has been immediate and extensive. On one level, being told to shup up and do anything will get a reaction from just about anyone. *LeBron James* being told to shut up and dribble may register at an entirely different level and his response will bend more ears than if it were coming from almost any other athlete; but still, how are we to relate LeBron's mind, body, and passion about social justice so that his reaction to shut up and dribble can be better understood? Mind, body, and social justice interact with each other to ensure that mind and body are equally valued, and this is made possible in LeBron's case through the ideal of racial justice that he has his sights set on. Hence, a tripartite anthropology is needed to shed light on this matter.

Dichotomy, however, has been a prevalent means of understanding who we are. Whether promoted in the Bible or ancient Greek philosophy and carried on by Western philosophy, the argument that we are made up of two things, mind (or soul) and body, persists today. The second Genesis creation story creation narrative provides us with a dichotomous anthropology by suggesting that each individual is composed of two parts. God forms Adam strictly from material elements and then breathes life into him, as stated in Genesis 2:7. "Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Because there is no mention of a pre-existent soul, the widely held interpretation is that God's breath, *ruah* in Hebrew, constitutes the spirit that animates the material body. Here, we have two entities, body and spirit, but not necessarily a dualism. We find another example in Ezekiel 37. Here, God leads Ezekiel to a valley of dry human bones. Then God instructs Ezekiel to prophesy that these bones, the bones of dead Israelites, will come to life, and God says, "I will put my Spirit in you and you will live." In both cases, the divine provides the material human with its animating spirit, and that alone is what gives the body life. Again, there is no talk about a pre-existent soul in either story, hence there is no conflict between the spirit and soul in the Jewish account of what a human being is—they are the same. Franz Delitzsch clarifies:

"He then breathed into this form the creature spirit, which, because it originated after the manner of breathing, may just as well be called His spirit as man's spirit, because it is His breath made into the spirit of man" (Delitzsch 1885, p. 102).

Dualism is on display in one sense in Plato's *Phaedo*. It is the incorporeal soul that possesses the ability, even the longing, for participation in the similarly incorporeal, perfect Forms—the ground of true intellect. The soul's engagement with the Forms renders the world intelligible through the application of universal (provided by the Forms) features of everyday objects. However, the corporeal, finite, visible body often prevents the soul from participating with the Forms. Hence, in *Phaedo*, the body is deemed the prison of the soul (Plato 1966, p. 86e). Though Aristotle did not agree with any separate ontology for the Forms or even of their existence, he appropriated (and lower-cased) Plato's Forms within his own philosophical system. One would be hard-pressed to classify Aristotle as a dualist, as his notion of the soul is the form that actualizes the human being through the body. As an alternative, the soul and body are so deeply interdependent that thinking of them as separate substances is difficult. Either way, a kind of dichotomy, at the very least, is pervasive in Ancient Greek philosophy.

Cartesian dualism brings Enlightenment authority into our anthropology that persists with us today. Rene Descartes' splitting of mind and body on epistemological grounds in the seventeenth century created a culturally, and philosophically, powerful dualism. We are essentially mind separated from body, and while the body exists, we can infer from Descartes that it is subordinate to the mind (Descartes 2003). His and others' dualisms have been challenged for centuries on the grounds that they constitute an oversimplified binary and therefore do not accurately describe the human experience. However, for our purposes, the line "shut up and dribble" effectively splits mind and body and turns Cartesian dualism on its head by placing the latter over the former. Potentially, Descartes' emphasis on the mind over the body could be of use in comprehending LeBron's need to be heard and not just be a body dribbling. However, the simple reconfiguring of the body and mind together under a dualistic framework is not what is going on with James.

Dualistic or dichotomous anthropologies struggle to explain LeBron's hyper focus on addressing racial injustice head on. If we were only discussing how he puts his mind and body back together after Ingraham's comment, perhaps his retort would only have been "I will not shut up and dribble," but what would he then talk about? Basketball? His family? No, Ingraham is telling him not to speak on political matters, and that is what he refuses to be silent on. Furthermore, it is certain political matters that, when pursued doggedly, light up his mind and give voice to these matters. The body comes in not only when he is ordered to dribble but also because the primary site of racial injustice in the United States is the maltreatment and even destruction of Black bodies. The ideal of racial justice is *in* James, and his mind and body are enlisted to chase it. Hence, a tripartite anthropology is called for here where a triangulation of three parts in relationship work together to create a whole person.

There exist three primary ways to view the human being as made up of three parts. The first one is Plato's tripartite soul as found in the *Republic*. Plato does seemingly equivocate on the nature of the soul, as we recall his defense of a two-part soul in the *Phaedo*. However, Plato might argue that he is discussing the soul's immortality in the *Phaedo*, and hence its contrast with the mortal body, whereas the *Republic* is largely a series of dialogues about the citizens' relationship to the polis. Therefore, discussing the soul in this context will be different. In Book IX of the *Republic* Plato lays out the facets of the soul which are often referred to with a kind of shorthand. They are the "rational," the "spirited," and the "appetitive." Socrates says,

> One part was the organ whereby a man learns, and another that whereby he shews spirit. The third was so multiform that we were unable to address it by a single appropriate name; so we named it after that which is its most important and strongest characteristic. We called it appetitive, on account of the violence of the appetites of hunger, thirst, and sex, and all their accompaniments; and

> we called it peculiarly money-loving, because money is the chief agent in the gratification of such appetites. (Plato 1923, p. 318)

The rational is essentially the mind, or the mind's most important quality. The mind possesses the ability to apply reason to the world to gauge options and make the best decision possible. According to Plato, when the rational is allowed to rule one's life over and against the other two parts, one can live a flourishing life. Alternatively, the spirited is the heart and is associated with expressing noble values such as courage. Yet, it also is the emotional center, and therefore it can also be foolhardy and steer the body into risky situations if the rational is minimally involved or not involved at all. The appetitive, as Plato suggests, is represented by the stomach, and if left unchecked, will seek to satisfy bodily appetites no matter the cost.

Interestingly, Plato ties each of these parts of the soul to three different groups of people in the polis. The rational is represented by the ruling class, who rules fairly and wisely when reason rules the day. This class is, after all, the most educated group in the polis, so they are uniquely equipped to resist the power of their emotions or appetite and apply reason liberally, according to Plato. The spirited is represented by the military class who must exhibit spirit in the form of courage and power in conjunction with their reason, though courage is more necessary than reason in battle. The appetitive is represented by the underclass who are governed by greed, gluttony, sexual gratification, and bodily satisfaction in general. By associating the three parts of the soul to classes of people, Plato is revealing his conservative political side. If each individual possesses these parts of their soul, then the polis necessarily reflects these parts with little chance for social mobility. Moreover, Plato's need to ground the parts of the soul with a political arrangement discloses that his triangulation is not very helpful in thinking about Lebron James. The body that is being told to dribble is not necessarily impulsive and always seeking pleasure, and the mind that is being told to keep quiet owns emotions *and* reason.

Sigmund Freud's three-part architecture of the mind tracks loosely with Plato's tripartite soul (Freud 1990). While the ego does not equal the rational, the superego does not equal the spirited, and the id does not equal the appetitive, both Plato and Freud's model do not clarify Lebron's situation whatsoever. In part, because Freud's three parts of the psyche do not take into account the fleshly body itself (just the pleasure principle of the id that is satisfied in material ways), his theory omits a significant feature of LeBron's situation. In addition, the demands of the superego are given to you without your choice. In LeBron's case, racial injustice is instructing, not forcing, him to do and say certain things; his involvement in political discourse is voluntary.

The Christian accounting of the tripartite or trichotomous human being, I argue, is the best model (though not perfect) to apply to James' orientation towards racial injustice in light of those telling him to shut up and dribble.[3] For the most part, it is based on the apostle Paul's statement in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."[4] The entire person comprised spirit, soul, and body. Otherwise, something essential is left out. This trichotomy was worked out by the early Church fathers and subsequent theologians in the following way. The body is, of course, made up of material elements and the soul consists of immaterial elements that we are born with. The mind takes up the most space within the soul. Rationality, emotions, volition, perception, and even consciousness comprise the soul in the Christian understanding of the term. Hence, the body and soul interact with each other in tension. Akin to Plato and Freud's formulations, the body alone does what it desires, and the soul is that which may sit on the sidelines or step up to curb or stop the body's actualization of its own pleasure.

According to Paul, we cannot think of the human being, who strives to be content, by only thinking in terms of body and soul regarding human beings. If there is only body and soul, each person has no chance of living a life whereby the soul somehow controls the ambitions of the body. After all the soul is human, and as the doctrine of Original Sin dictates, it too is corrupted. Therefore, the addition of the divine spirit into Paul's

anthropology furnishes him with that third leg of the stool that provides stability. This addition, which was undoubtedly due to the influence of Greek thought on Paul, is meant to infuse the human problem of simply negotiating body and soul with a divine spark that both body and soul have a rudder to guide them as they interact with each other.

The Christian tradition affirms that we are born with body, soul, and the capacity to receive the spirit. Upon believing in the Christian version of the Christ event, the spirit enters from the outside, just as it did at Jesus' baptism and at Pentecost. Once received, whether through baptism or conversion or other means, it goes to work on one's soul and body. The distinction between those who have received the spirit and those who have not is made clear in the New Testament. For instance, as Ephesians 1:17 conveys, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him." For those who either do not acknowledge the spirit bestowed on them or do not receive it at all, they are "unspiritual," and there God's gifts provided by the spirit are withheld, as 1 Corinthians 2:14 states, "Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

It must be said that Christian dichotomists forge their disagreement with trichotomists by conflating soul and spirit thus composing the individual as spirit and body alone. Drawing on the seeming two parts of Adam at creation as well as several other New Testament passages that talk only about flesh and spirit, they take a Manichean view of the human being. Galatians 5:16–17 suggests such a dichotomy. "Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want." In turn, as Paul writes late in Romans Chapter 8, "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." Here, life is a constant battle between oppositional qualities within each of us: good and bad, light and darkness, spirit and flesh.

Yet, if the divine spirit or Holy Spirit comes upon us at a certain time, are we merely flesh until that event occurs? What of the mind that is innate, even if rationally but not emotionally inchoate early on? Indeed, Martin Luther suggests such a conflation between soul and spirit when he writes, "The second part, the soul, is this same spirit, so far as its nature is concerned, but viewed as performing a different function, namely, giving life to the body and working through the body" (Luther 2007, p. 302). However, Luther's apparent dichotomy is illusion—soul and spirit are of the same nature (invisible, infinite)—the two are really separate entities.

> It is its (the soul's) nature to comprehend not incomprehensible things, but such things the reason can know and understand. Indeed, reason is the light of this dwelling; and unless the spirit, which is lighted with the brighter light of faith, controls this light of reason it cannot but be in error. For it is too feeble to deal with things divine. To these two parts of man (the soul and spirit) the Scriptures ascribe many things, such as wisdom and knowledge—wisdom to the spirit, knowledge to the soul. (Luther 2007, p. 302)

As Luther explains, the soul is necessary in Christian anthropology to explain the invisible mind and its ability to gather knowledge *and* its susceptibility to error. While the soul/mind and the divine spirit are of the same substance, each is housed in radically different containers. With the soul contained within the body, it is human. Human reason lights this "dwelling," but it can never "deal with things divine" nor attain "wisdom," and the finite body is certainly not made of the same stuff of the soul and spirit because it is limited by time and space.

Luther, as usual, moors his writing to Scripture. In addition to the Thessalonians passage quoted earlier, Hebrews 4:12 displays the tripartite individual through the use of Scripture. "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." We have soul, body, and spirit here, and it is Scripture

that makes clear the difference between soul and spirit as well as that the body is separate from the two (and can be pierced by Scripture as well). The implication here is that the soul is the seat of the "thoughts and intentions of the heart," and that Scriptural descriptions of the penetrating divine spirit that is not directed by our own desire fully differentiates our soul from the spirit. The relationship between soul, body, and spirit according to traditional Christian theology is one where the spirit, when received, can engage the soul so that it can prevent the body from pursuing pleasures of the flesh. If the soul is not engaged with the spirit, then the mind is let loose to give into temptation, and the body usually follows. In other words, the soul and body, as parts of the human being, have been sullied by sin. Absent the spirit to take over the soul, thereby governing the body, sin is allowed to express itself. Paul expresses the proper spiritual takeover of the soul in 1 Corinthians 2:16. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." Our soul/mind does not possess the capacity to know the mind of God, and once that is admitted and the spirit is permitted to rule the soul, our mind is the mind of Christ.

I detail the tripartite Christian anthropology for two primary reasons. One is to distinguish it from dichotomies that fail to capture how mind and body need another object to triangulate as that third piece exists "higher" than the other two so that mind and body can work together for their mutual benefit. Plato's rational soul and Freud's ego work in this way, however, to my second reason, it is the tripartite person displayed in Christian theology that most accurately models how LeBron James is living out his reckoning with his own mind and body as they strive to achieve racial justice. Because "shut up and dribble" effectively splits mind from body in order to diminish the mind, a model is required that plainly distinguishes the two. Plato and Freud involve the body, but only indirectly through its supposed conceptual expression in the appetitive and the id respectively. LeBron's body—not an expression of his body—has been commanded to dribble, and his mind (soul in Christian terms) *in toto* has been commanded to express itself, not just a part of his mind.

Just as the spirit communicates with the soul to move the soul and body in the direction of God's will, so does the principle of racial justice communicate with LeBron's mind to provoke the speaking out on political matters. Just as the spirit aids in the correct alignment of soul and body, the principle of racial justice helps LeBron recognize that he is "more than an athlete" that will not "shut up and dribble," despite the fact that this trope has been used against African Americans for centuries with great effect, or that because his body's accomplishments on the court furnishes him with a loud megaphone, it is his duty to express his mind on matters of racial injustice. The light bulb turning on for LeBron after the murder of Trayvon Martin can be thought of as a kind of conversion experience. Before Trayvon's death, James, in a sense, was just a basketball player—the body was the focus, and his public speaking was reserved for "sports speak." It was the killing of an innocent, unarmed Black teenager that ignited his mind and aroused his compulsion to speak out and take action; not unlike the born-again Christian who suddenly cannot keep quiet.

4. Concluding Thoughts

In this essay, I attempted to analyze the meaning of "shut up and dribble" and make sense of LeBron James' response to the phrase that was directed to him by Laura Ingraham. It is the Christian tripartite anthropology that best clarifies aspects of both objects of study. Several additional notes, however, are required here. One, I am not arguing that LeBron is consciously drawing on a Christian anthropology whatsoever. He has professed a faith in Jesus Christ, but very, very rarely. I am merely trying to make sense of LeBron's recent activism through the instrumental use of the Christian human trichotomy.

Two, LeBron's reaction to "shut up and dribble" has not necessarily been as smooth a ride as has been presented above. Recently, fellow NBA player Enes Kanter called James out for his cherry picking the social justice issues that will not conflict with his corporate sponsorships. James' financial relationship with Nike is tight and very lucrative, possibly because the majority of Nike shoes are produced in China where human rights violations

are well-known. When asked about rights violations in China several years ago, LeBron dodged the question (the NBA has high viewership amongst the Chinese). Before Kanter's Celtics took on James' Lakers in November 2021, Kanter tweeted to "King" James,

> Money over Morals for the "King," Sad & disgusting how these athletes pretend they care about social justice. They really do "shut up & dribble" when Big Boss (Chinese flag emoji). Did you educate yourself about the slave labor that made your shoes or is that not part of your research?"

James' again sidesteps the issue when he retorts that, "he's (Kanter's) definitely someone I wouldn't give my energy to." Perhaps the Jordan Rules have not been completely abandoned. Moreover, speaking out on social justice issues, especially after the murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, has proven not to be Kryptonite to corporations nor to the NBA. Apparently speaking out on rights violations in China is, as Houston Rockets' general manager Daryl Morey discovered in October of 2019 (Yglesias 2019).

Additionally, the title of James' *More than an Athlete* documentary series (the first season covers LeBron) would seem to be about the story of a politically active James who demonstrates his activism outside of play on the court. Instead, the documentary merely showcases LeBron's rise from the streets of Akron, Ohio to NBA superstar through the eyes of James and his three closest friends who are employed by him. LeBron, of course, is entitled to produce whatever he wants. Yet, stories of athletes' greatness are most often told by others such as in "The Last Dance" about the 1998 Chicago Bulls. *More than an Athlete* could have kept its title and rather chronicled LeBron's evolution not only as a basketball player but also as an athlete activist.

All of that said, James' quest to achieve racial justice with his voice, resources, and time as one of the most famous athletes on the planet is noteworthy. Ingraham's "shut up and dribble" did not kick start LeBron's activism, but it undoubtedly gave it renewed life. One could view LeBron's response to Ingraham as simply a form of revenge—she told him to shut up and he rightly refused in grand fashion. Yet, as this essay hopefully demonstrated, this is an oversimplified analysis. Yes, religion is not the only lens through which to examine his response, but it brings into focus the three components of LeBron James' mission by fetching a theological concept that has been brewing for over two thousand years.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 Ingraham, 17.

2 Ingraham, 3.

3 There is considerable debate on this issue. Luther himself acknowledged this. At issue is whether soul and spirit are truly separate. Because this is an issue has much to do with whether we are born with spirit or it is given to us upon recognition of the truth. If we are born with the divine spirit, then soul and spirit bear no difference, as the Hebrew Bible's telling speaks of it. If the spirit is given at a certain time, which the New Testament seems to speak of, then, if we are born with a soul/mind, then the spirit is different, that which originates from a different source.

4 All Bible verses are taken from the New Revised Standard Version translation.

References

Bieler, Des. 2020. LeBron James, Told by Laura Ingraham to 'Shut Up and Dribble,' Calls Her Out Over Drew Brees. *Washington Post*, June 4. Available online: https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2020/06/04/lebron-james-calls-out-laura-ingraham-over-drew-brees/ (accessed on 24 August 2021).

Delitzsch, Franz. 1885. *A System of Biblical Psychology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, p. 102.

Descartes, Rene. 2003. *Discourse on Method*. Translated by Desmond M. Clarke. New York: Penguin Books.

Freud, Sigmund. 1990. *The Ego and the Id*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Luther, Martin. 2007. *Luther's Works*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, vol. 21, p. 302.

Parke, Caleb. 2020. Herschel Walker Explains He Spoke at RNC Because 'People Don't Really Know Donald Trump'. August 25. Available online: https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-rnc-herschel-walker-speech (accessed on 3 August 2021).

Plato. 1923. *The Republic*. Translated by Alexander Dunlop Lindsay. London: J.M. Dent, p. 318.
Plato. 1966. *Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 1*. Translated by Harold North Fowler. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 86e.
Polacek, Scott. 2018. LeBron James on Trayvon Martin Shooting: 'I Just Started to Think About My Boys'. November 15. Available online: https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2806307-lebron-james-on-trayvon-martin-shooting-i-just-started-to-think-of-my-boys (accessed on 15 September 2021).
Yglesias, Matthew. 2019. The Raging Controversy Over the NBA, China, and the Hong Kong Protests, Explained Globalization Is Exporting Chinese Authoritarianism Rather Than American Democracy. October 7. Available online: https://www.vox.com/2019/10/7/20902700/daryl-morey-tweet-china-nba-hong-kong (accessed on 1 September 2021).