

## May 2022 Entry (Thoughts on Souls)

“In common parlance, the word ‘soul’ pops up everywhere. We may speak of a vast, soulless corporation or describe an athlete as the ‘heart and soul’ of his team. Soul music gets us swaying. We want our lover, body and soul. In each case, ‘soul’ connotes deep feeling and core values. ‘Feelings form the basis for what humans have described for millennia as the ... soul or spirit,’ the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio eloquently expounds in his groundbreaking book *Descartes’ Error* (1994).” – Michael Jawer, “[Do only humans have souls, or do animals possess them too?](#)” Aeon.co (undated)

This month, I turn my thoughts to the concept of the Soul. These are macrosocial thoughts on how we structure the world, I am not here to discuss – nor do I find it useful to do so for my purposes – whether souls exist, are immortal, or any ‘religious’ arguments or implications. It is sufficient for my purposes that the majority of humans who have lived at least for the last several millennia believe they do, have created forms and words to express that belief, and have done this or that historically or in their daily lives in response to that generally unquestioned, culturally-entrenched belief:

“In many religious, philosophical, and mythological traditions there is belief in a soul as the incorporeal essence of a living being. Soul or psyche (Ancient Greek “to breathe,” cf. Latin ‘anima’) comprises the mental abilities of a living being: reason, character, feeling, consciousness, qualia, memory, perception, thinking, etc. Depending on the philosophical system, a soul can either be mortal or immortal.” – from Wikipedia article, “[Soul](#).”

As a recent widely-reported example, consider the moment when Ukraine’s Ambassador to the United Nations, [Sergiy Kyslytsya](#), famously said to his Russian counterpart Ambassador [Vasily Nebenzya](#), “There is no purgatory for war criminals. They go straight to hell, ambassador.” Most people ‘got it,’ many found amusement in the comment, and very few required any explanation.

Belief in the soul, without any evidence, is the *one truly universal human faith*, regardless of the philosophical or theological details attached to the finer points. This belief persists in spite of, and primally separate from the withering human belief in an [anthropomorphic](#) supreme being or even a [singular supreme being](#). The belief in the soul is considered axiomatic such that we expect intelligent extraterrestrials to hold the same basic belief without question, even if they do not believe in any [supreme being or being that serves as a celestial avatar of their kind](#).

A tremendous amount of very consequential history depends solely on the common belief in the soul, especially an immortal human soul, for example, the [Reformation](#) was about the belief in [Purgatory](#) and people’s willingness to part with money (“[When a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs](#)”) with a little stretching and twisting of official Church doctrine and an extension of Papal authority to Purgatory. Although the causes of the Reformation were mostly political, social and economic, *it’s hard to imagine the Reformation without Purgatory*. Purgatory was here greater and more consequential to common lives than even the looming threat of the [Ottomans](#) creeping up through the Balkans.

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(on the axiomatic soul)

“If one steers clear of this confusion and recognizes that all systematically organized research and knowledge of every realm of phenomena is equally a form of science, it is then proper to recognize that there are several different orders of natural phenomena .... The four orders are the inorganic, the vital organic, the mental organic and the super-organic, or social.” – Clarence Marsh Case, [Outlines of Introductory Sociology](#) (1924), pp. xvi-xvii.

At the most basic level, people think of the soul (regardless of other religious beliefs or personal mumbo-jumbo spirituality) as the basic animating force that separates life from inorganic matter (rocks and so forth) and life from that which was living and is now dead – commonly envisioned as the soul having departed the body. And from this latter part, comes the question, well where does the soul go when the body dies, and all of the thought that has flowed from it over tens of thousands of years. Consider that [Merriam-Webster online dictionary starts with that very concept at “soul”](#):

“1: the immaterial essence, animating principle, or actuating cause of an individual life.”

As if that was the *single most agreeable meaning* of the word that the editors could find, the basic starting point for all of the other jumble of meanings that flow down the page for the lexical entry on “soul.”

But back to the point, the soul as people think most commonly and basically agree, is that which makes the living living, that which separates the inorganic (Prof. Case’s First Order of Natural Phenomenon) from “the vital organic” (Prof. Case’s Second Order of Natural Phenomenon), and even to very arguable extent, is responsible for the other two orders, the “mental organic” and “super organic or social” (the Third and Fourth Orders of Natural Phenomenon).

Moving to the frontiers of science, the soul – depending on how literally the term is taken – is the product of conception and of [abiogenesis](#); abiogenesis is commonly envisioned as matter gets a soul (even if science might quibble with that vision). It is the thing that Frankenstein was somehow given from the mad collection of parts assembled and energized that we cannot create even now by pouring all of the known chemicals and quantities of the human body into a vat and stirring the mess around (à la [Carl Sagan](#)’s famous demonstration in Cosmos). [Abiogenesis](#) is distinguishable from conception which creates a fetus in that [conception](#) (see also Merriam Webster "[conception](#)" at 1a) is the reproductive act of two living creatures, whereas abiogenesis is the moment that inanimate matter becomes animate. The ‘soul’ in the most basic meaning was also the starting point of early 20th Century biological theory called [Vitalism](#) which has now been shunted aside and is derided as “alternative medicine” but was very vital in its time (e.g., Professor Case’s “the vital organic,” *supra*).

But in the end, the soul is the universal symbol that we have created to express the difference between the living and the nonliving, by whatever means bestowed, occurred, or obtained. It has the wonderful advantage of being [non-falsifiable](#), almost [axiomatic](#), and very pliable to interpretation such that it has burrowed to the very center of human culture. It has become the object of the [Happiness Meta-Aspect](#):

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“Here, again in short, Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious. The Church was positive on both points. One can hardly think too little of one’s self. One can hardly think too much of one’s soul.” – [G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy, Ch. 6](#) (1908).

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(on philosophy class-ness)

“Let’s take a classic example: the chair. You know a chair, right? Right. So, our world is filled with all kinds of different chairs: big chairs, small chairs, uncomfortable chairs, plastic chairs, E.T. the Extraterrestrial chairs – but up in the world of the forms, there’s just one completely perfect chair, and all the chairs in our world are poor imitations of that one perfect, true, chair.

While this may sound wacky, Plato’s theory of the forms helps clear up the pesky philosophical problem of universals. Or, in plain English: considering how radically different so many versions of a chair can be, how is it that we are still able to recognize them all as chairs? For Plato, the answer is that up in the world of forms, this one perfect chair represents ‘chairness’ itself, the mysterious quality that makes all chairs chairs, even if one is pink and squishy, another green and prickly. This is why the forms are Plato’s representation of truth: they are the true essence of everything we see, know, and think.” – [“Study Guide: The Republic The Forms by Plato,” Shmoop.com, undated.](#)

Everyone who has sat in a basic philosophy class or more likely any intro Ancient Greek philosophy class, knows about chairs and chairness. And philosophy-classness; you can feel it at about 15 minutes into the lecture... Chairs and chairness are the classic example used in philosophy classes around the world (a part of ‘worldness’ I guess) when Plato’s essences are introduced and to the next generation; –ness seems to be the suffix that English has settled upon to signal the essence concept (a poor cousin of Platonic Forms), consider the [Merriam Webster definition at –ness \(noun suffix\)](#):

“state : condition : quality : degree”

As happens so often, what were ‘sort of’ clear and separate concepts, the [Platonic Essence](#) and the Soul, have become commonly conflated over time. For example, when an advertisement for a vehicle states that it has the “soul of a sports car” (we’ve all heard them) are they referring to the “deep feeling and core values” (Michael Jawer regarding the soul, supra) of the sports car, or the essence of sports-car-ness, or that the vehicle being advertised is actually a very inept physical manifestation of the Platonic Form of a sports car? Which is to say it isn’t actually a sports car or anything close, but they want you to think it might be, just a little bit like a sports car so you’ll buy it (sort of like the sporty extras package on a minivan).

Whatever is meant is actually very abstract and virtually meaningless in any concrete sense, but are things to which we have long been culturally attuned, such that they have become the [cognitive schema](#), the *core and essence* of our culture:

“For Plato, Forms are more real than any objects that imitate them. Though the Forms are timeless and unchanging, physical manifestations of Forms are in a constant state of change. Where Forms are unqualified perfection, physical objects are qualified and conditioned.

The Forms, according to Plato, are the essences of various objects. Forms are the qualities that an object must have to be considered that type of object. For example, there are countless chairs in the world but the Form of ‘chairness’ is at the core of all chairs. Plato held that the world of Forms is transcendent to our own world, the world of substances, which is the essential basis of reality.” – Jennifer Wilber, “[An Introduction to Plato’s Theory of Forms](#),” Owlcation, July 8, 2019.

[Plato](#) in all his weirdness, was simply being a human, nothing more, nothing less; such [dignitas](#) and [gravitas](#) are attached to the name that it is sometimes difficult to think of Plato as a human being, we can hardly recognize instances when he was trying to be comedic. Plato’s forms simply indicate that to humans, ideas are as real as the physical world – a [Kantian](#) inspired theme that runs throughout GGDM’s macrosociology. They are equal, each in its own sphere, the facts of the physical world and the facts of the cultural-cognitive world (see argument in [2 Culture](#), Aspects of Sociology) and the error of the 20th Century was to treat ideas as less than real. But I digress ... in the matter at hand, the soul, without any supporting empirical evidence, is not only the one true universal faith of humanity, but it is equally real in our culture, in human civilization, as any physical reality. And that goes a long way toward explaining much of human action throughout history.

“Plato argues that such recognition is contingent on the prior existence of a form or an essence, chairness, or the idea of a chair. Such an idea is pure form, and all empirical chairs are simply approximations of this idea.” – (authorship unattributed), “[Essentialism – Essences And Knowledge](#),” sciencejrank.org, undated.

Now, if one adds to this the seemingly modern (but actually very old), Western [egocentric](#) notion that each human (or each individual creature, pet, if you are willing to go that far) is unique, and will never be duplicated exactly in the history of the universe – then it easily becomes apparent that the soul of that person is the Platonic Essence of that person’s individuality or persona – the sum total of the experiences, history, thoughts, life impressions of that person.

Thus, in theory, as Philosophy professors like to quip, there is out there a Platonic Form of Platonicness or that Plato’s soul would be the Platonic Form of Plato. And each of us would be the Platonic essence of ‘you-ness’ or ‘me-ness’ as our individual forms, and somewhere out there is a Platonic form of “Jennifer Wilber-ness” (Owlcation quote, *supra*) which would be effectively the same as her soul. Thus the esteem which we hold for Platonic form (and for ideas and abstract concepts generally, of all sorts) – as a second equally-real set of facts in the human world, becomes the esteem to which we hold our own souls, to which our physical existence seems then a mere frail inconvenient and poorly-formed manifestation in the ‘real’ universe – our bodies age, but Platonic Form or our souls, by definition, cannot change for being as they are, perfect essences of whatever we think we are (thus, we think of souls as immortal).

Can you feel the philosophy-classness yet?

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(on animal souls – human or otherwise)

“As humans, we do not inhabit this earth alone. We live with other creations that were made by God for us to take care of. Animals are one of the most important creations by God that was entrusted to us. We even have pets that give us companionship, love, and joy...

However, despite their consciousness, they remain soulless or that they do not have spirits. For this reason, when they die, they do not enter into an afterlife. In other words, they will not live in eternity with us. The reason for this is because they are not created by the image and likeness of God. They do not have the body, soul, and spirit – and for this reason, they do not go to heaven or hell like us....

Animals are dichotomous beings. This means that they do have bodies and a particular kind of soul, which gives them consciousness, but they do not have free will. The knowledge of free will gives man the knowledge of what is good and what is evil.

Animals, however, do not have this. Instead, animals do actions based on their ‘animal instinct’ and the ‘circle of life’ where there is a predator and a prey. Because of their lack of free will, God has entrusted humans to have dominion over animals as stated in Genesis 1:28,

God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’

Man, on the other hand, is made in the image and likeness of God. We are made with three parts, the body, the soul, and the spirit.

Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’” – Glory Dy, “[Do Animals Have Souls?](#)” Christianity.com, December 28, 2020.

Sometime in 1985 or 1986, I was at the ‘rifle range’ for our regular [Marine Corps](#) marksmanship qualifications; I have always thought that this incident probably occurred in boot camp on [Parris Island](#) in 1985, but I cannot be certain. At the rifle range, Marines are divided into two groups, one group goes down to the ‘bunker’ or ‘pit’ and pulls targets for the other group who shoots in the morning, and then they switch places in the afternoon (most prefer to shoot in the morning because it’s freak’n hot out there).

The ‘bunker’ is a hillside facing the shooting lines, carved into the backside of the embankment is a concrete wall, overhead, and cat walkway, and on the backside of the walkway is a line of metal target frames that can be raised and lowered. The targets are put on the frames and run up so that they appear over the top of the embankment and the shooters fire at the targets. When the Marines manning the target hear the telltale snap of a round hitting the target, the target is pulled down and the new bullet hole is marked with a spotter and the target run back up so that the shooter can see where their shot hit on the target. Sometimes rounds hit the metal carriages and ricochet back into

the bunker, sometimes rounds hit the concrete berm and spray concrete into the bunker.

Behind the line of target carriages is usually another hill on which the rounds that punch through the targets impact. It is a necessary backstop. I looked up for a moment during live firing and was shocked to notice a dog – a stray dog – running around on the hillside backstop where the rounds were hitting, seemingly oblivious to the danger. My partner on the target, a 17 year old Southern white boy as I recall, said to me ‘it’s ok to kill a dog because they have no soul.’

I was absolutely [flabbergasted](#), [gobsmacked](#) when I heard that. It was entirely contrary to whatever I had been raised to believe and I pushed back questioning how he could believe such a thing. I could not believe that a modern person was saying this to me; it seemed so backward, so reactionary, like something I might hear from the [Middle Ages](#). I am not implying here that Ms. Dy would agree with the assertion boldly made by that young Marine, but I can see them co-existing within the spectrum of the same idea that animals don’t have souls, and I have wondered many times since that day how many dogs have been killed by that – to me patently absurd – belief? Humans, dogs, horses, all other life seems to be killed as a consequence of human beliefs and the same is always the case in any and every [religious end-of-times](#) (as in God believes that certain humans are ‘evil’ and condemns them to hell) and [alien – as in intelligent, technologically advanced extraterrestrials who often serve as a sci-fi proxy for God’s judgment of humanity – invasion movies](#).

The young Marine’s statement speaks to a different view of the soul, one which I think conflates “personhood” with having a soul. It takes some work to get to that point because it does not seem that such is implied in the common understanding of ‘soul’ in our civilization; and besides, there is a difference between distinguishing human (sapient/sentient) souls from other creatures (a distinction that I do not think holds well) and saying that only humans possess souls. Even [Thomas Aquinas](#) would not go that far:

“In Judaism and in some Christian denominations, (except for angels) only human beings have immortal souls (although immortality is disputed within Judaism and the concept of immortality may have been influenced by Plato). For example, Thomas Aquinas, borrowing directly from Aristotle’s *On the Soul*, attributed ‘soul’ (anima) to all organisms but argued that only human souls are immortal.” – from Wikipedia article, “Soul.”

So, like the concept of Purgatory (leading to the Reformation), apparently once some people have the concept of Heaven and Hell (which I have characterized previously is a cheapened version of [samsāra](#)), then animals cannot have souls in their view, lacking ‘free will’ or ‘consciousness’ (by which is probably meant “extended self-awareness and autobiographical memory” in the words of [Prof. Damasio](#)). As suggested by my own upbringing, there are various views on this, most people don’t even consider the issue and assume that animals have souls because ‘[anima](#)’ is one of the base concepts of the soul and so, easily one thing that any living creature has a ‘soul’ (especially those that can feel hurt or mirror human emotion) without differentiation. One could even go further and argue that this view was given new life by the notable influx of Eastern beliefs during the [‘counter-culture’ movement](#):

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“Other religions (most notably Hinduism and Jainism) believe that all living things from the smallest bacterium to the largest of mammals are the souls themselves (*Atman, jiva*) and have their physical representative (the body) in the world. The actual self is the soul, while the body is only a mechanism to experience the karma of that life. Thus if one sees a tiger then there is a self-conscious identity residing in it (the soul), and a physical representative (the whole body of the tiger, which is observable) in the world.” – from Wikipedia article, “Soul.”

I do not know or recall whether my mother or my family ever explicitly said that animals have souls, or that I ever asked (or thought to ask as a child, which suggests to me that the view expressed in Christianity.com originates with insecure religious adults who are overthinking the issue), but as part of the wholehearted compassion, sentimentality, and sensitivity toward animals that I learned (especially our pets), that animals have souls like ours was just an unthinking, unquestioned assumption.

And he probably hadn't given much thought to what he said to me that day in the bunker (not to mention the 'thou shalt not kill' part when he was in the Marines whose job it is to kill and they do it very well). So we have here two 17-year olds from opposite ends of the cultural spectrum of late [Cold War](#) America, meeting in the bunker and inadvertently exchanging views related to one of the most consequential questions of human civilization. This effect of disparate contact between peoples is well-known to explorers, migrating tribesmen, [sophists](#), historians, [movie-makers](#), and cultural intellectuals and is a well-known effect of nationalized [military conscription](#) and offered here as a corollary to the discussion of hegemonic empires in GGDM section [4 Order](#).

By Charles W. Phillips