

Introduction

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But (*thou*) which didst man's soul of nothing make,
And when to nothing it was fallen again,
To make it new, the form of man didst take;
“And God with God, becam'st a man with men.”

Thou that hast fashion'd twice this Soul of ours,
So that she is by double title thine,
Thou only know'st her nature and her pow'rs;
Her subtil form thou only canst define.¹

THERE IS SOMETHING CURIOUS about the frequency with which the term “soul” is now used in English in reference not to human beings but to inanimate objects. There is soul food and soulless fast food,² soul music and soulful music, and apparently, according to a friend, even my old Raleigh 3-speed bike has “got soul.”

Such language is one of many indications hidden within modern life that, whatever one may think in the clamorous halls of the academy *about* human nature, there are certain practices of humanity with which we are

1. Sir John Davies, “*Nosce teipsum*: Of the Soul of Man and the Immortality thereof,” stanzas 16, 17 (p. 4).

2. As William Gibson’s *Pattern Recognition* puts it “My God, don’t they know? This stuff is simulacra of simulacra of simulacra. A diluted tincture of Ralph Lauren, who had himself diluted the glory days of Brooks Brothers, who themselves had stepped on the product of Jermyn Street and Savile Row. . . . But Tommy surely is the null point, the black hole. There must be some Tommy Hilfiger event horizon, beyond which it is impossible to be more derivative, more removed from the source, more devoid of soul.” Gibson, *Pattern Recognition*, 17–18.

2 The Resounding Soul

intertwined in daily existence. When faced with one another, we serve and we cherish, we enjoy and we mourn, we forgive and make promises. All of this is enacted because, so to speak, “that is the kind of animal that I am,” and, likewise, in so enacting, I acknowledge the weight, not of the other’s brain (roughly 1.25 kgs), but of their person, their substance. The act of making a promise to another person, for example, is a granting of a claim that is not expected of non-human things.³ In such actions we are revealing in lived conviction that human persons differ from other things for they are “animate.”⁴

This enacted conviction is nowhere more evident than in our treatment of disability. We do not treat human beings with severe mental affliction, life-threatening ailments, and debilitating diseases as “lost causes” or “on their way out,” because we know that as persons they are still our friends,⁵ and this relationship is not severed even after their body may deteriorate or depart. To take a recent example, the *New York* magazine film critic David Edelstein makes an illuminating observation about a scene from the film *Still Alice*,⁶ which is about a fictional professor named Alice Howland who discovers that she has Alzheimer’s. In an appendix to the film, a speech from Tony Kushner’s “Angels in America” is delivered in light of the news that the movie’s co-director Richard Glatzer had been diagnosed with the disease ALS (amyotrophic laterals sclerosis). Edelstein remarks, “It’s a speech in which Tony Kushner, writing at the peak of a violent, hopeless AIDS epidemic, finds words to convey what remains when our earthly bodies seem lost. The scene takes you somewhere a neuroscientist can’t—to the soul.”⁷ Why would Edelstein be so bold about “what remains when our earthly bodies seem lost,” about this “more” which animates us even amidst such bodily degradation? On the level of everyday encounter with one another, it should not be surprising that we intuit this basic aspect of human interaction. We rightly balk at crude reductions of persons to some observable trait, which is why we find racism, eugenics, and even most stereotypes to be heinous misrepresentations of the full breadth of one’s humanity.

To this point, all parties—those who embrace the old language of soul and those who reject it—must agree. Even the vociferous commentator who

3. For more on this, see Spaemann and Zaborowski, “An Animal that can Promise and Forgive.”

4. “Between the psyche of an animal and the spirituality of a man there is an enormous distance, an uncrossable gulf.” Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 121.

5. See especially Hans Reinders meditations on disability in his *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*.

6. Adapted from a novel of the same title by Lisa Genova.

7. Edelstein, “Still Alice.”

is dedicated to convincing us that “you’re nothing but a pack of neurons,”⁸ does not intend, when he is attempting to argue for the radical nature of his hypothesis,⁹ to introduce an ethic by which promising and forgiving are rejected and eugenics is embraced. On the contrary, if the hypothesis is to stand, the aim is to take everything that we now call human and reveal just how it emerges from the material basis described. Such a person, who believes that the soul is imaginary,¹⁰ is similarly likely to find the continued ubiquity of the language of soul¹¹ at most puzzling, not unnerving. This confidence is based upon an implicit sense of the separability of these different usages. There is, so it is asserted, on the one hand, a primary and literal notion of “the soul” as a hypothesis by which the pre-modern world accounted for human mental functioning in roughly the same way that we now do with the brain. But though this primary sense is rejected, that does not prevent the term being used in looser and more figurative ways elsewhere.¹²

Perhaps the sentiment behind this breezy dismissal is coherent or even sufficient, but there remains something perplexing about the lingering need to express certain aspects of lived experience with reference to a “dead hypothesis.” Why is the word “soul” still so damn useful?

To answer this question, it is worth reflecting further on the notion of “soulfulness.” It is surely little accident that most of the references with which we started are to *made* things, objects of human artifice. To say that a bike has soul (which is different than saying that it has *a* soul) is surely to say something about the bike—about its vigor, perhaps, or its weathered wisdom—but it is also to say something about human beings. We might, in part, be alluding to the way that the human skill of the artisan is particularly manifest in the made object, or, perhaps to the way that the object is able powerfully to elicit a certain quality “of soul” from those who encounter it, or perhaps both. Nonetheless, to say that fast food is soulless would not, even for someone who believed in souls, mean “fast food is not a human product.” Instead, it seems that we are saying that “this human product fails

8. Crick, *Astonishing Hypothesis*, 3.

9. See Crick, *Astonishing Hypothesis*, 258.

10. “I myself, like many scientists, believe that the soul is imaginary and that what we call our minds is simply a way of talking about the functions of our brains.” Crick, *Of Molecules and Men*, 87.

11. Though one cannot make too much of this, it is interesting to note that according to Google’s Ngram database, whilst the word experienced a steady decline in usage across the twentieth century, this trajectory surprisingly reversed in the mid-1980s to such an extent that as of the most recent data available, it was more common in English than the word “brain.”

12. For an example of such a separation, see Musolino, *Soul Fallacy*, 23.

adequately to express humanity.” Amongst other things, the term “soul” in these phrases is being used as an intensifier, to express the power of human vivacity as it relates to the given objects in various ways.¹³ To put this another way, the term is indicating something about human potential. To say a dance has soul is to indicate that the seed of humanity has flourished and flowered in those actions more completely than elsewhere. In the best art, the human form seems to ring with life in a fashion that can summon tremors of vitality from forgotten depths within the human person.

Just as our lives enact reference to a certain weightiness both in ourselves and in those around us, so also our art implicitly refers to the possibility for growth, for enhanced weightiness to be achieved. It just so happens, furthermore, that the term “soul” is particularly apt in referring to both aspects. This, of course, is no accident. In historical terms the idea of humans as “ensouled” arose not as some bloodless hypothesis, but from within a powerful set of practices concerned with fostering human potentiality and vitality. To understand this point is also to understand why, despite protestations to the contrary from certain academic circles, the soul is still very near at hand.

Know Thyself

There is no doubt that “anthropological enquiry” (in the broadest sense, which now takes place under titles such as philosophy of mind, psychology, cognitive science and neuroscience, theological anthropology, and evolutionary biology) has undergone significant transformation in recent centuries. As the story is generally told, from the sixteenth century onward Western thought forcefully turned away from the old dualist idea of human nature to such an extent that, as one commentator now puts it, “substantial minds are no longer a live option for most of us.”¹⁴ The hard work of science and philosophy regarding the human mind, and related matters such as agency, consciousness, and intentionality have, so it is said, rightly left the soul in the past with other defunct hypotheses. What tends to go

13. The quality of this term can be highlighted further by replacing the term “soul” with “brain” in the prior uses. Rather than highlighting vitality, the later term highlights more of an intellectual or nerdy quality. Thus, “brain food” means “food that feeds the brain” and “brainless fast food” means “stupidly prepared” and so on. A decided shift in the nature of the expressions has occurred.

14. Jaegwon Kim, *Physicalism*, 9. A recent translator of Aristotle’s *De anima* similarly writes: “The predominant philosophic and scientific tradition of the last four hundred years has taken away our souls.” Translator’s introduction by Joe Sachs in Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 5.

unremarked in this way of telling the story is the fact that the most decisive departure from the older anthropological tradition in which the concept of “the soul” was developed has always been anterior to any of these debates.

Anthropological study is unlike any other, for it is the study of what we ourselves are. The self-reflexivity of the enterprise has some crucial consequences. For one thing, one cannot arrive at an understanding of human beings that does not allow for the possibility of self-knowledge without undermining the whole endeavor.¹⁵ For another, the question of why human beings should seek self-knowledge—why am I, that is, engaging in the present activity?—takes on similarly critical importance. It is with regard to this latter issue particularly that the two traditions divide.

To treat the soul as a defunct hypothesis is, rather obviously, to treat it as a hypothesis (or rather a proto-hypothesis¹⁶) in the first place.¹⁷ But this is to import a great mass of assumptions, including, most critically for our purpose here, assumptions regarding the motivations and aim of gaining knowledge about this particular entity (in this case, ourselves). Hypotheses, that is, have been developed as part of a procedure to gain a very specific kind of propositional knowledge, either for the purposes of technical mastery or out of a sense of the intrinsic value of “mapping the world.” To treat the soul as a hypothesis is to assume either that it has always been part of this procedure and is fit to be directed toward such aims, or that it can be imported with minimal damage to the sense of the concept. Both possibilities must, however, on historical grounds, be denied.

To understand why, consider a notable moment from the *Phaedrus*. Before turning to offer some of his most sophisticated reflections on the nature of the soul and its relationship to materiality, immortality, and love, Plato recounts the following interaction between Socrates and his young interlocutor. Phaedrus asks Socrates’ opinion regarding the veracity of the legend of Boreas carrying the princess Orithuia away from a nearby place. Socrates responds that Athenian intellectuals are fond of demystifying the story, saying that Boreas simply stands in for a gust of wind that swept Orithuia away over the cliff to her death. Far from endorsing such rigor (as we might expect a modern “lover of wisdom” to do) Socrates goes on to say that whilst these explanations

15. This feature undergirds arguments such as those presented in Lewis, *Miracles*, ch. 3, and Plantinga and Tooley, *Knowledge of God*, 33–49.

16. As the term hypothesis, in a strict sense, belongs to a procedure involving empirical evidence-based testing not yet developed in the ancient world.

17. For paradigmatic examples of handling the soul as a hypothesis/proto-hypothesis see Churchland, *Brain-Wise*, ch. 2; Churchland, *Engine of Reason*, 17; Musolino, *Soul Fallacy*, 24–25; Metzinger, *Being No One*, 504–5.

are amusing enough . . . they are a job for a man I cannot envy at all. He'd have to be far too ingenious and work too hard. . . . I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend, is this. I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that. That is why I do not concern myself with them. I accept what is generally believed, and, as I was just saying, I look not into them but into my own self: Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature? (229d3–230a6)¹⁸

At the heart of the Socratic temperament is the conviction that focus must fall, before all else, to the cultivation one's own being into its just shape. This theme is articulated to great effect in the *Alcibiades*. There, through highly pointed and personal questions, Socrates gradually enables his young interlocutor to see that the cultivation of any ambition—be it economic or political success or even happiness itself—will end up being both futile and destructive until he learns how to cultivate himself. As he shows him, it is only in this self-cultivation that one can come to see the truth and worth both of oneself and of everything else in the world (see, for example, the progress that Alcibiades makes in 116–24). As they finally come to agree in one of the dialogue's culminating passages: “it is not possible, unless one is moderate and good, to be happy. . . . So it's not one who's gotten rich who will avoid being wretched, but the one who has become moderate. . . . If you are going to manage the affairs of the city correctly and admirably, you must give excellence to the citizens. . . . So you must first get possession of excellence yourself” (134a13–c7).¹⁹ Socrates argues, further, that the only way to cultivate the self is through apprenticing oneself to the Delphic command. As he says, “oh Alcibiades, whether it is easy or not, the situation still holds us like this: if we know ourselves, then we might know how to care for ourselves, but we could never do this when ignorant” (129a7–9, translation ours; cf. 128e10–11).

This Socratic conviction that human life is only worth living in the context of having prioritized the Delphic imperative above all else came to be crystallized in the philosophical schools as they developed over subsequent centuries. As Proclus would write over 750 years later in his commentary on

18. Quotations from Plato, *Phaedrus*, translated by Nehamas and Woodruff. We have consulted the Greek text in Plato, *Phaedrus*, edited by Yunis.

19. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Plato (disputed), *Socrates & Alcibiades*, translated by Johnson. We have consulted the Greek text in Plato, *Alcibiades*, edited by Denyer.

Alcibiades, “we consider the strongest and steadiest foundation for . . . the whole of philosophical contemplation, so to speak, to be the discernment of one’s own being. For when this has been rightly set, we will also be able, in every way, to perceive accurately the good that belongs to us and the evil that fights it.”²⁰

It is in the context of this practice that the notion of “the soul” would be developed.²¹ This is apparent in both the *Alcibiades* and the *Phaedrus*.²² In the *Alcibiades*, the soul is introduced as the answer to the question of what the “it” is that one seeks to know in self-knowledge, which is itself the primary task in cultivating oneself.²³ But this “knowledge of the soul” is equated not with gaining a model of the human person, but rather with a kind of contemplative union with the most elevated aspect of the soul and the reality that underpins it:

S: So, my friend Alcibiades, if a soul is to know itself, it must look into a soul, and particularly into that region of it in which the excellence of the soul, wisdom, resides and to anything else that this is similar to?

A: It seems so to me . . .

S: So it is to God that this aspect of soul is similar, and one looking to this and knowing all that is divine, both God and thought, would in this way also most know himself.

(133b7–c6)²⁴

Although the second Socratic speech in the *Phaedrus* is famous for its description of the tripartite soul, the purpose of this vivid depiction is too

20. Our translation; Greek text: Proclus, *Alcibiadem*, 20, lines 1–7. With regard to the question of authorship: in one sense, our case would in fact be strengthened if *First Alcibiades* was written not by Plato, but by a philosopher from a subsequent generation as it would thereby evince just how powerful these faithfully Platonic ideas would come to be, even in the early academy. In any case, it is either genuine or an artful emulation, as can be seen, for example in the linguistic parallel between the argument in 133a–b and *Phaedrus* 255d. For a thorough summary of current debate on authorship see: Jirsa, “Authenticity”; cf. Denyer (ed.), “Introduction,” *Alcibiades*.

21. To grasp just how subservient the concepts developed in the ancient schools were to these aims of self-cultivation and ascent, see: Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, esp. chs. 3, 5, 7; Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*, parts 1, 2.; O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy of the Self*, part 1; Gerson, *Plotinus*, ch. 7.

22. The description of the nature of the soul in the *Phaedo* is obviously directed to much the same aim, but so too in the *Timaeus*; see the exhortation in 90a–e.

23. “So he who commands that one know oneself bids us to know our souls” (130e7–8).

24. These lines come just before a fascinating exhortation of disputed origin (Denyer, *Alcibiades*, 236–37, for example, argues that it is a later insertion) regarding the need to gaze into the greater clarity and purity of God in order to know oneself.

rarely considered. The idea that Socrates advances of the soul is a direct response to his questions in the passage on self-knowledge quoted above, with the dark horse representing the bestial aspect of the soul “more complicated and savage than Typhon” and the charioteer (and to a lesser extent, the virtuous horse) manifesting the dignified soul, which shares “in a divine and gentle nature” (230a5–6; see 246a–251c). Here again, however, the purpose in providing these descriptions is not simply to get a model of the soul, but to learn how to inhabit the divine aspect of the soul and to rule over the bestial so that the human can achieve its fullest state. The entire discussion of the character of the soul—of the charioteer and the horses, of the soul’s wings, of its capacity for self-motion, of its immortality, its relation to matter and its immortality—is offered with the single goal of enabling Socrates to reveal the path by which such a soul can seek its highest end. Socrates commends this path and the underlying self-knowledge required as the way to “divine gifts” (256e3), not only “bliss” and “shared understanding” in this life (256b1), but also the enslavement of the bestial aspect below the divine such that the wings of the soul regrow to their full expanse, enabling the soul to move upward in its ascent to the highest things (256b1–7).²⁵

Once one sees that the movement from the language of soul to the language of brain is not a shift between two different hypotheses, but between two different traditions with wildly divergent goals a number of things become clear. The first is why “the soul” has fared so badly in modernity. Just like we would be incomplete and likely even mistaken in attempting to describe a hammer without reference to the use for which it was developed (“ungainly hunk of metal”), so too, the sense inherent in the idea of the soul can only be spotted with regard to the aim of philosophical contemplation. Now of course, one can still use a tool in some sense without knowing what it was for—repurposing a hammer, for example, as a desk leg—but one ought not be surprised when its performance is less than ideal. What is shocking about those who maintain that the soul is imaginary, however, is that rather than pausing to understand whether they have misunderstood the soul’s use, they are content to go on berating it for its poor performance in propping up the *escritoire*.

25. A. E. Taylor, in commenting upon Plato’s *Phaedrus*, says regarding the soul: “The goal of the whole pilgrimage is reached by an ascent to a region outside the whole heaven, ‘the plain of reality’, where the procession pauses and enjoys a Sabbath rest in the contemplation of ‘bodiless reality, without figure, colour, or tangible quality’ (in other words the forms); this is the true home of souls, and the source of their spiritual food.” Taylor, *Plato*, 307. For an illuminating reading of Plato on the soul and the “World Soul,” see Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion*, 21–22.

In considering whether the soul as a concept can safely be transported out of its own tradition and into the scientific one, it is perhaps sufficient to note that many of the features that make it perform so poorly in the lab were its greatest strengths in its own environ. Take, for example, Patricia Churchland's consideration of the question "as a hypothesis about the nature of mind, how does substance dualism stack up against physicalism?" She responds:

The short answer is that substance dualism chronically suffers from the lack of any *positive* description of the nature of the mental substance and any *positive* description of the interaction between the physical and the nonphysical. The content of the hypothesis is specified mainly by saying what the soul is *not*: that is, it is *not* physical, *not* electromagnetic, *not* causal, and so forth. . . . Because the soul-brain hypothesis lacks a substantive, positive characterization, it . . . is hard to take seriously, especially at this stage of science.²⁶

Churchland is frustrated by the lack of precision in the construct that could be operationalized into a viable empirical test. What she does not pause to ask, however, is whether the features that she faults for lack of precision might have been developed with some other end in mind, as indeed they were. Socrates' descriptions of the soul, for example, lack Churchland's desired "positive content," not because he is sloppy or intentionally attempting to sidestep more rigorous scrutiny, but because of the conviction that the specific character of the soul's vitality is such that it cannot be defined in advance, but can only be understood by being inhabited in the fullest sense. What Churchland perceives as insufficiency or evasiveness (but which could be termed more charitably an "apophatic pause") is in fact an invitation to the hearer to give up trying prematurely to define the soul and learn rather to cultivate it.

To put this another way, the apparent victory won by those antagonistic to the soul has come about only because they have been jousting with a straw-man of their own devising. To strip a term of its original structure and usefulness only to find it wanting is not to refute an idea, but to ignore it.²⁷

26. Churchland, *Brain-wise*, 47, emphasis in original.

27. Another indication that this argument is being conducted against a strawman can be found in the structure that the case tends to take. Much of the text in works like Crick's, *Astonishing Hypothesis*, Churchland's *Brain-Wise*, or Musolino's *Soul Fallacy* is concerned, in the simpler form of the argument, with reviewing evidence that shows that there is strong correlation between certain material neurological events and particular traits of human thought or consciousness, or, in a slightly more complex form, showing that when particular material conditions are altered or impaired, the

An understanding of this Socratic tradition does more, however, than simply to challenge in conceptual terms the ease with which the soul has been imported as a hypothesis; it critiques the very impulse that motivates the attempt. As noted above, any anthropological enquiry faces serious self-reflexive questions regarding why we should go about studying the human being in the first place. The contemporary scientifically-minded tradition might, when faced with the question, resort to arguing that it is a modern successor to this old Delphic approach (for example, are not questions of how consciousness can be grounded in material processes or how the mind's habits have been shaped by evolutionary forces about as basic as it gets in considering the nature of the human being, in coming "to know ourselves"?). Sufficient introduction to that older tradition has already been given to see what is flawed with that claim. This issue, and its paradoxical consequences, have attentively been noted by the phenomenological school. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty aptly puts it, "Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world's, are always both naïve and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness . . ." ²⁸ The problem, in other words, is that science looks outward before looking inward. As Merleau-Ponty explains,

I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation.
I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my

corresponding "mental traits" are also impaired. Without any further steps, these authors tend to reach the conclusion that it must be very embarrassing for those who believe in the soul to be confronted with the intertwining of thought and matter. What tends to escape notice, however, is that a great many of those who developed the old idea of the soul were highly aware of this interwoven relationship (as is nearly anyone who observes that death happens through violence to the *body*), and, far from finding it embarrassing, were, in fact, transfixed by what they perceived as the great beauty and dignity of the arrangement. Aquinas writes this way in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 76 a. 5, for example, but it is more eloquently stated by John Donne, who thanks the body for being that from which the soul emerges: "On man heaven's influence works not so,/ But that it first imprints the air;/ For soul into the soul may flow,/ Though it to body first repair.// As our blood labours to beget/ Spirits, as like souls as it can;/ Because such fingers need to knit/ That subtle knot, which makes us man." "The Ecstasy," lines 57–64. Sir John Davies' beautiful poem "On the Immortality of the Soul" culminates its initial reflection on soul and body with the lines: "Doubtless, this could not be, but that she turns/ Bodies to Spirits, by sublimation strange;/ As fire converts to fire the things it burns;/ As we our meats into our nature change.// From their gross matter she abstracts the forms,/ And draws a kind of quintessence from things;/ Which to her proper nature she transforms,/ to bear them light on her celestial wings." Section IV, stanzas 12,13.

28. Quotation from Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith, ix.

knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression.²⁹

What seems to be essential for Socrates as for Merleau-Ponty is a matter of prioritization, that the first order of business must be the task of coming to know, and accordingly to be at home in, one's own self. But what Merleau-Ponty is sensing in this passage is that the path that has been taken by more scientifically-minded studies of the human is much too circuitous for comfort. They have, that is, arrived at anthropological enquiry by way of precisely the distraction of which Socrates was so wary when speaking of the legend of Boreas. Rather than attending to self knowledge as the first order of business they have: 1. rushed about analyzing the external appearance of things and then 2. attempted to assimilate the self (upon which such observations are all the while dependent) back into the mold of what they spied outside. Socrates would rightly be concerned: what looks to be a human-centric mode of enquiry is in fact the opposite, for its governing impulse is to ignore, or (worse) to "assimilate away," the human itself in an effort to make all of reality conform to the distraction.

The aims toward which scientific enterprises are shaped are representational (building a map of reality) and technical (finding ways to manipulate nature for practical ends). As we have seen, for Socrates, in contrast, all such projects are prone to catastrophic error until we understand what is actually *worth* doing, and the only way to find that out is through cultivation of the self in virtue through self-knowledge. Here the redefinition of the term "theory" in modernity is evident. Socrates is seeking *theoria*, contemplative union with the true nature of the soul and the highest things (as he says in *Phaedrus* 247c8, "that being that really is" οὐσία ὄντως οὐσία). The modern anthropologist seeks *theory*, a neutral model that represents an external reality in propositional form. To see the contrast, consider how an aspiring cognitive scientist who refused to conduct experiments until she could understand precisely how this activity is a *just* thing for her type

29. Ibid. For the original, see *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 8–9. For precursors to this critique, see Husserl, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science"; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 45–50.

of being to undertake would be shown the door before ever making it to graduate school.

From a Socratic perspective, there are a variety of problems here. The first is that these enquiries have succeeded in mis-marketing themselves and we must come to see that the energy fueling so much frantic activity in these disciplines is not the desire of true self-knowledge, but rather a fear of that very task and a resulting desire to force the conformity of the one lingering aberration (ourselves) into the model of the distraction. The second is that no enquiry, no matter how methodical, can proceed aright without first attending to this basic thing. For Socrates and the phenomenologists alike, the point is practical. We are quick to wipe clear our lenses and telescopes, but what if the grime is in my very self? If I am muddy and confused then all else will be the same *for me* (even if I don't recognize this fact).

Both of these points derive from a deeper and more encompassing point. Whatever we may think *about* human beings we also *are* human—a fact that we enact in many ways, including those noted at the start of this introduction. But, from a Socratic perspective, to be human as we are in this life is also to be in need of fostering, to be as a seedling, not yet a tree. The trick played by modern anthropological enquiries is, in other words, not merely disingenuous, but tragic. In substituting this game of hypothesis swapping in place of the true Delphic task, we have lost what we most desperately need, a pathway toward vitality, toward the full life.

Gaining the Soul

The following essays arise from this spirit of restless searching for ourselves in the company of others. We approach this task not as experts seeking to give a comprehensive definition of the soul (or of its relation to matter, immortality, etc.)—as we have indicated above, such a task would be a fool's errand. Instead, these essays, which represent papers given at the Centre of Theology and Philosophy conference at Oxford on "The Soul," are undertaken in the Socratic spirit of the novice. We seek, however fumblingly, to find our way again into the full life of the soul.

Just as we cannot pre-define the soul without inhabiting it, so too we cannot pre-determine the path by which its nature might be realized. That path can only be discovered by searching, and that, to put it mildly, is a difficult endeavor, not least for those born into a culture infused with powerful evasions and obstacles to such discovery. It is also, however, as we have been arguing all along, a task that is incumbent upon our nature. We are on this path whether we own up to this fact or not. We either seek, in a Socratic

manner, to find this full human life, or we suffer in the poverty of not having found what we should be.

The authors in this volume attempt this search in different manners (drawing on philosophical, theological, historical, literary, and musical modes of analysis) and arrive, at times, at different conclusions (see for example the contrasts between Wilson, Mitralaxis, and Eikelboom on the question of unity). Together, the volume presents a variety of possible itineraries, all within that Socratic country between poverty and abundance.³⁰ The volume is arranged thematically in five sections: “The Soul and the Saeculum,” “Fracture and Unity,” “Moving to Wholeness,” “The Soul’s Regard,” and “Vivacity.” Our description of the content of the volume follows these categories to a degree, but we have also attempted to narrate the work in a way that reveals crucial interconnections and contrasts that arise apart from these thematic headings.

In seeking this Socratic path, the first need is to confront the reality of our current situation. As Socrates says to Alcibiades, the condition most capable of causing great harm is to be one who does not know what is just, but to think that one does.³¹ The contrast here is stark. To confront one’s true condition and seek to become just is to open oneself to the possibility of attaining ever greater heights of goodness, beauty, and perfection.³² The obverse example is that of the tragic life in which one remains intent on evading one’s true face—attaching oneself to wealth, fame, or even, as in the case of the Athenian demythologizers, “knowledge”—so as to insulate oneself from the vulnerability of the Delphic task. As Socrates argues, these will ultimately find themselves condemned to wander the earth for nine millennia, devoid of understanding.³³ This relates to the argument in the previous section that much of what passes in the contemporary world for Delphic investigation (what we have called “anthropological enquiry”) is in fact the opposite, as the evasion has circled back on itself.

Three approaches to these issues can be found in the first half of the volume. On the one hand, there is a diagnostic voice, attempting both to

30. *Symposium* 203b–d.

31. 117c–118b.

32. It should be noted here that the person cannot, of course—nor should she want to—escape creaturely approaches to discerning soulful things. It is a matter of “where one ends up”. While perception arises through the senses first in knowledge, it is being (ontology) that is in fact primary—similar to how we do not know God’s essence directly, but first through God’s effects. We are here following Aquinas. See, e.g., *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, c. 11, n. 4; II, c. 15; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 7 ad 1; q. 2, a. 1; q. 2, a. 2; q. 12, a. 8; *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 14.

33. *Phaedrus* 256e–257a.

reveal the poverty of the current situation and to consider how we got here.³⁴ Kimbell Kornu, for example, shows how both Galen and Melancthon influence Western thought such that anatomical dissection becomes the primary paradigm for locating and achieving knowledge about the soul. Where for Aristotle “the soul is in a certain way all beings [ψυχὴ τὰ ὄντα πῶς ἐστὶ πάντα],”³⁵ now the soul, as Kornu shows, begins to be seen only as real within a spatialized, knowable nature. Likewise, K. Nicholas Forti turns to recent reductive accounts of the soul from Nancey Murphy to Daniel Dennett, highlighting significant difficulties hidden within the narratives of this new physicalism. As he argues, in addition to being unable to call certain human beings “persons” within their limited criteria, on the one hand, such accounts fail to be truly “physical” in the end, and on the other, they are so concerned with reacting against realistic accounts of soulful encounter that “truth” becomes an arbitrary concern. Forti paves a way forward with an account of souls that are narrated by a different, promising word. Mary Midgley extends these analyses by charting the trajectory by which the idea of “the soul” came to be abstracted, in modernity, into “mind” and then further reduced to mere “body.” She unpacks Descartes’ dualism of body and soul as a theistic dualism that later descends into a materialistic monism as the soul, now extrinsic to the body, is eschewed. A significant strand of Midgley’s argument leads into the second approach as she exhorts us to attend to the *whole* of our experience such that we can abide in our outer and inner realities.³⁶

This diagnostic approach complements the strategy deployed by Anna Piazza and Andrew Kaethler, who reflect on the soul’s continued accessibility through experience. Piazza considers the experience of mortality, arguing that such experience in fact verifies rather than refutes the idea of the underlying vitality and immortality of the soul. She provides a comparison between Max Scheler, Paul Ludwig Landsberg, and Augustine, showing how Landsberg and especially Augustine give our souls hope in ways that can truthfully guide our affections along the journey. Andrew T. J. Kaethler meditates similarly on the experience of time through a study of Alexander Schmemann’s understanding of a “Eucharistic anthropology” of persons

34. Interestingly, as can be seen by their placement in the second section, all three of these diagnostic papers are also heavily concerned with issues of unity and fragmentation.

35. Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book III, ch. 8; 431b 21. Thomas Aquinas approvingly quotes this passage from the philosopher in *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1c. See the paper by Hackett for further discussion of this understanding of the soul.

36. This diagnostic strategy is also prominent in the essays by Milbank, Hackett, and Desmond.

ensconced in and bounded by the finite limitations of time. These finite limitations, he argues, can be either enslaving or freeing, depending upon our descent away from, or ascent into the offering of ourselves to God. The nature of thanksgiving transports us into a further participation of this reality where time is redeemed.

A third approach can be seen in the essays by Johann Rossouw and John Milbank, both of whom reflect on the political conditions that result from our ability or inability to inhabit the soul rightly. In contrast to many essays in this volume, Rossouw, drawing on the work of Bernard Stiegler, takes for granted, to a certain degree, the severing of the old connection between the soul and God. He suggests that we must now find an alternative societal mechanism by which the needs previously met by the divine can be serviced in another way. John Milbank disagrees. Over against Stiegler's "mix and match" approach, Milbank argues that we must recognize the stark contrast between a cosmos of soul and that without it. Against those theologians who seek now simply to defend a minimalist view of mind and human dignity, Milbank argues that we must rather see that the true confrontation is between comprehensive visions of reality and their attendant political embodiments. Thus, to use the language we used above, "the soul" is not simply a hypothesis (as "mind" tends to be) but a whole way of inhabiting reality in integral ethical community stretching from plants to humans to God himself. In contrast, our post-soul world, with all of its incoherencies, is built upon a much more unilateral notion of the human being who works as the uninvolved technocrat who oversees and manipulates, but never loves.

The work of confronting one's present condition—however difficult—is undertaken out of the desire to find a way behind it, and Milbank's point regarding the integrated nature of the soulful cosmos is useful here. When one takes the Socratic path, with all of the sacrifice that it entails, one is also opening oneself to a kind of bounty in a number of different areas, including, amongst others: 1. the integrating of oneself, 2. the communication or communion with other beings, 3. the ascent to God and the highest things. It is the concern of the remaining essays in the volume to explore one or more aspect of this abundance and the difficulty of the path to it in various ways.

Amidst such diagnoses regarding the fractured state of the soul, a perpetual concern regards the soul's quest to be integrated or unified. Sotiris Mitralaxis and Nichifor Tănase have each contributed similar-yet-differing papers to this collection that attend to issues of a unified—and fully ensouled—human person. Mitralaxis and Tănase both aim to provide a wholistic anthropology through specific studies of Maximus the Confessor

and Gregory Palamas, respectively. While their papers differ widely in their specifics, both point toward a unified account of the human hypostasis such that the person becomes more unified by their own response to reflecting the unity of God through the unity of Christ. This technical philosophical and theological method approaches, from another (and often very useful) angle, a reality that is at the same time deeply personal.

When we examine the nature of our own experience along these paths, we frequently discover that the journey itself, like Kierkegaard so often mentions, is inherently fraught. A phenomenology of Abraham's ascent up Mount Moriah with his son Isaac, despite its shockingly paradoxical nature,³⁷ provides an analogy for our own foray into a truthful life, one which Kierkegaard says in fact *should* be difficult.³⁸ The truth of this realism is not ultimately expressed in writing, but is one that has to be lived, or performed.³⁹ Saint Augustine echoes the struggle embodied in these sentiments when he states, "If you are in love with the earth, your journey is taking you far from God. If you are with God, you are climbing toward him."⁴⁰ Mere bodies cannot find rest in and of themselves, for we are always more than that, guided by the heart's desire: "The body travels from place to place; the soul travels by its affections."⁴¹ The soul, therefore, must undertake the toil of conversion and pilgrimage if there is to be ascent.

Within the fraught nature of this experience we are continually impeded, furthermore, by a hidden shadow-like darkness, a sinful proclivity. L. C. Wilson writes on Evagrius of Pontus and Søren Kierkegaard against such a melancholic backdrop. Acedia, despair, and the demonic attempt to destroy the unity of the person into a dispersion of multiplicities resulting in dejection of heart, escapism, and a lack of earnestness about the eternal. Wilson shows how Evagrius and Kierkegaard, in their own ways, offer a path toward a harmonious, balanced, integrated soulful person. Lexi Eikelboom also considers the challenge of the unified person, but from a different perspective, questioning the parameters of unity itself. She suggests that perhaps the philosophical disunity of the body and soul may not be primarily due to the affects of sin (so her focus is very different from Wilson's), and thus, by looking to the work of Giorgio Agamben with some necessary

37. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.

38. See, e.g., "But the ideality with regard to being a Christian is a continual inward deepening. The more ideal the conception of being a Christian, the more inward it becomes—and indeed the more difficult." Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 137.

39. This is why, for Kierkegaard, Socrates is the existential person *par excellence*.

40. Saint Augustine, *Psalms*, 507 [Commenting upon Psalm 119:5–6 in Augustine's Latin text; Psalm 120:5–6 in current translation].

41. *Ibid.*

modifications, Eikelboom offers not a disunity for its own sake, but rather a “redeemed duality” with an emphasis on relationality (and so in this sense presents a concern very much *like* Wilson’s).

The papers by Edmund Waldstein and Anthony D. Baker complement Wilson’s reflections on such *difficulty* by bringing these practical and pastoral concerns into conversation with literary resources. Waldstein considers the history of the modern novel, arguing that its primary features, which aimed at giving the reader a “peep-hole” into another’s consciousness emerged out of dualisms which saw the inner and outer as radically divorced from one another. Waldstein argues, however, that as this tidy eighteenth-century anthropology has broken down, so too has the idea of the novel itself, particularly in post-modernity as our fractured experience of being human also undermines the books that we pen. Considering finally the work of David Foster Wallace, Waldstein argues, however, that this erosion is in fact providing an opportunity, as the novel comes again to be a “performance,” and, in particular, a performance of fracture and of difficulty capable of providing healing. Baker, using the works of Shakespeare, similarly reflects upon these issues of masks and performances in order to consider the nature of conversion. As Baker argues, “all true conversions in Shakespeare are difficult” such that the least masked characters (and he considers Falstaff especially) are also those that have the most trouble with conversion, for, what do they have to give but their very selves? By reflecting in this literary fashion on the soul’s obstinacy, these papers force one again to consider just how much is required if one is to be successful in the truly Socratic task of conversion (this is surely part of the reason that many opt for the much easier work of hypothesizing).

Relationality is a significant concern of a number of the authors under the conviction that it is impossible to understand the soul in isolation, for its essence is bound up with its capacity for community. As W. Norris Clarke puts it, “the full dimensions of what it means ‘to be’ can be found only in *personal being*, in its *interpersonal manifestation*.”⁴² More primary than the “I am,” as Clarke says, is the “we are” of interpersonal dialogue. The papers by Nigel Zimmermann and Férdia J. Stone-Davis establish this foundational connection between souls and their inherent regard for one another (as does the essay by Eikelboom). Zimmermann engages in a comparison between Saint John Paul II and Emmanuel Levinas, highlighting different strategies of gift reception, looking particularly at how each of these thinkers gives attention to “the other.” While both John Paul II and Levinas are known for providing strong accounts of alterity/otherness, Zimmermann points

42. Clarke, “The ‘We are’ of Interpersonal Dialogue,” 42, emphasis Clarke’s.

out significant divergences that make a real difference when it comes to the flourishing of a *communio personarum* without eliding the irreducibility of the singular person. Stone-Davis considers the effects of music on the body in establishing what she calls a “liminal ethics” focusing particularly on the challenging interstices between proximity and distance. By examining a cacophonous “Music Immersion Program,” she brings to the forefront various assumptions about how music can “world-make” and therefore create a reality, however positive or (as it seems here in her example) negative. This analogy enables her to reflect upon music’s role in establishing soulful worlds as the music’s “thresholds” resounds in the person’s own porous relationality.⁴³

This idea of the soul as the window by which relationality is opened to the creature extends, for many of our authors, far beyond *human* community. The soul becomes intertwined in intimacy with creation itself, both ringing with the divine song and, in its turn, singing as well. In this vein, soulful eyes become the “eyes to see” creation as iconic, and other faces as icons of the friendship and love of Christ. A beautifully recreated fictional diary of the poet Francis Thompson speaks movingly to this theme as the poet ruminates on the interplay between isolation and community, darkness and light:

My own darkened life has here at Storrington been irradiated by the light of the lives of these holy monks. Their faces are icons of Christ, radiant with His love and compassion. How fortunate I am to abide among them.

When I gaze upon Father Sebastian’s face, I am gazing upon Christ. “Our faces are forged within the soul,” he once said to me on one of our afternoon walks. How else explain the sublimity and dignity and repose of such a face as his?

Faces and therefore eyes. I shall never forget the day I looked into Sebastian’s eyes and felt that Christ was gazing at me. Under his gaze I became myself.⁴⁴

The final three essays in this volume reflect in different ways upon the vitality of soul as it participates in the community of God and of creation. Simone Kotva’s essay brings out that facet of the novice’s journey related to work as a liturgical activity. The spirit of the Socratic novice, contrary to much of our modern inclination toward specialist expertise, is to look afresh on all reality, again and again, in a child-like way, striving for what

43. In this sense there are some striking parallels with William Desmond’s paper in this volume.

44. Waldon, *The Lost Diary*, 48.

Chesterton calls an “eternal appetite of infancy.”⁴⁵ Kotva’s paper analyzes Friedrich Schlegel and the concept of work, for Schlegel Kotva finds that the knowledge involved in this enterprise reverses our notion of work such that we allow ourselves to be grasped by love.⁴⁶ It is in divine worship where we “let things be” in such a way that life is a liturgical celebration, Being is resplendent with love, and work becomes, in turn, truly leisure.⁴⁷

Through examination of medieval, modern, and post-modern understandings of the human person, W. Chris Hackett charts a series of tensions regarding the possibility of ascent back to the highest things. As he emphasizes, the goal of the ascent, finally, is to share in God’s own self-knowing. This is only possible as that highest comes low to bring us high in various ways, not least in the gift of being ensouled in the first place. We *are* our ascent and all human knowledge and action can only be understood as an interpretation of this ascending itself. What is the soul but the analogical presence of this passage to God? This ascent is enabled, furthermore, communally in the gift of the community of the church that stretches all the way to the end of the ascent through the *beati* who stand now before the divine essence. As Hackett argues, modern thought has been centrally concerned with alienating us from these realities and his final challenge is to reflect upon how the soul as a living concept can be recovered, and, indeed, reinhabited.

The final and culminating essay in the volume by William Desmond is itself, when read aright, a Socratic journey. In his spiraling reflection one comes into confrontation at various moments with Aristotle and Descartes, with science and Kant, with singularity and intimacy, with music and death, with self and soul. In all of this, Desmond gradually opens a space in which one’s present music-less stasis might crack apart as a deeper resonant soul music emerges all around.

It is finally for the sake of this resonance, for Desmond and for us, that the soul must turn to itself, must endeavor to find its face. One does not walk the Socratic path so as to be left simply with more “ego”; Alcibiades had quite enough of this to begin with. That self was always a counterfeit, a substitute for a true name that Alcibiades had never bothered to find. For in order to come to say “I” truly, one must awaken to that truer self that has always already been ringing with melodies not its own. This soul is, as

45. See the full wonderful passage in Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 58.

46. Cf. 1 Cor 8:2–3.

47. Pieper, *Leisure*, 65.

Jean-Louis Chrétien says, “the place where the world transforms its light into song.”⁴⁸

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48. The full quotation reads: “the human body does not respond solely by itself and for itself, that its task and dignity are to speak for all that does not speak, to be the place where the world transforms its light into song. Human dialogue lives only in also being a response to things and to the world. Such are the command and compassion of the song.” Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, 128.

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