On The Soul

HERBERT MORRIS

Abstract
Discussion of the soul in this essay departs from the concept of the soul that for thousands of years has occupied the attention of philosophers and theologians and pervaded religious discourse. The author is concerned with what William James referred to as 'the popular soul,' the soul as it is invoked by expressions such as 'an expansive soul,' 'a soulless person,' 'soul-mate,' and 'that melody touched my soul.' Skepticism with regard to the existence of this soul is without warrant. How this soul comes into being and develops; what its essential features are; how the world, when the soul is engaged, is transformed; what its relationship is to one's conscience; its importance in a human life; its connections to purity and perfection, to silence; its survival upon death; and the perils posed today to its development and existence are the principal topics considered.

1. The idea that human beings possess a soul appears throughout world cultures and has an ancient lineage. Hinduism and Jainism incorporate the idea, and the Egyptians, several thousand years before the Christian era, developed a distinctive and elaborate conception of the soul, its numerous parts, and its functions in human life and into death. The idea also surfaced in the popular culture of Greece in the poetry of Homer, where the poet makes reference to the soul, associating it with courage and temperance. In the Pre-Socratic period, and then with Plato and Aristotle, philosophers begin theorizing about the idea. They were struck by the differences between inanimate and animate being, between the existence of a rock and life in its many forms, between consciousness and the body in which it resided. They posited an entity of a distinctive kind, a soul, in order to account for these evident facts of human existence. They portrayed its nature, offering significantly different views on such matters as whether or not animals and plants have souls, whether or not souls pre-exist an individual's human life and survive in some form after its subsequent death, whether it inhabits in some manner the single individual in whom it was lodged or migrates to other manifestations of life such as animals and even plants. Whatever character is attributed to it, and whatever fate it might have had before birth, or that it is destined to have, if any, after death, it is viewed as a 'thing', an entity, immaterial in nature, a

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substance with powers of agency, fundamentally different from the body in which it resides.[1] It is a unique entity, one not available to its bearer by direct inspection though its manifestations are. There is an impregnable barrier lying between life and consciousness on the one side, with which we have direct knowledge, and on the other side the soul, an agency accounting for those matters with which we are directly acquainted. It is offered as the explanation for life itself and for a wide range of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. This view of the soul, with countless refinements and variations, has persisted in the popular consciousness of diverse cultures, in philosophical and, of course, religious discourse and theological theorizing for several thousand years up until the present.

2. The existence of this soul has not been without its sceptics. For them the soul, as portrayed above, is either unintelligible or, if intelligible, something that does not on the available evidence exist; or if it exists, the phenomena for which the concept serves as an explanation, is believed to be adequately accounted for by the science of psychology and its experimentally verified hypotheses or simply by introspection. As William James concluded in his *Principles of Psychology*,[2] the concept in no way contributes to the understanding of human psychology. It is no more useful to psychology than the ether is to physics. James does not indicate what the soul-phenomena are for which no soul is required as an explanation. He does refer to a 'popular soul', which he thinks is different in nature from the traditional soul, but he does not indicate what this might be. Nietzsche introduces a complicating element into this skeptical picture. He anticipated James' critique and offers his own on what he labels 'the atomistic soul'. There is, for him, no such spiritual entity. Unlike James, however, Nietzsche affirms the existence of a soul, but its character differs markedly from the soul conceived of as some spiritual entity. He is unprepared, however, to jettison, as skeptics are, the concept of the soul in its entirety. Nietzsche sees the

[1] The Ancient Egyptian concept of the soul differs markedly from this conception. An excellent relatively brief treatment of this topic can be found in the *Wikipedia* article 'Ancient Egyptian Concept of the Soul'. It is also true that some philosophical perspectives treated the soul as composed of matter.

[2] *Principles of Psychology*, vol. I, 342–350.

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soul as intimately related to the drives, in particular the will to power, and views the soul as accounting for the value of objects.[3] It is not unlikely, I believe, that among most academic philosophers in the United States and Great Britain today, anyone who asserted belief in the soul would be met with a bemused smile, and there would be limited engagement with the views of Nietzsche because of his theoretical commitments and his obscurity.

3. It comes as something of a shock, then, that many skeptics, while questioning the existence of a soul of the kind dear to philosophers, theologians, and many religious believers, often continue to talk and write in a manner that appears to invoke the very idea they have rejected.[4] Something about the idea of a soul appears to attract even its most ardent skeptics. In the talk of poets, of sceptical philosophers and laypersons, it is common throughout our culture, to talk of one having a noble soul, one's soul being corrupted, or one's soul aching, of a person being soulless or not possessing a soul, of one's having a soul-mate, of the United States currently being at peril of losing its soul, and many other such locutions. It is unlikely that the skeptically-inclined, in using such expressions, are referring to what they believe to be a myth. They appear to believe that it makes sense to talk as they do,

[3] 'And confidentially, we do not need to get rid of "the soul" itself nor do without one of our oldest, most venerable hypotheses, which the bungling naturalists tend to do, losing "the soul" as soon as they have touched on it. But the way is clear for new and refined versions of the hypothesis about the soul; in future, concepts such as the "mortal soul" and the soul as the multiplicity of the subject and the soul as the social construct of drives and emotions will claim their rightful place in science.' Section 12 of *Beyond Good and Evil*. I find Nietzsche's openness to a different conception of the soul appealing, and the views set forth in this essay connect at points with Niezsche's view, but my elaboration of my views and methodology differ substantially from his treatment in *Beyond Good and Evil*, the work where his views on the soul are most thoroughly developed.

[4] The American poet, Wallace Stevens, an avowed sceptic, provides a nice example of this in his poem, *Invective Against Swans*:

> 'The soul, O ganders, flies beyond the parks
> And beyond the discords of the wind.
> …
> And the soul, O ganders, being lonely, flies
> Beyond your chilly chariots, to the skies.'

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that there is, in fact, something there to talk about. I shall refer to this conception of the soul, following James, as 'the popular soul'. It has not, to my knowledge, been made as explicit as it might be.[5] Throughout the remainder of this essay, when I refer to 'the soul', the referent is to this popular soul.

4. So, there is this term 'soul'; it appears to have meaning; and having meaning, there are elements to which it presumably refers that just might relate to some distinctive and organized congeries of thoughts, emotions, and attitudes within us. What, then, might this soul be if not that entity so prized by philosophers and theologians for thousands of years? Is this soul simply the self? One's consciousness? One's character? Is it simply one's having a conscience? Is it our drive to survive? Might 'soul' simply be a term we loosely throw about to exploit in some manner whatever cachet it has acquired over time? We talk about 'soul music' and 'soul food', and such expressions might strike us as devoid of anything about us as human beings of great significance. Whatever, however, we think about the soul, it appears to be something within us of precisely that kind of significance. Is there finally a reality that corresponds to what I label 'the popular soul', and if so, is it of any significance?

5. The popular soul does, I believe, exist. Our language, of course, refers to something. We do need, however, to make an attempt at determining its character and importance in our lives. Once the character of the soul, to which we make reference in our daily lives is clear, its existence is as evident as the existence of our conscience, about which scepticism rarely arises. While diverging in important respects from views of the soul over the long expanse of human history, the popular soul clearly, and not surprisingly, incorporates elements that have earlier surfaced. This soul is not a mystery, however, but something familiar to us all. With it, nothing is behind the curtain. Its possessor knows of its existence through direct experience. A person physically alive but devoid of a

[5] An elaborate and stimulating attempt to do precisely this is to be found in Ilham Dilman, 'Wittgenstein on the Soul', *Understanding Wittgenstein, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures Volume 7* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 162–192. See, too, Keats on 'soul-making' in his letter to his brother and sister-in-law: *The Letters of John Keats*, 1814–1821, ed. by Hyde Edwards Rikkins (Harvard Univrsity Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1958), 100–104.

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soul would only know the soul by description, not by acquaintance. When a possessor of a soul contemplates what it is, the person readily comes to realize that it is among the most to be prized of all that one possesses. It can wither away and it can be lost. Its continued vitality requires constant care. An individual still physically alive but devoid of a soul would be a mere shadow of a human being.

6. The concept of a soul as it surfaces in everyday life is no idle philosophic concern. A judgment that someone has a noble soul or that someone is soulless, to choose only a couple of the familiar expressions referred to above, are among the more serious judgments one can make about a person and their life. To feel, too, that one's soul is dead and grieve over it involves a momentously significant judgment about one's life and is, as we shall see, evidence that the soul is still, to some degree, alive. Having one's soul touched and brought back to active life in a person who is suffering both physical pain and great emotional distress while also anticipating imminent death may bring a relative calm. Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* captures this:

> 'The dying man was still screaming desperately and waving his arms. His hand fell on the boy's head and the boy caught it, pressed it to his lips and began to cry.... He opened his eyes, looked at his son, and felt sorry for him. His wife came up to him and he glanced at her. She was gazing at him open-mouthed, with undried tears on her face and cheek and a despairing look on her face. He felt sorry for her too.'[6]

It is a moment of two human bodies touching and two human souls, metaphorically, touching each other; that is to say, bringing into being a distinctive range of feelings. Ivan's long dormant soul comes alive in him; he is transformed, filled with light. His rage vanishes; his indifference to others is replaced by his taking them in as human beings and not merely fixtures in his environment. It is a state of being that he has not been sufficiently connected with throughout his life, his access to it blocked by numerous distractions that have successfully seduced him from what he most deeply longs for. He is deluded, then, by a self-imposed blindness. His son's touch works magic; a spark of life ignites; a sudden visitation from

[6] *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Short Stories*, Dover Publishers, Inc., 1993.

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without takes him over, and Ivan is a new, redeemed man, connected with what he unknowingly sought throughout his life. It provides Ivan with a greater peace than he has hitherto known, and because he feels more alive than before, he is able to accept death with more equanimity than would otherwise have been the case. Physical touching that conveys compassion or love – as with a kiss or embrace or holding of hands – is among the principal ways in which the soul expresses itself. Michelangelo's *Creation of Man* may be taken as a visual expression of this idea. Talk, then, about the soul relates to matters that are surely among the most significant matters in an ongoing human life. It can be an expression of one's soul that it cares to obtain a clearer picture of its nature because among its numerous manifestations may be love of knowledge and truth.

7. A promising place to initiate an inquiry into the popular soul is our moral sensibility and the variegated sensibilities included in it – our conscience, our sense of guilt, our sense of moral shame, our sense of moral disgust, our moral ideals – because of the possibility that this sensibility or certain aspects of it may be identical with the soul or in some manner intimately related to it. It seems clear, for example, that the conscience and the soul share certain important characteristics; but they differ in important respects too, and they intersect in significant and complicated ways. However, before we enter upon this inquiry, it is important to have some idea of what constitutes possessing a soul. We shall then be in a position to juxtapose the soul with our moral sensibility – in particular, our conscience – and this will allow us to compare and contrast these concepts.

8. What, then, is the nature of the soul? What criteria must be satisfied for the claim to be warranted that the soul within a person exists?

   A. An essential aspect of the soul is its connection with life. In its not fully developed state, its earliest manifestation is a drive or an abiding desire for life. It is not a fleeting desire but rather a sustained and insistent desire.[7] A phrase that I shall adopt, because while of course a metaphor, vividly captures this propelling and enduring force, is 'a hunger for life'. Initially, this hunger expresses itself in the infant seeking

[7] One might find it inappropriate to attribute to an infant in the earliest period of its life 'a desire', believing that only agents self-consciously aware of their attitude to achieve some end possess a desire. We might, then, prefer 'drive' or 'instinct' to this phase of life.

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nourishment. With hunger satisfied, let us imagine there develops an attachment to the breast and soon an attachment to the provider of that gratification. In a primitive manner, the infant comes to care for these objects – the breast and the mother – seeking the continuance of the gratification afforded and triggering in it frustration if that gratification is not forthcoming. With time, the child is able to reflect on the object to which it has become attached and the features of the object that have led to its desire for it. It is aware of its desire and develops the capacity to judge why it is that it persists in its desire for it. The object becomes of value to the child, and the caring for it moves on from the merely instinctual. This coming to care in a richer sense of caring – for what I shall label 'an object' – apart from oneself, is another essential, defining stage in the life of the soul.[8] Both a hunger for life and a capacity to care for objects apart from oneself are the foundational and non-learned elements underlying coming to have a fully developed soul. If these building blocks are innate, we can understand the pull toward one's believing that upon birth one is ensouled. The primitive hunger for life, complemented by the initial type of caring and then the richer type, then provides the occasion for the development of one's first soul attachments. With time and acculturalization, other attachments – to art, to nature, to human beings generally, to abstract principles and values such as truth, beauty and goodness – are formed that do not directly derive from the initial drive for life. One's early drive for life and capacity for caring are clearly not like one's appendix which is a vestige that no longer has a use; rather, they persist throughout life and may express themselves in a variety of ways beyond their initial manifestations. As we know it then, the seed of the existence of a soul is laid at the earliest stage of life, but if it is to exist in the manner with which we as adults are familiar with it, the soul requires an environment that promotes germination and growth.[9] The flower's seed is there; the

[8] For illuminating observations on the concept of caring, see Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 80–94.

[9] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Ln. 301–305:

> 'Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
> Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:
> Much favoured in my birthplace, and no less

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flower has yet to appear. The capacity for caring and the realization of caring are the fecund ground on which future developments in the soul depend.

B. The soul's life requires objects, but its relationship to these objects is of a unique kind. The soul's engagement with them brings these objects to life in the sense that these objects now possess the potential to make the soul's possessor feel more alive. We might say, as with a feed-back process, that energy put in can then loop back and further energize the initial source of the energy. We can regard this transformation of the inert as a form of ensouling. A house becomes a home, a source of a variety of gratifications that are not available when emotions have not yet adhered to a house. A casual acquaintance becomes a dear friend. Each person has the capacity to reshape the world in which they exist much as poets guide us in viewing the world differently. This phenomenon is the same with everything one comes to cherish. The fate of these objects naturally determines to a large degree the fate of the person attached to them, who may grieve over their loss or become elated when the soul's objects are flourishing. For an expansive soul, the entire world may be charged with life. There appears, I believe, a fundamental truth in the view of many diverse cultures that the soul can migrate into any object, however inert.[10]

In that beloved Vale to which erelong
We were transplanted…'

[10] Wallace Stevens in *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Random House, 1965) quotes Robert Wolseley (1685) on the transformation of objects: 'True genius…will enter into the hardest and driest thing, enrich the most barren Soyl, and inform the meanest and most uncomely matter…the baser, the emptier, the obscurer, the fouler, and the less susceptible of Ornament the subject appears to be, the more is the Poet's Praise …who says of Homer, can fetch Light out of Smoak, Roses out of Dunghills , and give a kind of Life to the Inanimate.' 19–20. Of course, it is not just poets who possess this 'true genius' of giving life to the inanimate but everyone, however modestly educated or intelligent. It comes with falling in love with the ordinary which thereby transforms its nature. Proust writes in his essay on Jean Siméon Chardin: 'Chardin may have been someone who simply enjoyed spending time in his dining room, among the fruits and the drinking glasses, but he was a man with a sharpened awareness, whose overly intense pleasure spilled into touches of oil and eternal colors. You will yourself be a Chardin, though no doubt less great – great to the extent that you love him and become as he was – yet someone for whom,

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C. A distinguishing mark of the soul's existence is attachment to objects apart from oneself that in time come to constitute essential elements of oneself. Each individual's soul is unique. The soul's world is what is precious for the possessor of a soul. The soul, then, does not express itself if the attachment is restricted to the satisfaction of one's appetites or needs, characteristic of the first stage in the soul's development. It is not an expression of one's soul to seek gain for oneself, to seek pleasure for oneself or the avoidance of pain. We do not, accordingly, think of 'feeding' our souls by satisfying our desires for pleasure or avoidance of pain – perhaps with the exception of 'soul food'. The soul is other-regarding. If one's sole attachment is to oneself, narrowly constituted by desires for pleasure and avoidance of pain – if this alone matters to one, as might be the case with a thorough-going psychopath or narcissist – the soul is not present. Nothing, apart from the self as self-aggrandizing, is in place. Occasions arise in which the person, in whom the soul resides, experiences distress because the object to which the soul is attached comes upon hard times. Suppose the truth cherished by a person's soul is persistently disregarded and falsehood dominates discourse. The soul is then frustrated; suffering arises, and there is a strong desire to remedy the situation. If one acts here to repair the damage to the object to which one is attached, the soul is engaged; if the principal motive for action is to relieve one's own suffering, the soul is not activated.

D. The soul's objects are inherently valuable. They are valued in themselves and not merely as means to something else that one values. The hold upon humans of a concern for their own selves, the general admixture in human motivation of both other and self-regarding motivations, raises warranted doubts about just how operative in an actual human life is one's soul. The soul's focus is upon cherished ends and not upon means that might be valued in order to

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as for him, metals and stoneware will come to life, and fruits will speak.' (See Marcel Proust, *Against Saint-Beuve and Other Essays*, transl J. Sturrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, (1988), 122–131.) It remains possible that some attachments to the ordinary may also be regarded as perverse or shallow. Appraisals of attachments are elements of talk about the soul.

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achieve those ends. One may claim that one loves another, but the love may turn out to be a love of oneself because the attachment derives from bolstering one's view of oneself. The greater the attentiveness to oneself, the less the soul's engagement with what it cares for.[11]

E. Among the objects to which the soul could become attached are purity and perfection. A person with an active soul experiences discontent if love is mixed with hate, truth with falseness, beauty with ugliness. A person with a soul longs for purity in one's feelings and actions, where the soul is implicated. As Kierkegaard maintains, if purity of heart was to will one thing, so a person with an investment in their soul favors acting solely from motives of caring for the object. If purity is an ideal associated with possessing a soul, so it appears is perfection. If the soul could speak, it would resonate to Browning's 'A Man's reach should exceed his grasp, else what's a Heaven for?' The artist's soul lies behind the erasures on the page and on the canvas. The mathematician's persistent seeking for a more elegant and parsimonious proof reveals the soul's involvement. So to say, it is the soul that speaks when one believes that however fine one's finished project, it can be improved even if one is unaware of just how. The soul remains active in one who, in contemplating their life, seeks for ways to further enrich it. It is this property of the soul that may account for imagining a perfect love. The idea of a perfect being to whom one desires to be attached in a like perfect and pure manner, is an understandable impulse in those who possess a soul. It is, however, often the task of the self to moderate this longing by coming to accept imperfections in the objects to which one is attached. Along with perfection, the soul may also be attached to reality.

F. As a consequence of cherished attachments, it is evident that for those who possess a soul the existence of these

[11] The 'heart' is sometimes used interchangeably with the soul. The heart, metaphorically, is taken to be the sphere of human emotional response; it differs from the soul, despite the soul's linkage to one's emotional life, because the possessor of a soul responds to its attachments as inherently valuable. No such restriction on the heart's attachments applies. One can be heart-sick through frustration of a desire for what one does not view as inherently valuable. A drop in spirits upon losing at gambling reveals the state of one's heart but not one's soul.

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objects must matter; they must be viewed as among the most important elements in one's life. They constitute substantial parts of the self. With the loss of an attachment, a part of the person falls away. Without any of these elements, the self is largely emptied out. This topic connects with the relationship of the soul to life's meaning and whether it has any meaning at all. One may think everything we do comes to an end and that because of this, there is no point to anything, that any attachment to whatever the object is meaningless. Such claims are bound not to have a grip on those in touch with their souls. A person who regards everything as pointless – if it is an attitude assumed toward the world and not some idle philosophic observation – is indicating an absence in them of the soul's engagement with the world. A person who manages to be distressed by being in such a state has a soul by virtue of the regret felt over the inability to find objects that satisfy it. To be sure, all that is cherished will come to an end. To a possessor of a soul, life's brief duration only reaffirms life's preciousness, and a sadness contemplating life's loss is but another reflection of the soul's existence. The point from the perspective of a person who possesses a soul is love itself and maintaining it as long as possible. For some souls, the world itself is the soul's home and feeling at home is a good in itself.

G. From the very beginning of thought about it, the soul has been associated with life. I have claimed that in the earliest stages of the soul's development there is a hunger for life, and the life to which that refers is one's physical existence. With time, an attachment derived from that primitive hunger arises, but other attachments are formed that may or may not derive from this hunger for physical life. Curiosity arises and one comes to care for knowledge. One's gaze fixes on birds and their flight, and attachments to beauty and freedom may arise. Further, the ideas of a more or less intense life or of feeling dead inside while still physically alive enter our conceptual world. The terms 'life' and 'death' acquire a metaphorical but illuminating use. If we are fortunate, the hunger for continued existence is still persistent in us, but each attachment we develop beyond the primary ones, has connected with it the potential to enhance one's feeling of being alive when the soul is engaged. It is, of course, the case that one may possess the cherished object – say a loved person and their

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love – and not have an experience that is life-enhancing. It is on those occasions – perhaps, when the object is lost or threatened; when there is an overcoming of obstacles in doing the right thing by them; or one is struck, as if for the first time, by just how deeply one loves another – that an engagement of the soul is triggered. Still, I believe we should not underestimate the presence of states of being of which we are not consciously aware – for example, when we enter a garden that we have come to cherish – and something of which we are not aware is enhancing our state of being. Not all enhancements of life are the objects of conscious awareness.

9. Of the many objects which we care about, a wide range of them I have excluded because we care about them as means to some end or because they are not intimately related to ourselves as we conceive of ourselves. The soul goes deep. Within the range of the soul's attachments, there are bound to be more and less intense ones, ones too that we regard as more or less important than others. It is possible to have an expansive range of attachments, each one of them less intense than another person's single attachment. One might possess a deep and beautiful soul that is attached to life in its many forms but be indifferent to works of art and the beauties of inanimate nature. In Tolstoy's time, a peasant's attachment to the Russian soil and the Russian Orthodox Church might run deeper than an aristocrat's attachments to art and knowledge. The self's powers of imagination also importantly service the soul by opening up wider worlds to which the soul may become attached. The self's imagination supplies the possibility of an infinitude of nutrients to satisfy the soul's hunger. For example, the idea of a perfectly organized community, a utopia, has engaged the minds of many over time. The more the full range of human capacities are engaged and expressed, the larger the soul but not necessarily the deeper.

10. We can turn now to our soul's connection with our moral sensibility, in particular with our conscience – that aspect of ourselves with which the soul is often identified, or if not identified – seen as a principal manifestation of the soul. Our conscience resides within us, but it does not, of course, occupy space as a toothache is said to lodge in one's tooth.

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Introspection reveals to us no entity, of whatever kind, to which the term 'conscience' applies. A conscience requires consciousness and self-consciousness, and physical matter, whatever might be its relationship to consciousness, is not identical with it. The feelings and thoughts that are distinctive of an active conscience – that constitute the existence of a conscience, at least as it relates to wrongdoing – are triggered either by contemplation of conduct yet to be performed or wrongful conduct in which one has already engaged. Conscience, when wrongdoing of some kind is at issue, faces forward as implied by the expression, 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all.' It also faces backward as captured by the phrases, 'the pangs of conscience' and 'conscience-stricken'. Conscience provides guidelines that relate to a variety of different matters – feelings, attitudes, and actions. One can be conscience-stricken because one feels shame, as, for example, when one is ashamed of some aspect of one's parent's conduct. One can be conscience-stricken because one hates someone that one feels one should love. One may find one's conscience troubled by one's contemplating betrayal of a friend. The conscience is authoritative with regard to its possessor. Its voice, the metaphor familiarly referred to with conscience, feels obligatory despite any other interests of its possessor with regard to the matter at issue. It gives rise to feelings of restraint and compulsion. Conscience relates to moral value; it is grounded in a valued view of oneself and one's dispositions related to norms governing one's feelings, character, actions, departures from which cause a peculiar form of distress. Having a conscience does not imply that it invariably dictates the objectively right thing to do, although it does imply that the possessor believes that it is the right thing to do. For it to be conscience that is activated, its possessor must reveal attachment to some moral value; though, it is also apparent that the possessor might be mistaken in one's judgments with regard to what weight should be attached to what is valued. Followers of Hitler might have given great weight to loyalty and no discernible weight to lives of certain classes of innocent people. The conscience takes as its object its possessor's failures and wrongs, not those of others. The conscience does not reveal itself in indignation or resentment though one's sense of right and wrong does. Conscience governs a relationship with oneself. One betrays

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a friend; one's sense of guilt may be activated so that one is disposed to confess, to apologize, to ask for forgiveness. The forgiveness may quiet the feelings of guilt. It may or may not quiet one's conscience. It quiets one's conscience provided that one feels contrite over one's self-betrayal, and one comes to believe that one is again entirely committed to fidelity to one's conscience.

11. If we suppose now that these observations comport at least roughly with our conception of what it is to possess a conscience, the soul and conscience, though linked occasionally, are fundamentally different aspects of ourselves. The concepts share certain characteristics, and these similarities merit attention; but they also differ in important respects, and they do intersect in a crucial way. A conscience is but one expression of our soul. The soul is not to be identified with one's conscience, though having a conscience and our consequent attachment to it, implicates the soul through that attachment.

What, then, are the features shared by these concepts?

A. The popular soul like one's conscience is not some faculty or non-material substance lodged within the person but a family of psychological dispositions to be found in most all human beings.

B. Both one's conscience and one's soul seem intimately connected to a sense of how one might define oneself in a manner regarded as constitutive of who one essentially is.

C. As both conscience and soul lodge within the person, their existence, then, presupposes a person who is attached to their continued existence. The distress the person feels when conscience is compromised, the gratification it experiences when the soul achieves its objects and the conscience is at ease, are marks of the person's caring for its conscience and its soul. The person is, then, necessarily concerned about their fate in the course of its life. It would appear that the person, in its caring for many of its capacities – for example, its capacity for perception, for reasoning, and for the imagination – is itself manifesting a caring attitude with regard to fundamental constituents of the self. The person and its soul appear, then, to meld into a single unit when the person's caring is manifested.

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D. Similarly, through various seductions and surrenders, one may become largely indifferent to the dictates of conscience, indifferent to the point that one no longer possesses a conscience. One may lose their soul in a variety of ways either through damage to one's brain that affects one's capacity for caring or from choices that one makes with regard to the objects that gain one's attention and care. Inattentiveness to one's objects of attachment risks their importance vanishing. With the concept of the soul I have been describing, what is lost is not something that might have eventually inhered in one after one's physical death or in another being or inanimate object. What is lost is a property once possessed by a living person who is still living. They are physically alive but now soulless. It is, presumably, quite rare that a soul once fully alive in a person entirely disappears. It may, however, happen.

E. Both possessing a conscience and possessing a soul presuppose vulnerability to suffering, and, given the nature of human beings and the world in which we live, actual suffering. Conscience has its pangs and the soul has its aches or worse. Still, it appears that it is oneself who is suffering and not conscience and not the soul, even though it is these distinctive aspects of the self whose fates affect the self. The 'pangs' and 'aches', while the locutions suggest their being of the conscience or soul, are the pangs and aches of a person. Neither conscience nor the soul are persons, human agents, capable of suffering. Neither is a homunculus hidden within the person. In thinking of the soul as suffering, one elides, then, the distinction between the person possessing a soul and the soul that is possessed.

12. Conscience and soul do, however, differ in significant ways.

A. The conscience, when active, invariably triggers the self's moral appraisal of some matter within the scope of one's conscience – a feeling, an attitude, an action. The soul may, of course, respond, as conscience does not, when natural occurrences or humans other than oneself destroy that to which one is attached. The soul may be engaged by music and nature and one's conscience remains silent unless one's attitude toward these objects contemplates doing them damage. The soul, too, but not conscience, is activated by the destruction of whatever it is to which one is deeply attached. It enters

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into our more intense joys and major griefs. Joy, ecstasy, grief, remorse, sadness, loneliness, feelings of emptiness and plenitude can mark the person's responses to the soul's engagements. The soul is intimately engaged with suffering and with what is life-enhancing; the conscience with a departure from some norm, some of which may not be regarded of great importance to the possessor of a conscience.

B. While conscience is associated with a voice calling for compliance with its norms, a voice that delivers judgments, the soul's expressions are frequently associated with silence and stillness. The soul's sphere is that of direct experience not mediated by rational judgment.[12] Touch, as earlier observed, marks the soul's operations. Mental operations involving reasoning and judgment, activities not of the soul but of the soul's possessor – the self – may affect the soul's attachments, but the soul does not judge; it operates within the sphere of feelings and attitudes. There is an abeyance in the soul's operations when one assumes an observing or critical attitude toward the soul's operations.

C. The concept of 'life-enhancement' is central to the soul but not to conscience and its operations. It is a feature of the soul that a connection with the objects to which it is attached is experienced as elevating one's spirit, just as witnessing disrespect that others have for these objects will naturally deflate one's spirits. There is no corresponding experience of life-enhancement when facing the call of one's conscience. We speak of 'an easy' conscience never, as might be the case with the soul, a joyful one. The self's responses to the vicissistudes of its conscience and soul are of an entirely different nature. The soul always, we may say, goes deep; the conscience sometimes but not always evokes depth of feeling in the self.

13. There is, with all these differences, an important non-symmetrical relationship between having a conscience and having a soul. One of soul's expressions is in an attachment to one's conscience. When a person develops indifference to conscience's demands, when the soul is, as a consequence, no longer engaged with one's conscience, the possessor of

[12] Yeats, *A Dialogue of Self and Soul*:

'Fix every wandering thought upon
That quarter where all thought is done:

Who can distinguish darkness from the soul?'

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the soul suffers. The conscience does not, however, express itself in an attachment to the soul. Having a conscience is cherished by the soul as we learn when departures from it dictate and trigger distress in that aspect of the self that is connected to the soul. If one, for example, develops an indifference to maintaining one's self-integrity as would be the case if one no longer found honesty or respect for others something that mattered to one, the soul may be corrupted by this development. The extent of one's caring for the sustaining of one's conscience has declined. One's soul has been diminished.

14. *The soul, time, and freedom.* The soul is eternal, not in the sense of infinite duration but, in its purest form, when the soul's engagement with its objects is outside time, when the self is insensitive to the passage of time. It is manifest in total absorption of the sort one finds in play, in meditation, in the creation and experience of art, in being totally involved in what one is experiencing, be it as simple as a peach on a table or as complex as working out a proof in logic. The object absorbs one; the subject absorbs the object. Love yearns, too, for its peak moment to be fixed forever. One's everyday concerns that entail attention to causes and effects are left behind. Feelings of constriction disappear; one is free of the familiar world of causal constraints. It is, as I have claimed, the soul's longing for things in themselves and for their sustained existence.[13]

15. *The soul, the will, and recovering one's lost soul.* One possesses a soul without having decided to possess it. It comes about because of a grace of fate, the fate that attends being born a human and into a supportive environment. Once possessed, the soul operates apart from the will. The soul might, however, be guided by its possessor. Once an object is put before the soul, the soul cannot by an act of will decide to be attached. One falls in love; one does not decide to love. If one's soul has been entirely lost, that aspect of the self

[13] T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, Lines 70–75:

'I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.
The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded

By grace of sense, a white light still and moving.'

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that constitutes one's soul, has lost motivational power to seek for the soul's recovery. Perhaps something like this thought lay behind Jesus' observation, 'If the salt hath lost its flavor, wherewith shall it be salted.' If the loss is remediable, this must be attained as a gift from the outside, a gift that has been unsolicited. Even then, it would appear that the gift's acceptance would require a receptive soul. A self grieving over its lost soul appears to imply the continued existence of some remnant of the soul. This argues for especial caution in matters related to the soul. The soul's objects are viewed by its possessor as precious. The fact that losing one's soul may be irreparable makes the tragedy of its loss all the greater.

16. *The soul and silence*. Silence is agreeable to the self that possesses a soul. The silence sought is not an absence of sound but rather the absence of noise, displeasing sound of any kind, most particularly the metaphor of interior noise, the flow of distracting thoughts present when one is attempting to attend to the Chopin nocturne. The soul is often stirred by music that evokes moods and emotions not mediated by judgments. Interior noise forces itself upon one without physical sound. It is most marked by chaotic thoughts, similar to voices forcing themselves upon us which distract our attention. The soul's attention to its cherished objects is disrupted by these intrusions from without. The Carthusian's practice of silence testifies to a desire to avoid distractions entailed by conversation commonly associated with the details of daily life. The soul and its responses are also ineffable. Words are inadequate to capture the uniqueness of the experiences in which the soul is involved. We speak of being moved or touched or wondrous, but these words seems peculiarly inadequate in describing the experience. Words invariably feel inadequate when love and loss are at play. Silence also marks the soul's engagement with the objects to which it is attached. These objects communicate their significance to the soul without spoken words. They speak volumes, retaining within themselves, the rich assortment of emotions and moods and memories that have accluded to them overtime, those involuntary memories of the kind so cherished by Proust, the world contained in a madeleine dipped in a cup of tea.

17. *The survival of the soul*. From at least the time of the Ancient Egyptian Kingdoms the survival of the soul upon death has

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been a major issue of concern. A person, possessing a soul, has died. What happens to that person's soul upon death? And what happens to the soul of the person loving the deceased?

A. *The survival of the soul after the decease of its possessor*. The conception of the soul set out in this essay may incline one to say that brain death results in the soul's death. The soul as described, that within us that constitutes our capacity for and relishing of connectedness, would appear to disappear upon natural death. Still, just so long as the deceased's person maintains a grip on the soul of a survivor of the deceased, so long as this connectedness through memory exists, the deceased's person, who has been ensouled, remains charged with power. The deceased may have, as it were, two types of soul, one its own, made up of its attachments, and the other a soul, infused by the survivor, which may include elements other than the deceased's soul. It may, for example, be the deceased's humour or voice that has been ensouled by the survivor, and these aspects of the deceased are not elements in their soul. That infusion is a consequence of coming to love the person, a person with these characteristics as well as loving also the deceased's own soul. The ensouling from another, then, may complement the deceased person's own ensoulments. That ensouled person, included in which is the person's soul, its capacity for enhanced life, survives in those who through continued caring remain alive. This soul, and perhaps other ensouled aspects of the deceased person, may have as much power, or even more, than would result from a forced separation without hope of rejoinder, while the possessor of the soul was still alive. It is not memory alone that is at work here. This soul of the deceased also operates in conjunction with the imagination of the survivor. The deceased is not, in its effects on a loving survivor restricted to particular memories one has of the deceased. One remains in touch with one's image of the deceased's soul and those other aspects of the deceased that have been ensouled and finds imaginatively appealing and truthful new engagements of these aspects of the deceased. Buddha serves as a guide for millions now alive when he no longer exists not so much because one recalls particular sayings of the Buddha but rather, more importantly, because of their soul's engagement with Buddha's soul and the survivor's ensoulment of it and other aspects of

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the Buddha. Memory and imagination then come into play serving to guide one's action and emotions in situations not specifically addressed by the Buddha.[14]

B. *The soul of the survivor who has lost through death or destruction an object of attachment*. There is grief over the loss of what it is that one loves. There is grief over, if it is a person whom one loves, the deceased's loss of more opportunities to experience life. There may be grief over there no longer being the display of love toward oneself. There may be grief over no longer being able to express love toward a no longer existent loved person. One's soul cherishes one's disposition to love and the self is gratified when an object satisfies that longing. The survivor suffers as a consequence of an aspect of one's soul no longer being as full as it was before the loss. The self can be battered by these vicissitudes of life. Its recompense, if despair has not set in, can be the conviction that the soul remains fully alive, the grief itself providing evidence of the continued attachment. One's love persists though the concrete object of one's attachment has ceased. The survivor may, and often does, carry on conversations with the loved object.

18. *Perils of the Soul*

However diverse the views about the soul, upon one matter there appears to be universal agreement: The soul is an invaluable aspect, perhaps the most valuable, of oneself. It has been, therefore, a particular matter of concern to many who have reflected on the issue that risks abound with regard to the soul, that it requires constant attention to assure that it is still active within its possessor. Talk about the soul when such concerns arise is rare, though the soul, as described above, is certainly

[14] Proust, in *Swann's Way* writes: 'I believe there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and thus effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain the possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognized their voice the spell is broken. Delivered by us, they have overcome death and returned to share our life.' (Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992) 47.)

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implicated. Focus on the jeopardy to the soul and its development has largely been on the seductiveness of false idols, of which money, fame, and power, are prime examples. In a world where such idols predominate desires for self-aggrandisement and 'highs' of one kind or another reign. The familiar banes of human life, ignorance and self-imposed blindness, no doubt in part, account for these misdirected attachments.[15] These threats to the soul have always been present. Today they certainly remain powerful attractions for many. But there are threats to the soul and its development, from the earliest years of life, that appear, especially now in industrial societies, to augment those customary false idols. We have only to imagine the effect on a three-year old who has been supplied with a large number of toys and whose reaction to the cornucopia before it is to move from one to the other without devoting any particular importance to any of them. It is common knowledge today that the more access, say to 'friends', while increasing the number, potentially diminishes the preciousness of any one of them. It is as if something like Gresham's law, bad money drives out good, were in effect. Strether offers wise advice to his young friend in Henry James' *The Ambassadors*, 'Experience!' He might have added, 'but beware of attachment to the new because it is new?' The availability of devices, too, may lead their possessors to appear more attached to them than their fellow human beings or, for that matter, to reflect upon themselves and their lives. An outright assault on the soul is urged by those who cultivate an attitude of 'cool', an attitude of not allowing oneself to become emotionally involved and to express one's feelings. All of this bears directly on the soul. The soul's development depends to a great extent on the virtues of patience, attentiveness, an openness to giving oneself up to the experience of an object and a deferment of one's attention to the self's immediate gratification. To all this may be added what has now, certainly since the time of Marx, been the phenomenon of relating to each other as objects to service each

[15] Consider Anthony Bourdain's comment in *Kitchen Confidential*: (New York: Harper Collins, 2000). 'But I frequently look back at my life, searching for that fork in the road, trying to figure out where, exactly, I *went bad* and became a thrill-seeking, pleasure-hunting sensualist, always looking to shock, amuse, terrify and manipulate, seeking to fill that empty space in my soul with something new.'

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other's needs and not as human beings. This phenomenon, a reduction in relating to each other as human beings, is compounded by feelings that one's work, a major aspect of one's life, is of little significance apart from providing the wherewithal to live. From this brief sketch of the vicissitude of the soul in modern life, it appears that we may be transitioning into a world in which what some regard as an indispensably valuable aspect of their lives, and who hope that others' views are similar, is slowly vanishing, as if before their eyes. If, as some have warned, the United States is at risk of losing its soul, it seems apparent, too, that individuals within the country risk not acquiring a fully developed soul or allowing it to wither away if once developed.

HERBERT MORRIS (morris@law.ucla.edu) is an Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Emeritus Professor of Law and former Dean of Humanities (1983–1993) at the University of California, Los Angeles. His latest publication is *Disclosures: Essays on Art, Literature and Philosophy* (2017).

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