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Ailments of the Soul

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Abstract

The paper aims to trace the distinctive character of the talk of the soul and to disentangle it from the talk of the mind. The key context will be the way in which we talk about souls that are ailing. As a point of departure, I use the later Wittgenstein's notion of the soul as anti-dualist and anti-substantive, which brings it close to Dennett's or Davidson's philosophy of mind, but which Wittgensteinian ethicists have elaborated upon as concerned with matters of good and evil, and beauty. In relation to these concerns, the sense of the ailing soul is different from issues relating to mental health. I then discuss cases of ailments of the soul that would be misleading to analyse as matters of mental health (issues): addiction, racism, and environmental grief. I conclude with a plea for maintaining the talk of the soul as helpful for making sense of existential or beauty- or morality-related ailments, yet as something that does not necessarily subscribe to any doctrine of the soul as a substance. In support, I also use arguments from the spheres of eco-theology and public theology.

Keywords: soul; Wittgenstein; racism; addiction; environmental grief

1. Introduction

Robert Heilman's essay on Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* shows the distinctiveness of the novel by using the image of the *ailing soul*. Heilman makes some rather complex uses of the notion of the soul, for instance when he says that 'Lowry's hero (…) suffers from a kind of undergrowth of soul … [He] falls short of the quality that makes life possible' (p. 11).[1] His overall point proceeds as follows:

> How present the central conception – that of the ailing soul? There are endless symbols for ill-being (…) [b]ut Geoffrey's tremendous drinking is exactly the right one (…). In greater or lesser extent it is widely shared, or at least is related to widely practiced habits; it is known to be a pathological state; it may be fatal, but also it can be cured. (…) [D]rinking as an escape, an evasion of responsibility,

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[1] Robert Heilman, 'The Possessed Artist and the Ailing Soul', *Canadian Literature* 8 (1961), pp. 7-16, https://doi.org/10.14288/cl.v0i8, see p. 11.

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> a separation from life, a self-worship, a denial of love, a hatred of the living with a faith. (…) The horror of Geoffrey's existence is always in the forefront of our consciousness.[2]

Here, speaking of an ailing soul *opens up* the difficult, opaque character of Geoffrey Firmin. As such, the notion should be more evident than the case itself, rather than as something calling for being opened up. And, indeed, our language abounds in mentions of souls troubled, luminous, lost, sold, or found again. We help ourselves with such figures of speech to shed light on tricky cases.

On the other hand, the notion that people have souls is troublesome for much of contemporary philosophy – if not in the sense of having issues with the *truth* of the claim of people having souls, then certainly in the sense of struggling laboriously to clarify what (having) a soul should *mean*.

Philosophy has traditionally tackled these questions using the intuition of the soul as a *substance*, comprising – along with the bodily/material substance – a human being. In contrast to the body, the soul is *not* material in the same sense that the body is; it is 'inside', sometimes separate, even immortal. These considerations assimilate the soul to the *mind*. The questions of whether the soul has an independent existence or what its nature is – compared to the nature of the body – are asked in the same breath as questions about the mind.

This association has led to questioning the nature of the soul as an independent-ish substance, much like new developments in the philosophy of mind picture the mind as something other than an independent-ish substance. Though these critical arguments have ontological merit, my concern will be with the *talk* of the soul. In *this* context, I will plead for a disentangling of the soul from the mind.

In section II, I briefly discuss the mind and the soul in the context of the philosophy of a thinker who gave *both* of these concepts some prominence – Ludwig Wittgenstein. I argue that, first, his arguments are indeed congenial to the arguments of anti-dualist philosophers of mind (Davidson or Dennett), but, second, he also makes observations difficult to accommodate within this framework, which Wittgensteinian ethicists such as Winch, Rhees, or Gaita later elaborated on as congenial to a roughly *Platonic* notion of the soul. In section III, I discuss a few particular cases of 'ailments of the soul' (addiction, racism, environmental grief) as distinct from common senses in which we talk about the mind suffering from (mental) health issues. In section IV, I discuss what these cases suggest in favour of talking about the soul in ways distinctive and different from the ways we talk about the mind, because this is *one* helpful means of understanding these ailments in a more nuanced way. This, however, does not require us to opt for any substantivist doctrine of the soul.

2. Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein's remarks about the soul are related to the opposition inner-outer. In this sense, he contributes to the same debate as advocates or critics of behaviourism: do people have minds apart from bodies? Are their minds localised? Do their minds have contents? Is people's outward behaviour a visible expression of their thoughts, intentions, or emotions, which are 'inside'? While some picture Wittgenstein as a philosopher friendly to behaviourism,[3] others are critical of this assumption.[4] The question of whether people's thoughts and feelings are hidden behind, or present in, their faces indeed invites epistemological reading, but Wittgenstein is primarily concerned with the exploration of the *conceptual* structure of human relationships.

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[2] Heilman, 'The Possessed Artist', 14.

2.1. Wittgenstein, the Mind, and the Soul

In a much-quoted remark, Wittgenstein says: 'My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul'.[5] He is not interested in the question of whether there is a certain something that people have (in their heads). The talk of the soul reflects contexts in which we *relate* to others in certain ways. That we deal with a soul is not an isolated, independently formed conjecture. We have here a cluster of primitive attitudes of a 'reactive' or 'participant' character,[6] a matter of unreflected 'feeling about and acting towards' others.[7] We are angry with another person, we long for her words, we care about what she thinks, also because *it is she* who thinks these things. These attitudes have very different 'contents'; *that* the other has a soul is a way of describing what all the heterogeneous attitudes are like.

Winch[8] observes that for Wittgenstein, the key difference between beliefs and attitudes is that they do not have objects of the same kind. That we relate to each other differently from the way we treat an automaton is not because we have certain beliefs about each other. We have *particular* beliefs *about* other people's souls ('Only a man with a black soul could have hit the child as he did!') because we adopt those foundational attitudes. Moreover, while we certainly have beliefs about the states of people's souls and their lives – 'I believe she is profoundly unhappy' – we cannot 'believe' in the same sense that someone has a soul. We say 'I believe she is unhappy' in a situation in which our interlocutor, or ourselves, *may not* be aware of the person's unhappiness, or may misinterpret her confusing behaviour. We can hardly imagine analogous situations in which what is at stake would be whether she has/is a soul.

Wittgenstein expands his comment by saying, equally famously, that '[t]he human body is the best picture of the human soul',[9] and, much less famously, that '[i]nstead of "attitude toward the soul" one could also say "attitude toward a human"'.[10] The second quotation explains Wittgenstein's refusal of 'opinions'. Can one be of the *opinion* that the other is a human? What would it be like? The presence or absence of the soul is not stated *after* consideration; the soul simply is at play whenever anything human, or simply alive in a human way, is at play. Making sense of *human* encounters presupposes the context of attitudes toward souls.

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[3] Nicholas Gier. 'Wittgenstein, Intentionality and Behaviorism', *Metaphilosophy* 13, no 1 (1982), pp. 46-64, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9973.1982.tb00290.x; George Graham, 'Behaviorism', accessed 8 April 2022, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/behaviorism/.

[4] Peter Winch, '"Eine Einstellung zur Seele"', in *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 140-153.

[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations. Revised 4th edition*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Chichester: Wiley, 2009), II, § 22.

[6] Peter Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962), pp. 187-211.

[7] David Cockburn, *Other Human Beings* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 6.

[8] Winch, 'Eine Einstellung'.

[9] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II, § 25.

[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on the Philosophy or Psychology: The Inner and the Outer (1949-1951)*, trans. M. Aue and C. Grant Luckhardt (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 38.

Wittgenstein's position resembles the classical post-war rejections of mind-body dualism – Dennett's functionalism or Davidson's anomalous monism. Dennett, too, refuses to search for another 'substance' that 'is there' apart from the body. Talking about the mind reflects the presence of a *relatable* bodily being. This is captured by Dennett's Wittgensteinian example of the difference between 'we – just me and my dog' and 'we – just me and my oyster', or 'me and my truck'. He says: 'When I address you, I include us both in the class of mind-havers'.[11] That is, by addressing you, I ascribe a mind to you, not that, based on ascribing a mind to you, I can address you as a 'you'.

Davidson argues that while we talk about bodies and about minds, this is a difference of *vocabularies* applied simultaneously.[12] By applying the 'vocabulary of agency',[13] we are not positing the mind as an extra entity apart from the (human) body: we use a conceptual tool appropriate for talking about motives, reasons, ideas – everything that makes human behaviour *agency*. Without accommodating propositional attitudes or the concept of truth, our descriptions of human agency are impossible.

Thus, the elements of Wittgenstein's notion of the soul point in directions similar to established philosophers of mind.

2.2. The Immortal Soul in Plato and Wittgensteinian Ethics

However, I would also like to stress the aspects of the Wittgensteinian account of the soul that mark *differences* between the talk of the *mind* and the talk of the *soul*. The mind features prominently in discussions of knowledge, intention, or decision-making, and, indeed, when Wittgenstein is talking about *Seele*, he often seems to mean exactly this.[14]

On the other hand, he makes occasional comments about *Seele* in which substituting 'the mind' would feel flattening or blunt the edge of the observation. Thus, the 'soulful' expression in a person's eyes, in the gaze of which one 'can be lost', 'into which one can look with astonishment and delight',[15] seems to denote more than the presence of consciousness, of life. (Analogously with a 'soulful' expression with which a piece of music is played.)[16] For the soul can also feel the 'weighing burden' of depression, in ways different from bodily feeling.[17] It is comprehensibly weary beyond the sense in which the mind is tired (*sic*!),[18] and it is the soul that feels grief, the place of which is the whole person (or, surprisingly, the stomach rather than the head) and the object of which is the world.[19] In a similar sense, the soul is where *regret* is located.[20] The 'soul' is also something we may feel uncertain about in some contexts where the question of 'the mind' would be much more clear-cut, such as when we ask whether a dog has a soul, in connection to such contested notions as whether (it makes sense to say that) a dog can *hope*.[21] It is difficult to conceive of a comparable uncertainty about a dog's mind.

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[11] Daniel Dennett, *Kinds of Minds* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 4.

[12] Donald Davidson, 'Problems in the Explanation of Action', in *Problems of Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 101-116.

[13] Bjørn Ramberg, 'Post-ontological Philosophy of Mind: Rorty versus Davidson', in Robert Brandom, ed., *Rorty and His Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 351-370.

[14] When and whether Wittgenstein's *Seele* is to be translated as 'the mind' instead of 'the soul' is in itself a difficult exegetical question. Anscombe's original translation of the *Investigations* favours 'the soul' in many places where the editors of the 4th revised edition (Hacker and Schulte) considered it reasonable to change to 'the mind' (cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, xivf).

[15] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology I*, trans. M. Aue and C. Grant Luckhardt (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), § 267f.

[16] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology II*, trans. M. Aue and C. Grant Luckhardt (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), § 695; also *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, trans. M. Aue and C. Grant Luckhardt (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), § 954.

[17] Wittgenstein, *Remarks I*, § 133.

This is not to say that Wittgenstein has a definite theory of the soul. However, he is using the term *Seele* in a much more inclusive way than the English term 'mind', covering also the territory of 'the soul'. What is the common denominator (if any) of those extra contexts? Wittgensteinian ethicist İlham Dilman contrasts 'the mind' as a term featuring in discussions of perception, consciousness, knowledge, or representation, with the talk of 'the soul' indispensable for *moral* or spiritual concerns.[22] Grief, regret, hope, the not-of-the-mind tiredness, perhaps also the nonphysical burden of depression – these all are close to moral and spiritual concerns.

Thus, it may not be surprising that among the examples of matters of the soul discussed by Wittgenstein, we also find his observation of the importance of the fact that people often consider the soul *immortal*, and act accordingly.[23] Again, this doesn't amount to committing oneself to a metaphysics of a discorporate mind, though. The immortality of the soul is not a matter of whether the respect in which living beings are functioning and conscious exists independently of a mere body. Instead, Wittgensteinian ethicists elaborate on the philosopher's remarks in a manner relying on Platonic and Christian intuitions. They take the immortality of the soul as the matter of life 'lived in the light of eternity' and 'seen under certain moral and religious modes of thought',[24] as '[t]here would be no sense to [the talk of] "my eternal soul" were I not answerable to eternal things'.[25] This relies on the Platonic rejection of the idea that what harms the soul is the same sense of harm that concerns the body. Here, rather than Plato's metaphysical doctrine, the moral aspect of his conception of the immortality of the soul is stressed.

Rush Rhees characterises the specificity of the talk of the soul, observing that '[t]he chemical changes of the body at death (…) do not tell you what has "left" the body', and similarly that understanding the nature of being alive, or joy, or love, is not the same as understanding the accompanying bodily processes.[26] On the other hand, philosophers of mind *are* legitimately interested in the relevance of bodily chemical processes for the *mental events* of thinking or being in love.

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[18] Wittgenstein, *Remarks I*, § 586. In this passage, 'the mind' is Aue and Luckhardt's translation of *Verstand*.

[19] Wittgenstein, *Remarks I*, § 438ff. Here, admittedly, I (unlike Aue and Luckhardt) take Wittgenstein's *Seele* to mean 'the soul', not 'the mind'.

[20] Wittgenstein, *Remarks II*, § 307.

[21] Wittgenstein, *Last Writings (1949-1951)*, 65.

[22] İlham Dilman, *The Self, the Soul and the Psychology of Good and Evil* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 20f. Of course, Wittgensteinian ethicists are not the only thinkers tracing the essential link between the soul and morality; cf. the recent work by John Cottingham, *In Search of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 33.

[23] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II, § 23.

[24] D. Z. Phillips, *Death and Immortality* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 49.

[25] Rush Rhees, *In Dialogue with the Greeks Volume II* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 93.

[26] Rhees, *In Dialogue*, 80.

Plato's point (in Rhees's reading) is that the soul need not fear the death of the body. The mind is something that perishes through causes that lead to the death of the body, too. That through which the soul perishes *are not such causes*, though; the soul is 'that which the body loses through moral degradation', says Rhees,[27] arguing that only its own evil can destroy the soul, with reference (probably) to *The Republic* (I, 610a). Here, Rhees's reading illuminates Wittgenstein's cursory remarks, especially the way in which Winch or others elaborate on them. Attitudes towards a soul are attitudes towards someone whose life it makes sense to understand as liable to be damaged morally.

In what sense do we speak here of 'damage'? The condition of the soul makes our lives good or bad in a sense different from health or welfare understood in a naturalised way. As Rhees argues, the soul is not a 'something' *based on which* 'I have certain responsibilities or I am capable of good and evil – (…) having such responsibilities is a part of what is *meant* by having a soul (…) [a]nd similarly with "being capable of good and evil"'.[28] Certainly, one is limited in one's capacity for good and evil if one is severely cognitively impaired or suffers from a devastating mental health condition; in these respects, the soul *is* linked to mental capacities. Yet the soul is connected *intrinsically* to being a good person. Being a good person does not 'require' a non-degraded soul, but having a non-degraded soul is simply a way of expressing what being good means.[29]

The Platonic aspect of Wittgenstein's account of the soul thus points in this direction: we do not talk about the soul as a function of the organism, whereas we do so with the mind. The mind can be healthy, like the body; the health of both is conducive to one's welfare. When we say that something is wrong with a person's soul, we offer a comment on the person's integrity (perhaps) rather than on her health. A mental disorder, being a health disorder, is diagnosed and treated (therapeutically). In that respect, it differs from a situation that we regard as a disorder of the soul. Commenting on a soul disorder by way of finding there a mental health disorder prevents us from clearly seeing important things in the life of the person. For instance, we pity the person in different ways: as someone who is suffering, or as someone who has committed something that we must condemn. In the following section, I will try to show the importance of focusing on disorders (of the soul) by looking at some specific examples.

3. Ailments of the Soul

There is, as I indicated at the beginning of this paper, a whole range of common expressions featuring the soul: we talk about people losing, or selling, their souls; we call some (even trivial) life situations 'soul-destroying'. We help ourselves with these expressions not to grasp a unified and coherent theory of the soul but to indicate a certain quality of these cases and situations that might otherwise remain unnoticed, for instance if we conceptualised them in terms of cognitive or mental shortcomings. Admittedly, all these expressions are exactly – figures of speech. They are open to exaggerated, hyperbolic, or ironic uses as well, and they needn't refer to any serious spiritual situation. But so are expressions featuring the mind – 'losing one's mind' is a familiar idiom that has (mostly) nothing to do with a person's actually losing what philosophers of mind or cognitive scientists call 'the mind'. Yet, whether literal, hyperbolic, ironic, or figurative, each of these idioms means something distinct. When we describe certain cases using the term 'the soul', we shed a different light on them than if we mention 'the mind'. In fact, the benefit of maintaining the independence of the talk of the soul may consist in great part exactly in preventing the application of the talk of the mind to some cases and phenomena. Framing them in terms of the soul is more suitable than giving room to the ever-expansive discourse of the mental, but that does not necessarily make the talk of the soul the only discourse, or the best one to apply.

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[27] Rhees, *In Dialogue*, 94.

[28] Rush Rhees, 'That man is made for Heaven', in *On Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 256-276, see p. 259f.

[29] For various versions of this point, cf. Peter Winch, 'Moral Integrity', in *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 171-192, see p. 172, Rush Rhees, 'Understanding What Men Do and Understanding the Lives Men Live', in *Moral Questions* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 231-237, see p. 233f, or Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (London: Routledge, 2006), chap. 11.

This caveat is one of the reasons why I do not tackle here any substantive anthropologies of the soul.[30] The Wittgensteinian background (outlined in the previous section) of my observations simply offers support for keeping the talk of the soul distinct from, and doing a different job than, the talk of the body, or of the mind, naturalistically construed. Thus, I will focus here on particular examples from the midst of our *talk* of the soul, specifically those we may make sense of as 'ailments' or 'disorders of the soul'. This allows for a worthwhile kind of understanding, while stressing 'the mind' or 'the mental' would hinder such understanding.

There are many ways in which things may not be all right in our lives. Some of them we relate, when understanding what is going on, to our bodies, some to our minds, some to our souls. I have indicated the tight connection between the soul and the *moral* dimension: there is something wrong with our life when we harm others, succumb to nasty habits, or indulge in mean thoughts. Clearly, these are not problems that a physician or a psychiatrist could address. They are neither *health* problems nor related to intellectual or cognitive failings.[31]

I would, however, like to touch also upon further contexts in which our souls can be said to be ailing, contexts that involve aesthetic or generally existential dimensions. Unlike the specifically moral cases of ailing souls that the holder of the soul may not notice, other cases of ailments of the soul often *are* experienced and perceived as forms of suffering *by the persons* in question themselves. Charles Perakis discusses 'soul sickness' as having 'medically unexplained symptoms', which in fact stem from hopelessness, lack of meaning, and demoralisation and may culminate in 'checking out of life'. This sickness does not call for 'the prescription for a drug or the over-investigation of symptoms'.[32] But first, and briefly, let us look at a specifically moral example.

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[30] For instance, Joshua Farris, in *The Soul of Theological Anthropology* (New York: Routledge, 2017), advocates for the notion of the soul as a conscious substance that owns and unifies a person's mental events (and is akin to the greater spiritual substance: God). I am afraid that my observations in this paper have no direct bearing on whether Farris's account is right or not.

[31] An intriguing example of this intuitive yet philosophically often neglected distinction between the mental/intellectual and the soul-related occurs in JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series: when the procedure of producing 'horcruxes' is explained as based on 'ripping one's *soul* apart', through *murder*. Dumbledore says that while Voldemort's *soul* is thereby 'maimed and diminished', his magic powers, related to his *brain* (and, presumably, mind), remain intact. That a bad person may not be mentally impaired is of course a trivial observation; what is notable is that Rowling's characters naturally specify it in terms of the soul vs. body-and-mind distinction.

3.1. Racism, Inflicted and Suffered

Bryan Massingale, an American ethicist and public theologian, writes:

> Something catastrophic is happening in our country. And I don't mean only the morbid, wrenching, almost incessant killings of Black young men and boys. These deaths reveal a deep malady at the core of America. A coldness. A callousness. A soul-warping disease. For racism is a soul-sickness.[33]

The sickness does not consist in particular violent actions, or verbal slurs, but rather in the overall attitude of callousness and indifference towards cruelty, violence, and suffering – an implicit refusal to care about people whom I take to be/look different from myself. Massingale does not content himself with locating racism solely at the sociocultural level; a soul sickness is a sickness of the ways in which we are who we are, as persons. At the same time, his theological description has the ambition to be *public* theology, one that addresses the fact that the soul sickness of an individual comprises a particular form of life. In this, it represents a certain paradox: fighting racism in society requires public steps, which, however, would not just be institutional or political measures but would be understood and received by people as developments of value standpoints they could embrace as *their* value standpoints.

The cure for racism requires a transformation of the person's life, which may require implementing resources not readily and independently available to the individual, but which rely on what society makes available. For Massingale, interventions into the soul are interventions into 'the set of meanings and values that inform and animate a way of life',[34] but the same phrase may be the definition of – and the interventions are thus the interventions into – the *culture* of a society. Consequently, in Massingale's reading, when Martin Luther King Jr called for 'redeeming the soul of America', the word 'soul' did not refer to something individual humans have substantively, and the country or the society only figuratively. Here, we talk about the soul sickness of racism as something that applies both to individuals and to society, exactly to the extent that man is a social being. At the same time, as in all genuinely moral cases, individuals can be blamed and held responsible in a way not fully transferable to society.

Conversely, racism's denial of the full humanity of its victims arguably amounts to the refusal to grant the full depth of the life of the soul to people of other races, as Raimond Gaita observes.[35] He also suggests, following the thought of Simone Weil, that 'lacerations of the soul' are caused by harms that one *suffers from*, not just those that one inflicts on others. However, he insists that talking about souls lacerated or destroyed by suffered harm does not presuppose a substantive doctrine of the soul. Instead, the talk of the soul equips us with tools that help us to reflect more acutely on the human condition, human suffering, and the depths of human life, which is that of 'a mortal creature, vulnerable to misfortune'.[36] This point reflects the one made by Wittgenstein about the role of our talk of 'feelings, etc.'.[37]

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[32] Charles Perakis, 'Soul Sickness: A Frequently Missed Diagnosis', *Journal of Osteopathic Medicine* 110, no. 6 (2010), pp. 347-349, https://doi.org/10.7556/jaoa.2010.110.6.347.

[33] Bryan Massingale, 'Theology in the Public Sphere in the Twenty-First Century', *Horizons* 43, no. 2 (2016), pp. 351-356, https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2016.110, see p. 355. Etty Hillesum, in *An Interrupted Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 11, also calls 'indiscriminate hatred' (towards all members of a nation simply by virtue of their nationality) 'a sickness of the soul'.

[34] Bryan Massingale, 'To Redeem the Soul of America', accessed 2 May 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhFyaNYkKTg.

This extremely brief outline naturally cannot exhaust the complex issue of racism. However, it can indicate that talking about distinctive aspects of racism and racial hatred in terms of 'the soul' captures something important that the conceptual register of 'the mind' would likely leave unnoticed.

3.2. Addiction

A different kind of example is served by addiction, which usually, but not only, relates to drugs. Drug problems are interpreted in many ways by philosophers. Among the common ways of looking at addiction that obscure more than illuminate is characterising it in terms of (mental) health, as a problem that should be treated medically. Or locating it in a breakdown of the will, or of one's cognitive capacities, as an incapacity to see what drug use leads to. I criticise these conceptions at length elsewhere,[38] suggesting instead that addiction is an expression of a more complex problem one has with oneself and one's life. That much is indicated by the simple difference between the consumption of a drug, even if regular and rather frequent, and a drug problem.

It is important to see that addiction is a problem different in nature, one that is not 'simply happening' to a person in the way that a physical health problem (COVID-19) or a mental health problem (schizophrenia) *happens*. The answer to the question of why someone succumbs to excessive drinking comes not from describing her dopamine neurochemistry but rather from reporting an important event or circumstance in her life. However, the usually assumed alternative to the 'disease concept' has traditionally been the 'sin concept': addiction as a *moral* degradation. This unfortunate choice has prompted various proposals to understand addiction as 'soul sickness'.[39] Sonia Waters characterises addiction as

> behaviors that begin as ritual attempts to survive something unbearable that is happening in our inner or outer world. They appear to help us, but they are really self-harming. They infect us, compromise the will, then take over the will, and finally turn against us. (…) They are not about pleasure, but about pain.[40]

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[35] Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity* (London: Routledge, 2002), 57ff.

[36] Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 238f.

[37] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 656.

[38] Ondřej Beran, 'Addiction as Degradation of Life', *Ethics and Medicine* 35, no. 3 (2019), pp. 171–190.

[39] J. Keene and P. Raynor, 'Addiction as a "Soul Sickness": The Influence of Client and Therapist Beliefs', *Addiction Research* 1, no. 1 (1993), pp. 77–87, https://doi.org/10.3109/16066359309035325; Sonia Waters, *Addiction and Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019).

[40] Waters, *Addiction and Pastoral Care*, 18.

Why *soul*? The object of addiction becomes the 'central concern of a person's life'.[41] As such, it is that to which one gives *oneself* over.[42] One may be fully devoted to one's work, family, or political activism, and these cases can take worrisome forms, too. Giving oneself over to an addiction object, though, is disruptive *as a rule*. This has to do with the predatory and deceptive nature of the addictive habit, which promises to give one 'something for nothing', and immediately. Unlike the healthy central concerns of one's life, addiction not only reduces the space devoted to the non-central concerns but often eliminates this space altogether, or it disrupts one's capacity to follow the logic of functioning in these contexts.[43] Seeburger observes that with addiction in the central place, 'one's very life has ceased to be one's "own"'.[44]

One's relation to one's central concern cannot best be understood in terms of the body or the mind, but rather of the *soul*. Accordingly, any disorder involved is one of life rather than health. The suggested remedies usually aim at very broad targets: 'learn[ing] to live without drugs or alcohol and substitute a new social life, spiritual beliefs, emotional contacts, and moral behaviour for the old way of life'.[45] Since this description, like many similar ones, comes from therapy practitioners, the passing mention of *moral* matters reflects everyday conceptual intuitions rather than philosophical theories. The mentions of the soul should be read analogously: not as proposals for dualistic substance metaphysics but as ingrained forms of expression of human self-understanding. (Several addiction therapy resources apply the metaphor of a 'hole in the soul'. Notably, they diverge over whether the 'hole' is caused by addiction, or whether addiction is a reaction to a perceived pre-existing 'hole', exacerbating it further. Yet the lack of consistent metaphysics of the 'hole' needn't worry us.)

I would like to point to the fact that the suggested remedies[46] are of a particular kind. The proposed life reconstruction comes in terms different from the way in which we formulate what a moral transformation, or recovery from a disease, consists of. A description of moral growth or recovery (say, from racism) in terms of finding a new way of life for oneself is rather uninformative; on the other hand, it describes *drug*-related trajectories of recovery quite literally. Again, when problems of the soul are problems of what one's life is like, the proposed reconstruction concerns dimensions impossible to influence without tackling the problem on a social, political, and economic level. This is why the most complex analyses of addiction focus in great breadth on its social, economic, or cultural roots.[47] By extension, it indicates that our talk about the ailing or healing soul does *not* focus on a 'substance' co-constituting an individual human being.

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[41] Leon Holtzhausen, 'Addiction – a brain disorder or a spiritual disorder', *Mental Health and Addiction Research* 2, no. 1 (2017), pp. 1-7, https://doi.org/10.15761/MHAR.1000129; cf. Herbert Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), chap. 5.

[42] Francis Seeburger, *Addiction and Responsibility* (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

[43] More about this in my 'Addiction as Degradation of Life', section 4.

[44] Seeburger, *Addiction and Responsibility*, 41.

[45] Keene and Raynor, 'Addiction as a "Soul Sickness"', 86.

[46] Alternative sources of 'positive reinforcement' (cf. Carl Hart, Charles Ksir, and Oakley Ray, *Drugs, Society and Human Behavior* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008], 35ff) include 'the ability to earn income, learn a skill, or receive some respect based on your performance in some sort of way, those things compete with potentially destructive behavior (…) [s]kills that are employable or marketable, education, having a stake or meaningful role in society, not being marginalized'; see Carl Hart, 'Everything Americans Think They Know About Drugs Is Wrong', accessed 2 May 2022, https://www.alternet.org/2013/06/drugs-addiction/.

[47] For example Bruce Alexander, *The Globalization of Addiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

As with racism, we need not necessarily apply the vocabulary of the 'soul' to addiction in order to understand it. Addiction is perhaps most properly understood as a problem of the person's *life*. Here, the distinctiveness of the talk of the soul from the talk of the mental (health) indicates that there is simply more to life, or rather that more can be wrong with life than what calls for remedy of a medical (if broadly construed) kind.

3.3. Environmental Grief

The previous two examples of soul sickness represent cases of a specifically moral or generally (individually) existential nature. Here, I want to introduce another example, indicating that our talk of the soul responds also to other kinds of disruption. What I have in mind is the negative influence of the environmental/climate crisis on the way we experience and live our lives, especially for young people, who seem pushed by it towards questioning whether they have any future left.[48]

Willis Jenkins argues that the destruction of places of nature – that are an 'offer of grace' – breaks the 'covenant', and 'wounds the soul'.[49] Here, we have a case of 'soul wounding' different from a moral disruption (akin to racism, inflicted or suffered) or personal life disruption (akin to addiction). Though Jenkins applies theological terms, this is not necessarily only the experience of people pledging allegiance to a particular religious denomination. Thus, Roger Gottlieb points out that aspects of deep ecology present in many responses to the environmental crisis guide us to perceive something being *desecrated*:[50] neither is simply an instrumental or practical value lost, nor is there a clearly delimited wrongdoing committed or suffered.

Environmental grief[51] thus responds to a particular *wholesome*, ongoing loss. This loss integrates *several* axes of value, which makes it *sui generis*. Nature includes us; we are a part of it and its degradation influences negatively our pragmatic interests, but we also thereby lose a part of who we took ourselves to be. The suicides of Indian farmers[52] indicate that they lost any sense of the continuity of their lives, of who they could imagine themselves to be. The intelligibility of this loss, perceived as inescapable, relates to the land in/on which they have lived[53] and to their no-longer-sustainable farming practices.

But nature is also *beautiful*. We take beauty to be something that elevates our lives, and the degradation of something beautiful is a blow to our souls. Contemplating the sea full of plastic is a soul-shrinking experience, even if you are not directly personally affected by it. And it differs from the indignation you feel on behalf of the afflicted marine fauna. It is a feeling of horror, and we may falter in our will or our feeling that we have any right to live as we have lived before. This shock doesn't concern an immediate loss of practical life prospects, as in the case of the Indian farmers, nor is it simply a matter of mental health. What recognised diagnosis should it be, after all? It responds to the loss of something valuable *and* beautiful *and*, perhaps, sacred – all of which affect the sustainability of who we understand ourselves to be.[54]

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[48] Cf. my article 'Who Should Have Children? (Us?) When Should We Have Children? (Now?)', *SATS* 23, no. 1 (2022), pp. 55–74.

[49] Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 231ff.

[50] Roger Gottlieb, *Political and Spiritual* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2015), 11.

[51] Kriss Kevorkian, 'Environmental Grief', in Darcy Harris, ed., *Non-Death Loss and Grief. Context and Clinical Implications* (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 216-226.

[52] Tamma Carleton, 'Crop-damaging temperatures increase suicide rates in India', *PNAS* 114, no. 33 (2017), pp. 8746-51, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1701354114.

[53] Cf. Jakob Meløe, 'The two landscapes of Northern Norway', *Acta Borealia* 7, no. 1 (1990), pp. 68–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/08003839008580385, see p. 79.

In theological contexts, this challenges traditional 'stewardship theologies', based on the conception of the human soul that makes us exempt from nature and uninvolved in its degradation. Instead, theologies are proposed that embrace our involvement in nature and call us to reinvent our vocation in terms different from that of stewardship elevated above nature.[55] As the traditional substantive notion of the soul is a benchmark of the traditional stewardship theologies of humanity, it may be thereby weakened as well. We come to understand the soul differently. It allows us to make sense of what we experience as 'the blow to our souls' when we face environmental degradation. For many well-to-do Westerners, it is not so much a direct blow to their personal well-being, or mental health, nor something that calls for medication or therapy – to be able to let the feeling go. They may not even be very complicit. (Often, the people who care strongly about the crisis do their best to live as sustainably as possible.) And they may not *want* to let the feeling go, and for a good reason.

Religious language allows one to say that 'to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin', something that has an impact on 'the health not only of our rivers and lungs, but of our souls as well'.[56] In an important, though not clear-cut, distinction from racism, this sin *blurs* the boundaries between committing a particular wrongdoing, being implicated through one's lifestyle, and witnessing the harm as a member of 'humanity'. These blurred boundaries reflect a certain blurring of 'where' we take the soul to be, as that which is ailing.

Environmental emotions such as climate anxiety are sometimes seen as a mental health issue and mental health threat.[57] Though there is much to this observation, it cannot be the whole picture, for these emotions are also lucid responses to what is the case – our recognition of the disrupted value. And to the extent that there is a component of guilt, wanting the feeling to go away may even be misplaced, much like wanting to get rid of remorse qua an unpleasant feeling. Thus, we can see these emotions as cases of unpleasant and distressed thoughts and other mental (yes) states, yet we do justice to them by seeing them as lucid acknowledgements of distressing reality. The talk of the soul is better suited to this purpose than the talk of the mind.

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[54] Wittgensteinian ethicist Roy Holland speaks of these resources as a matter of 'nourishment of the soul'. R. F. Holland, 'Education and Values', in *Against Empiricism* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1980), pp. 52-61, see p. 59.

[55] Cf. Theodore Hiebert, 'The Human Vocation. Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions', in . D. T. Hessel and R. Radford Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 135-154; or Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 234ff.

[56] Cf. Roger Gottlieb, 'Introduction: Religion and Ecology – What Is the Connection and Why Does It Matter?', in Roger Gottlieb, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 3-21, see p. 13 (quoting the Orthodox patriarch Bartholomew).

[57] Cf. Ashlee Cunsolo Willox and Neville Ellis, 'Ecological grief as a mental health response to climate change-related loss', *Nature Climate Change* 8 (2018), pp. 275–81.

4. Back to the Soul and the Mind

Clearly, the things said about the soul in the above contexts do not form a coherent whole. For instance, the soul, in the sense of (having) a system of values and ideas, can be sick, but it can hardly be wounded in the way a person (someone who holds certain things dear) can experience a wound. This, however, represents a problem for the ambition to vindicate a substantive account of the soul, which is not my ambition here. I take the above contexts, in which we *talk* about ailments of the soul, as interrelated and partly overlapping[58] areas of reflection on our lives. The talk of the soul as a substance is also one of these areas.

It is tempting to see the talk of the soul as a residuum, not yet processed by contemporary professional discourses of the mind or the self. Indeed, some parts of our talk of the soul *do* overlap with the ways in which we talk of the mind. Insofar as we are interested in whether there is an ‘inner’ aspect of humans, of their hidden thoughts or feelings, apart from the ‘outer’ aspect, the two talks intersect, and the inclusive ambiguity of Wittgenstein’s notion of *Seele* reflects that, too. Yet, to the extent that we are not interested in the nature and quantity of a human ‘inner’ substance (or substances), we are free to study the differences between our talks of the mind and the soul. Dilman (2005: 9f, 20f) notes that our talk of the soul concerns ‘that part of us, as flesh-and-blood beings, in which we respond to good and evil, and also to beauty’, as opposed to the ‘capacity to think, feel, make choices, take decisions, etc.’ characteristic of the talk of the mind.[59]

My suggestion is to focus on the *differences* rather than the similarities. The cases of ‘ailments’ and disorders highlight the importance of the mind-vs-soul distinction quite clearly. ‘Losing one’s mind’ is a phrase we use when a person’s capacity to think or deliberate is compromised; ‘losing one’s soul’ is used when the person’s grip on what is of value in life is compromised, and, by extension, who she is. There are reasons why we tie ‘who we are’ more closely to considerations circumscribed by the notion of the ‘soul’ than to those relating to the ‘mind’. Much as using the ‘soul’ vocabulary has its own problems (for instance, in carrying religious associations not everybody is happy with), using the ‘mind’ vocabulary means losing something important from the picture.

Necessarily, a lot of what we include under the heading ‘matters of the soul’ are matters of interpersonal interactions and of navigation in social contexts. Again, inevitably, this means that the notion of the soul, and of humanity, is constantly developing, as is the particular place within it occupied by social interaction strata and the current default forms of social ‘traffic’.[60] This need not be a disadvantage; in fact, it allows the concept to be flexible and stretch to cover cases, people, and situations traditionally difficult to accommodate within it. One example is neurodivergent people, who often struggle with 'normal' social interactions with others. Ian Hacking notes that the Wittgensteinian observation about the human body as the image of human soul, or the metaphor of the eyes as windows into the soul, or the importance of eye contact in human interactions, do not work smoothly with and for autistic people.[61] Even if this indicates something like a 'social hole in their soul',[62] this does not mean that the humanity of autistic people should conform to the traditionally ingrained notion of the social (component of humanity), or that it is deficient. Rather, the social (component of humanity) should develop to better accommodate autistic people, who struggle with some of its traditional expressions. To the extent that we are concerned here primarily with the way people speak, the notion of humanity indeed does develop. Then, to paraphrase one of Hacking's points, the soul is not only immediately visible in the flexions and expressions of the human body but also in the collective endeavour to facilitate, help, and teach those for whom this is not immediately visible to *infer* it.[63]

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[58] Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 67.

[59] Dilman, *The Self*, 9f, 20f. Dilman presents this distinction as motivated by Wittgenstein’s discussion, though he himself implicitly struggles with the difficulties of mapping the English soul-vs.-mind distinction onto Wittgenstein’s terms *Seele* (inclusive) and *Geist* (rather marginal).

[60] Ian Hacking notes that acknowledging that the notion of the soul is culturally specific (Western) and has a complicated history and a range of social functions is not a way to explain away the soul but rather

This example and those from the previous section suggest that a lot about the soul is of a conceptual nature and finds itself 'out there', in our social worlds and interactions with each other. In fact, some recent theologies, accommodating insights from postwar philosophy, such as Fergus Kerr's classic book,[64] indicate openings for refocusing theologically the notion of the soul. Just as discussions in philosophy have eroded the options for understanding the human mind as a separate 'substance', so too does 'the soul' face the same challenges.

Non-substantivist theologies thus take seriously the task of thinking theologically about matters of the soul, as expressed by the ingrained sayings of our language. Rowan Williams, in an address at a Christian festival gathering, speaks critically about body/soul dualism as something that makes it difficult to see how complicated a thing is the soul. Understanding what the soul is requires understanding the significance of the fact that

> what I do has a life in the lives of other people. I do not exist as a self-contained person, but I live in your life. (…) There is a life (…) that you are creating with and projecting into the lives of other people. And that is part of the soul as well – a life involved in past and future. I am what I have been and other people live in me.[65]

In this sense, having, or being, a soul is a lifelong process. Only if we understand this in a sense distinct from developmental psychology can we understand not only the striking developments in an individual's personality throughout her life but also how one can

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to understand better what it is. Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 215f.

[61] Ian Hacking, 'Humans, Aliens & Autism', *Daedalus* 138, no. 3 (2009), pp. 44–59.

[62] To borrow the phrase of Geoffrey Hollin ('Autism, Sociality and Human Nature', accessed 2 May 2022, http://somatosphere.net/2014/autism-sociality-and-human-nature.html/).

[63] Hacking, 'Humans, Aliens & Autism', 57.

[64] Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[65] Rowan Williams, 'Lost Souls: What Do We Think We Are?', *Ministry Today* 21 (2001), pp. 105-115, see p. 108f.

'sell' or 'lose' one's soul. This understanding of 'the soul' also requires the ability to follow cases of addiction, racism, or environmental despair as ailments of the soul: by directing our gaze not into the person's 'head', or into a metaphysical realm, but into the person's life, 'out there'. Thus, Wittgenstein – an important inspirational source for Kerr's and Williams's theological writings – observes:

> Regret is called a pain of the soul because the signs of pain are similar to those of regret.
>
> But if one wanted to find an analogy to the place of pain, it would of course not be the mind (as, of course, place of bodily pain is not[66] the body), but the *object* of regret.[67]

That one's soul suffers because it dwells with suffering people one cares about is not a riddle for a metaphysician to solve – how can one of the substances comprising my person 'be with' somebody else? – or 'just a metaphor'. Losing touch with one's soul is not a matter of the *physical* distance between oneself and the person on whom the soul is focused. It can be a matter of the psychological or spiritual distance between the two. Or between what one could have become and what one is guided to become, when racism imprints itself on one's personality. These ways of talking do not obscure the matters of the soul with foggy metaphors. They are among the natural sources of our sense of the soul.

Yet, as far as this sense involves understanding the soul as some*thing* we can lose, we still rely on the deep roots of the image of the soul as a *substance*.[68] Inevitably so? We *stick with using* the term and the corresponding concept, even if we find them difficult to interpret. Without it, our orientation within the world might be clumsier, more difficult, and unfocused. Attempts to explain away the notion of the soul as a shorthand for certain psychological and relational habits may obscure something important. Iris Murdoch argues that explaining away the soul as such a shorthand would mean denying our moral and religious experiences independent reality.[69] This caveat, I believe (whether Murdoch meant it so or not), does not concern the worry that character dispositions – habits of virtue, in the Aristotelian sense (the traditional alternative to the Platonic view) – cannot be oriented and work towards the good. They can. To me, it seems that it rather concerns the peculiar working of the *talk* of the soul. Having a noun for areas of our lives distinct from those in which we equally naturally employ a different noun, such as 'mind', keeps us focused. Yet, an important difference is that the functionality and focus of our ordinary talk of the mind does *not* seem eroded by the general absence of mind substantivism among lay people, bolstered also by the findings of cognitive sciences and neurology, which indeed favour and popularise various forms of functionalist emergentism. We seem to be happy with explaining away a Cartesian notion of the mind and taking the word as a shorthand for our capacities to think, make choices, or take decisions (to borrow from Dilman's list). Our capacity to make choices and to understand what it means to make a choice, and to be aware of the ways in which this differs from, say, our capacity to walk, is not thereby compromised.

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[66] I find this 'not' rather confusing, but it does not affect the point about the 'place of regret'.

[67] Wittgenstein, *Remarks II*, § 307.

[68] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 72.

[69] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), 307.

On the other hand, if having the soul concerns the capacity to respond to matters of (moral, aesthetic, …) value as significant and real, then talking about the soul as a *shorthand* for our *proclivities* to act in certain ways (and to further praise actions of this kind) might mean weakening the sense of the unconditional importance of preferring the good and the right to the bad and the wrong, the unconditionality of which is such by virtue of being answerable to something other than ourselves. This can be taken as an analogy of an observation made by the advocates of the 'ontological turn' in the social sciences: for example, anthropologists placing their informants' convictions about the afterlife survival of the soul or spirit in 'hermeneutical brackets' (that is, as a peculiar way of describing certain habits and practices, which are 'true for them') do not, in fact, do justice to these practices.[70] Similarly, we may not be doing justice to our sense of the soul – as that which responds and is answerable to moral and aesthetic values – if we are ready to cross out the independent and unconditional component from our understanding of these values. Without this component, talking about the soul merely as about a shorthand for the pattern of our responsiveness to these values would do nothing more than what an observation that we have certain psychological and relational habits and dispositions provides (which is *not* to say that such an observation is of no importance, interest, or worth). Talking *explicitly* about 'the soul' as a metaphor or shorthand of this kind might mean already starting to lose the concept, and, probably, contributing to a shift in our notion of the good and the beautiful.

5. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have sought to flesh out my intuition that it is helpful and important to keep the *talk* of the soul disentangled from the talk of the mind. First of all, it simply prevents misunderstanding some areas of human life. More specifically, in the case of the 'ailments' discussed, it prevents their misplaced medicalisation; understanding addiction or environmental grief as mental health issues is insufficient at best. The questions of in what sense, to what extent or even *whether* we should be trying to get rid of these ailments do not have obvious answers; they require fine judgement. Throughout, my concern has been with the *talk* of the soul, illuminating various concerns of human life as having to do with *values* regarded as significant (most often moral, perhaps, but also aesthetic, spiritual, and even pragmatic). However, this is to argue for the added value of the soul vocabulary, compared to the mind, not to promote it as the definitive description of addiction (and so forth) and substantive metaphysical facts underlying it.[71]

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[70] Cf. David Hufford's critical point about reductive explanations of after-death communications: 'the information that comes from such experiences must be perceived as valid; after-death communications, for example, would not assuage grief if they were taken to be symbolic expressions of the bereaved person's deepest wishes, as Freud suggested' (David Hufford, 'The Healing Power of Extraordinary Spiritual Experiences', *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 32 (2014), pp. 137–156, see p. 150)

I discuss the philosophical importance of the ontologists' approach to survival in detail elsewhere: Ondřej Beran, 'The Other Modern Séances', in Gustav Strandberg and Hugo Strandberg, eds., *Jan Patočka and the Phenomenology of Life after Death* (Cham: Springer, to appear in 2023).

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