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# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SOUL

# *A cultural history [[1]](#footnote-1)*

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*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* (Matthew XVI, 26)

*We do not need to get rid of the soul itself, and thus forgo one of the oldest and most venerable hypotheses of thought.*

(Friedrich Nietzsche)

*A woman in love, wallowing in love; a cat on a roof, howling; complex proteins swirling in the blood, distending the sexual organs making the palms sweat and voice thicken as the soul hurls its longings to the skies.*

(J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*)

## INTRODUCTION

Many people feel sure they have one – very few feel sure they can say just what it is. There is something profoundly fascinating about the soul. It expresses something intensely personal and inalienable for which we have no adequate words and thus have recourse to images and symbols – as well as music – to try to express and come in contact with. Music and lyrics are conceived as the medium of the soul. It is no coincidence that *soul* is a separate music genre, and that *blues* has its origin in the despair and humiliation of the Afro-Americans, where the soul was the only thing they could call their own, the only thing that could not be enslaved, and that they literally sang from in their hope of freedom and release from their chains and fetters.

The disparity between the unclear semantic content of the soul and theimportance that people mostly ascribe to it is reflected in our everyday speech. We talk about a whole and pure soul, about a deep and honest soul. We feel something deep down in our soul, can have a noble or a kind soul, are afraid of harming our soul. We use such expressions about personal and moral qualities. There are strong and weak souls, free and open, bound and closed. That which is most personal, as regards both personal strength and vulnerability, we find in the depths of our soul. A person can have a delicate and sensitive soul. It can be both unsettled and divided. The question is whether these are just figurative ways of speaking, metaphorical expressions of personal characteristics, or whether the word soul refers to something real and important, an own dimension in the individual in line with reason and the emotions. Such questions underlie this book.

Throughout human history, the *soul* has been the prism through which humans and human life have been seen and understood. Socrates’ appeal to his fellow citizens in Athens to *take care of the soul* and Christianity’s message of salvation to *preserve one’s soul* have formed the basis of how we view human nature in our culture. The soul has been regarded as an expression of the individual’s personality, as the person’s *self*. And that which has affected the person’s thoughts, words and deeds has affected his soul. It has thus been the measure and yardstick for everything the individual stands for and can be made accountable for. The soul is perhaps what makes a human being human, it is his hallmark – or mark of Cain.

The soul has probably come into existence as an answer to the mystery of death. As far back as the Neanderthals, there were burial rituals, and the dead were buried in a way that indicates that humans believed they had a life after death. While death is the only certain thing in everybody’s life, nobody can know whether there is anything personal that survives death. But the answer has always been, in all cultures and religious communities, that the soul survives death and continues its existence in some form or other of the beyond. It is hard to imagine what agonies of soul people in the Christian Middle Ages and later Christians wrestled with in fear and dread of eternal torment because of actual or imagined sins.

The central position of the soul in our culture has, however, been challenged since the Renaissance and the insistence of the Enlightenment period on rational justification and scientific proof of that which is true and valid here in life. Since the existence of the soul cannot be proved scientifically, it is often rejected as a religious concept and a subject of *belief*. This is reflected in the conceptual development of various languages, where ‘soul’, as in modern English, is mainly conceived as being a religious concept. In other European languages, the word for ‘soul’ (*sjel* in Norwegian) has retained a broader meaning and also covers semantic areas that in English are expressed by the word ‘mind’. The same applies to the adjectival form of ‘soul’ in Scandinavian and other languages, which in English is normally replaced by ‘mental’ (‘psychic[-al]’ is something else and has a narrower meaning). The narrowing down of the meaning of ‘soul’ is the reason why some people claim that it is, so to speak, out of date. We will investigate if this tallies or not, and on the basis of the history of the soul seek to clarify what status the soul has in the 21st century.

Since we live in a global and multicultural age, we will also examine the way the soul is understood by a couple of non-Western religions. To understand oneself one also has to understand the other ones, the aliens. We will take a closer look at the conception of the soul in Buddhism, a wide-spread religion in large parts of Asia. And also in Islam, where the fate of the soul in this and the next life is crucially important. There the belief in the salvation of the soul is also a motivating political factor since many Moslems believe they can partake in a paradisiac life in the beyond if they sacrifice themselves and their life in a holy war, *jihad*. For that reason, we will take a closer look at what is actually written about the soul, *nafs* in the Koran and what determines the salvation of the soul there. On the basis on the irreconcilable battle between the believers and non-believers in the Koran, the question is also raised as to whether Islam, the religion of love, is also the religion of hate.

The soul has been understood in different ways down through the ages. We therefore ask: Is the soul substance or an idea, reason or feeling, form or content, possibility or reality, something exclusively individual or something larger than the individual, something innate or culturally inherited, something whole and unified or something composite and heterogeneous? Soul refers to something that is not all that easy to identify, that lacks a tangible correlate. Perhaps it is not ‘something’ at all, but a mere fiction, an artificial construction? A concept or an image? In that case, it is an ancient construction, one that is still being deconstructed and reconstructed, perhaps because it is a necessary construction?

This applies to one of the crucial questions regarding the existence of the soul, to what extent it is something given, innate, or if it is artificially created and can be formed and developed. History can help clarify this for us by returning to the homeland of the *psyche*, the Hellas of antiquity. The ancient Greeks *discovered* the spirit and reason as something given, something larger which humanity is a part of, whereas the soul was *invented*. If the soul was invented and artificially created, it is vital to find out *why* it was and still is being created, what function it has, to what questions and needs it is an answer. There is also good reason to ask if we actually need a conception of the soul at all in order to be able to develop certain personal qualities and organise them in a personal totality. There are perhaps other anthropological concepts that can replace it which are clearer and more usable when attempting to explain the inner life of the individual.

The characteristics and fate of the soul have been understood in all cultures as a consequence of how the individual has lived his or her life, and in word and deed has furthered good or evil. This means the focus is on life as lived and on how the individual develops personal and soul-related qualities and carries out his or her obligations to other human beings. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the soul seen from a social perspective. Even though the soul is something strictly individual, it is determined by its relation to others. One cannot take care of oneself without taking care of others. For that reason, the fate of the soul is at risk when the individual abandons himself or herself to collective movements, as Hannah Arendt has documented in such a down-to-earth way. What consequences this has both for the single individual and others affected we can learn from the history of mass movements such as communism, nazism and the aggressive versions of nationalism and Islam in our own age. Or when we blindly acquiesce to habitual thinking and mass media, market forces and political abuse of power.

One reason for the changing status and shifting meaning of the soul is that a human being is not born as a ready-made, fully-made specimen of the species but as an open and non-determined being. This means that it must develop itself via historical and cultural learning, inheriting the knowledge of the past as its legacy. The soul is the most profound and richest image of the insights amassed over the centuries considering what it means to be a human being. These invaluable insights are handed down to us via language, as an experience we automatically participate in as members of a culture and a linguistic community.

But when the soul does not in the same way any longer belong to the cultural heritage that everyone automatically acquires as part of the socialisation process, it increasingly becomes up to the individual to clarify and order his or her inner life. But not everyone is interested in carrying out ‘the interior journeys into one’s inner life’ that Søren Kierkegaard writes about. For that reason, the redefinition or even loss of the soul, from a purely anthropological point of view, has left behind it a vacuum, as depicted by Franz Kafka. This explains why alternative lifestyle movements have made such an impact in the West, ever since *Flower Power* in the 1960s, and why conceptions of the soul that derived in particular from the East have become so pervasive in the West, no matter whether it was Buddhist thinking, yoga or various contemplative and meditative techniques. Just look at the bookshelves, where one is struck by the numbers of books about oriental religions and lifestyles. *Mindfulness* is one of the present waves.

Alternative views of life, *New Age* and various subcultures function as a compensation for loss, want or unsatisfied spiritual needs in postmodern, materialistic society. Angel schools and various forms of spiritualism can be understood as offshoots of this. In these alternative movements there is much talk of the *soul*, spiritual power, reincarnation, transmigration of souls and *out-of-body* experiences, motifs that popular literature and fantasy genres are full of. When dissimilar bestsellers and genres such as Norwegian Margit Sandemo’s popular literature series, J.K. Rowling’s books about Harry Potter and the classic J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* give souls and spiritual magic so much space, it not only says something about fascination that fictional literature exerts but also something about the significance the mysterious soul still exerts in people’s consciousness, and what needs there are for it. For what the soul does not have in the way of institutional and academic blessing, it makes up for on the sly, in alternative movements, popular culture and the fantasy world of fiction.

As the soul has gradually become less central as a theme in modern philosophy, it has been increasingly reinterpreted as the psyche of scientific psychology and the subject of therapy. When this occurs, however, the soul becomes reduced, and those sections of inner life that fall outside this understanding of the psychic are left to their own devices. Large sections of the total human interior, especially those parts that have to do with the personal, ethical and existential sides of mental life, remain in the dark, as the soul’s religious needs and importance are increasingly being ignored or considered no-go areas. There is a marked increase in mental problems and afflictions in our age, particularly among young people. Which means there is a greater need than ever for the insights of psychology and psychiatry. Mental sufferings are perhaps a symptom of an inhuman society where the soul has been deprived of several of its irreducible aspects. For the human soul is not first and foremost anxiety and depressions, split personalities and irrational delusions. It is also a creative force that can fill the mind with enthusiasm and love, sympathy and empathy, and give us the feeling of belonging to something that is larger than ourselves.

Is it then the history of the rise and fall of the soul that is to be written here? No. It has furthermore already been written: *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* by Raymond Martin and John Barresi (2006). Such a title is, incidentally, based on a linear understanding of history that does not place any emphasis on what is special about such mental phenomena as the soul, where past and present, the contemporaneous and non-contemporaneous are mixed with our expectations of the future. The affective history of the soul continues and applies to the mind and soul here and now. We are not writing a linear history here but about the devolvement and involvement of the soul, about how it has been interpreted and re-interpreted, described and transcribed as an image and a symbol, how it quite literally has inscribed itself into our mind and left behind traces and impressions, wounds and growing scars that we carry with us as an indelible heritage and source of inspiration. The soul, viewed as such, is a *palimpsest*.

A palimpsest is an old manuscript where the original writing has been erased and written over, just as one re-used a precious parchment in the Middle Ages, which is where the word palimpsest comes from. A parchment, a hide processed for writing purposes, was expensive and was re-used. The soul is such a palimpsest, written, written over, forewritten and rewritten, crisscrossed, in a long, profound story, many stories and narratives that can be uncovered layer by layer, and that intertwine in our self-understanding. In such a way, we can drill down and carry out our archaeological studies of the soul so as to uncover how we are still being inscribed in its history – and how we continue to write on this palimpsest.

Since a human being is an indeterminate, open being that can be virtually anything at all, the ‘soul’ can be an appropriate or necessary part of an anthropological or philosophical system. Various philosophers from Plato and Socrates in Antiquity to Nietzsche and Wittgenstein in modern times, operate with different concepts of the soul. The discussion and the conflicts between a philosophical and a religious solution to the problem of the soul has characterised the view of humanity in European culture right up until the present day.

To sum up, one can say that there are five possible answers to what significance the soul has in our age: 1) It is a theoretical concept in a philosophical system or an anthropology; 2) It is a religious concept, linked to a belief in something that survives death; 3) It is a psychological concept concerning the individual’s subconscious and often irrational inner emotional life in the form of a *psyche*, which is how it is perceived by psychology as a scientific discipline; 4) It is reduced to a metaphor for the individual’s inner life and personal and moral qualities; 5) Elements from these four conceptions are all part of a general conception of the soul that refers to a necessary (constituent) and real (ontological) dimension in man that has personal, existential and moral significance in people’s lives.

Such a general concept of the soul underlies this book. What validity it has will be determined by following the development of – and conflicts between – various perceptions of the soul through the history of ideas and of culture and in the representation of them in literature. Fictional writing adds flesh and blood to the soul and its significance in various historical periods. Here the soul stands for something in us, the sum or a kind of power centre for certain deeper feelings and attitudes, our will and that which constitutes what is most basic in our personality. Most people have a feeling of what the soul is, but it is hard to define. That is the case with old and living historical concepts. They cannot really be defined, according to Nietzsche. They are part of our cultural heritage. This also applies to the soul, whose deep and diffuse, mysterious and inalienable inner quality the following chapters will help to clarify.

**STAGES IN THE DRAMA OF THE SOUL**

**ANTIQUITY**

*The immortals have appointed a proper time*

*for each thing upon the earth* (The Odyssey XIX, 591f)

**The mother of all souls – Homer’s mythical shadows**

The history of the soul will always be connected with Homer and Greek Antiquity. We still use the same word for soul that Homer used in ancient Greek: *psyche,* ψυχή. This word has such an important historical significance that it is simply impossible to consider a human being without it, as well as everything it means for our understanding of what a human being is. If one removes the concept of *psyche*, humanity as we know it also disappears. It is Homer who sets everything in motion, providing us with a figurative and mythical repertoire for the importance of the soul in many different ways, provided we restrict ourselves to Western cultures.

To understand the origin of the soul we first have to grasp the etymological meaning of *psyche* in ancient Greek. It has several meanings, but is normally translated by something in the direction of breath, breath of air, from *psychein*, to breathe, ‘breath of life’, or quite simply ‘life’. Originally the soul is something concrete, not something abstractly mental or rational (noematic), as in later philosophical definitions.

In various ways, the soul is what everything is about in Homer’s two great epic works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, which date from c. 800 BC. For everything that Achilles and Odysseus and the other heroes do and do not do involves the thought of their ultimate death, is done out of consideration for their posthumous reputation. Consequently, the souls of the dead acquire a key position in the two works. This is directly expressed right at the beginning of the elder of the two epic works, where Homer states what the subject of the *Iliad* is:

Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus,

that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans.

Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades,

and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs and vultures(I, 1-4, in Butler’s translation)

These opening lines say a great deal about the meaning of *psyche* in the work, what it has to do with, and what human ideal the homeric individual possessed. It is important for the poet that from the very first word he utters there can be no doubt as to what is at stake. The opening lines tell us that it is the warrior Achilles who is the main character of the epic poem, that it is his anger, his *pathos*, that is of crucial importance in the battle and that it is the reason why many of those fighting lose their lives, resulting in a split, since the *pyche* leaves the body at death and goes to Hades while the corpse is left lying on the battlefield.

On the basis of the many depictions of death in Homer we discover that it is not until death that the human *psyche* manifests itself. At death, the body (*soma*) and soul (*psyche*) separate, with *psyche* leaving the body as a breath of air (II.XXII, 467) in order to travel to Hades, the kingdom of the dead. This is portrayed at several points in Homer’s works, as when Menelaus, the husband of the fair Helen, has driven his lance into the entrails of his foe: ‘Never-ending darkness wrapp’d the warrior round,/And the strong soul came rushing through the wound’ (XIV, 518f). Or when Achilles’ best friend Patroclus similarly plants his foot on his foe’s chest and wrenches out the lance: ‘When he had thus spoken his eyes were closed in death, his soul left his body and flitted down to the house of Hades’ (XVI, 505). The soul leaves the body through the open wound and travels to Hades. There it manifests itself as a shadow of the self, which is the body. But in Homer the soul does not have any function as a separate dimension of the living human being.

Nor, however, is the body, *soma*, an independent entity before in death, when it is left behind on the battlefield as a corpse. *Soma* means *corpse* in ancient Greek. *Soma* and *psyche* therefore do not exist as independent entities before they become separated at death and *psyche*, as a life-principle, as life-breath, is forced to leave the body. It is only then that the body appears as a body, *soma*, i.e. as a corpse. This is also the case in English, where body can refer both to something which is alive and something which is dead. Before death takes place, *soma* and *psyche* are a unity for which there are no words, except to talk of a human being or person. This is made clear by the many death scenes described in *The Iliad*. On the basis of this, one can also derive two fundamental meanings of *psyche*, as a life-soul or life-spirit (which animates and keeps the body alive), and as a death-soul that belongs to life after death, separated from the body and thus ‘loose’ (detached from the body). This provides a basis for the development later of the concept of the free soul.

One of the souls which we are most familiar with in *The Iliad*, and which is most inimately connected with Achilles and thereby the fate of the Achaeans, is the soul of his best friend, comrade-in-arms and foster brother Patroclus, with whom he also shared a tent. The turning point in both the work and the battle of Troy takes place when Patroclus sets off to battle wearing the armour of Achilles, who has refused to take part in the battle for ten years (to decide it) because the king of the Achaeans, Agamemnon, has deeply offended him by taking from him his spoils of war, the beautiful Brisēís. Patroclus manages for a while to turn the tide of war in favour of the Achaeans, whose situation was looking perilous until then. But when he meets Troy’s great son, the warrior Hector, Patroclus is slain. This in turn doubles Achilles’ anger and thirst for revenge. The loss of his best friend brings him out onto the battlefield, where he yells out a scream of pain that even causes the Trojan horses to flee in dread, while a deathly fear grips in the brave Trojan warriors. It is also Patroclus who foreshadows Hector’s own death before his soul leaves his body. Patroclus’ death and burial are portrayed in detail. The moment of his death is depicted by Homer with a laconic intensity that leaves no doubt about the Greeks’ ideals:

When he had thus spoken his eyes were closed in death,

his soul (*psyche*) left his body and flitted down to the house of Hades,

mourning its sad fate and bidding farewell to the youth and vigour of its manhood. (XVI, 855f)

One of the scenes where we gain a more profound knowledge of *psyche* is when the soul of the dead Patroclus visits Achilles in his sleep. The reason for the visit is that Patroclus has not yet been buried in a ritually correct fashion and is therefore unable to gain entrance to the realm of the dead:

Bury me with all speed that I may pass the gates of Hades; the ghosts (*psychai*),

vain shadows of men that can labour no more, drive me away from them;

they will not yet suffer me to join those that are beyond the river. (XXIII, 71f)

One of the key issues in the history of the soul is whether it is for life or for death. In all religions, death is the yardstick of the soul, the critical transition and transformation to the state after death, whether this involves new life or not. This finds expression in Christianity in Psalm 121, v. 8 ‘The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in.’ The going out of life must be in order, a transition which has been perceived in different ways at different times and places in the history of man. In Homer we meet the concept of death as a transition and a journey, a journey across a river which in itself is a trial, something which Patroclus’ words above illustrate. The concept in Greek mythology of the ferryman Charon, who ferries the soul of the dead person over the river Styx to the realm of the dead, has become classic. Even though Charon is not portrayed as passing sentence, as is the case in later presentations, the dead person is dependent on him in order not to drown in the river of forgetfulness, Lethe. When the enchantress and temptress Circe tells Odysseus how he is to get to Hades, she also emphasises the strenuous boat journey, across the outermost edge of the ocean along dangerous shores, to reach Hades. Like Dante, Odysseus arrives at the realm of the dead as one of the few to do so alive. In Dante, however, Charon has become a brutal watchman, not on the way to Hades but of Hell, and he strikes the unworthy dead with his oar to keep them at a distance from the boat.

In Homer, however, there is another companion, Hermes, the winged messenger between men and gods, the Olympian as well as the god of the underworld, Hades. Hermes, the one who relieves distress, does not pass judgment but is a mediator. He also accompanies the dead souls of the suitors to Hades after Odysseus has taken such gruesome revenge on them after his return to Ithaca. But as a messenger Hermes also has the task of making the message intelligible to its recipients. He himself has to interpret and get the recipient to understand. Hermes meets the worthy to whom he reveals himself with questions, as when Odysseus is on his way into Circe’s palace, and Hermes asks the vital question: Where are you going? “Whither now again, hapless man?” (X, 280). This divine *quo vadis* never forgets the man who seeks his final destiny. As a messenger from the mysterious realm of the other side, Hermes is also himself a mysterious figure, almost hermetically sealed; his knowledge is not immediately accessible and has to be interpreted hermeneutically (a word derived from Hermes).

A similar experience to that which Achilles had when meeting the dead Patroclus is also had by Odysseus when he manages to slip into Hades to find out about his own fate and the lot in life of those closest to him from the prophet Tiresias. There he also meets the shadow of his mother, who died of grief and anxiety about the unknown fate of her son: “my longing to know what you were doing and the force of my affection for you - this it was that was the death of me” (Od. XI, 202f). From joy at seeing his mother once more, Odysseus attempts to embrace his mother’s shadow (*psyche*), but each time she slips away like a dream or a phantom (*skiê*). And when he expresses his regret to his mother that they are unable to embrace and console each other, and asks her if she is merely an apparition (*eidolon*), he hears how this is connected to death (XI, 218ff):

All people are like this when they are dead.

The sinews no longer hold the flesh and bones together;

these perish in the fierceness of consuming fire

as soon as life (*thymos*) has left the body,

and the soul (*psyche*) flits away as though it were a dream.

The shadow soul is a faithful copy of the dead body, and is therefore portrayed as the doppelgänger of the dead person. But it does not torment the living, and never returns to the land of the living. *Psyche* never appears as a ghost or apparition in Homer. We do not find the souls anywhere else than Hades in Homer’s world, apart from those that drift restlessly about because they did not receive a ritual burial. *Psyche* has the same physical contours as the dead person, i.e. the deceased’s body, of which it is a true copy (*eidolon*). This is of particular interest, for after death *psyche* represents *the identity of the dead person*, the self, *autos*, a word which otherwise in Homer is used for the body. There are then various aspects of the Homeric soul that open up for a reinterpretation of the relation between body and soul in the following centuries. Among other things, it has a double nature, both as a shadow (in the realm of the dead) and a live-force when in life. In many ways, *psyche* represents individual fate and from the outset is seen by the Greeks as an expression not only of how they conceive man but also what they *want* with man, what ideal they are striving towards.

……

**THE RENAISSANCE**

*My soul grows sad with troubles;*

*Sing, and disperse ’em, if thou canst.*

*(*Shakespeare*: King Henry VIII)*

***Doubt is dear to me – Montaigne the Sceptic***

Anyone in doubt about the connection between personal characteristics and those of the soul should simply read Montaigne’s essays, which deal with what it means to be a human being in one way or another, and what qualities and proficiencies are needed in various contexts in life – so that one is prepared for dying in a dignified manner. Montaigne views death as the final *essai* (attempt), that against which all others are to be tried and tested. He practises dying by writing his essays, practises writing himself free, liberating himself from everything that weighs down the soul and prevents it from making the final throw that nullifies all previous ones. But the actual crowning achievement is living. For as you live, so shall you die. And body and soul belong together, performing *mutual favours* for each other, as Montaigne so beautifully puts it, right up until death. With this life-asserting reciprocity between body and soul, Montaigne demonstrates how far he has removed himself from the Middle Ages.

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) was definitely a so-called Renaissance man and he competes with Descartes and Shakespeare as deserving the title of the founder of *the modern subject*. He is the undisputed founder of the essay genre with his three volumes *Essais*, which appeared in 1580 and 1588 (2nd, revision edition). His view of human nature cannot be detached from the *way* in which he wrote. Montaigne is one of the first writers to recognise that form and content are one and the same. Especially his pointing out that content is not given prior to or independently of form dealt a deathblow to the idea that the individual has a given, predetermined being. The individual must also be shaped and formed.

The essay genre has got its name from the method that underlies Montaigne’s self-reflections. When he writes, he abandons himself to a greater or lesser extent to spontaneous ideas and to chance, allowing his thoughts to follow the unpredictable course of free associations. In this way he carries out his trials and attempts, *essais*, as they are called in French. And the aim Montaigne set himself with his essais was to find out who he is: *You have here purely an essay* [essai] *of my natural parts, and not of those acquired. [...] These are fancies of my own, by which I do not pretend to discover things but to lay open myself* (quotations in italics are from *Essays,* Books I-III, here from Book II, chapter 10).

The exceptional discovery Montaigne makes when he attempts to find out who he is is that the perception he formulates through his ‘essay’ also forms him as a human being. This applies to a high degree to something as formless as the soul. The act of writing and the writing itself form the writer. Much indicates that Montaigne started his epistemological project with a classical conception of the individual as something fixed and given (identical with himself) that can be apprehended through linguistic clarification and the defining of concepts. But then he constantly experiences that whenever he believes he has captured the nature of the individual in terms of language and found an adequate expression for his substance, it slips through his fingers in the very process of formulation, which constantly assumes new forms. He cannot pin down what is essentially human with his concepts. Language has the innate characteristic that every linguistic definition contains a contradiction, which in turn opens up the indefinable nature of the individual, which then has to be defined, etc. Since he takes *existence* as his starting point, the *essence* of a human being as something fixed dissolves. For existence means change and movement away from what is fixed: *to be consists in movement and action; therefore everyone is in some way present in his work* (II, 8). *Our life is nothing but movement* (III, 13). This realisation that everything is in motion is, according to Jean Starobinski’s presentation in *Montaigne* en mouvement (Montaigne in Motion, 1982) the very basis for the new identity that Montaigne is in search of. The movement that exists in all that is human also means that everything is change and subject to the law of transformation. In such a view of humanity there is no room for a soul that is born with certain eternal qualities, a god-given and never-changing substance. No, the soul is not only changeable, it is also created as a *work*, an opus. To avoid the personal instability resulting from this, Montaigne writes his essays. In writing he can fix on paper something that cannot be held fast in life as it is lived, and reconcile opposites in dynamic patterns. This he believes at any rate when he has begun the writing process.

***An inner void?***

One of the most striking things about Montaigne and all his classical references is that the Middle Ages are apparently absent. They are silently present, as a demonstration of what Montaigne does *not* stand for. They literally have to be overcome. And he does so by leaping over them back to Antiquity, to Greek and especially Latin literature with heroes such as Cato the Older, Horace and Cicero. This also applies to the soul and its Christian conceptual framework. For that reason, Montaigne does not present the soul as a unified and given substance, as the medieval theologians did. It is not substance at all. This is the big leap from the Middle Ages to Montaigne, a leap from one code to another one: *Montaigne does not give the soul substance*. In their separate ways, Montaigne and the more recent Descartes lay the foundation for the new concept of the soul, since the one dissolves the soul’s substance (by linking it to the body’s substance), while the other links the soul to reason and consciousness. Both execute a movement away from the centre of the individual, understood as a substantial soul seated in the heart as portrayed by Dante. The one moves downwards and outwards, while the other moves inwards and upwards, the one in the direction of something concrete, the other in an abstract direction. Montaigne links the soul to the sensory body and allows it to become the organ of the soul, so to speak, while Descartes – more of this later – links the soul to reason and the ability to think, to the human capacity for rational reflection and consciousness. In this double movement the human centre, the soul, is in the long term emptied of its substance, even though Descartes defends it. In this way, Montaigne and Descartes together demonstrate that the soul is a historical phenomenon.

Psyche was discovered in Antiquity, had its function temporarily defined by Plato and Aristotle, acquired a new content and a new function in the Middle Ages, when the soul was, so to speak, filled up as a substance, so as subsequently to be emptied of substance by Montaigne. For when he examines himself and attempts to grasp his inner being, i.e. the soul, he discovers that he is grasping into thin air, at emptiness. Within it is empty, there is no fixed being. This is Montaigne’s landmark discovery: For *if, perhaps, you fix your thought to apprehending your being, it would only be like grasping water* (cf. II, 20). Time and again, he fixes his gaze inwards in order to try to grasp what is within, is innermost, and every time he discovers that it refuses to be caught – it is empty. So what Montaigne is left with is an *I, a self, a person* that attempts to find out what it is that gives him identity or integrity, that allows him to cohere with himself, and that represents something tangible rather than something lasting. *Finding myself totally unprovided and empty of other matter, I present myself to myself for argument and subject* (II, 8). It is not thoughts (Descartes’ solution) – which to Montaigne are as ephemeral as air – that give him identity, but the body. Even so, it is still thought that he has to use as his starting point: *I chiefly paint my thoughts, a subject without form and incapable of operative production; and I can only just manage to couch it in this airy body of the voice* (II, 6).

When one is empty within, and thoughts cannot be grasped hold of, one has to ask how Montaigne is going to grasp his own soul, if it exists at all. He sets about it historically and phenomenologically, historically in order to investigate if the thinkers of Antiquity could provide him with a tenable solution to the problem of the soul, and phenomenologically by taking as his starting point the mental experiences he has as a physical being.

It is in his longest essay, almost a lengthy dissertation, chapter 12 in Book II, “Defence of Raymond Sebond”, that Montaigne gives a historical account of the theories of the soul found in Antiquity, from Heraclitus and Thales to Aristotle and his favourites, the Stoics. Raymond Sebond’s work, typically enough, was an attempt to defend a *Natural theology or The book of living creatures (Theologia naturalis sive liber creaturarum)* from 1484, i.e. an alternative theology to the dogmatic Christian one and based on natural conditions. And, typically enough, the great model for both writers is Lucretius and his great nature poem *De rerum naturae* (On the nature of things). With such a natural point of departure, Montaigne also becomes highly critical of most of the conceptions of the soul in Antiquity, which he regards as pure figments of the imagination, without any anchoring in reality. For that reason, he temporarily concludes with Cicero: *Which of these conceptions is true a god will have to decide*, and with Heraclitus, who claimed that *a man could never go so far towards the knowledge of the soul that he could come unto it; so deep and mysterious was her essence.* (II, 12). Montaigne, however, has such a nature that he even so cannot help asking, since the soul is a major part of an individual, in his mixture of the natural and artificially created. Once again, his answer is based on his own experiences, which he pragmatically seeks to unite with the philosophical answers to the mystery of the soul that he finds sound most plausible. On his basis of the account of the history of the soul, Montaigne is able to sum up and define the soul in a way that was abreast of his own times:

*And the most likely of their opinions is that there is always a soul, which, via its cogitative faculty recalls, understands, judges, desires and exercises all its other operations via diverse bodily instruments, just as the pilot controls his ship according to the experience he has of it, straining or slacking the cordage, hoisting the raw-sail, or steering the rudder, carrying out diverse effects by means of a single force: And that it resides in the brain: which is revealed by the fact that the wound and accidents which affect this part greatly offend the faculties of the soul: from this it is not incongruous that it flows out to the rest of the body* (II, 12).

This is a conception of the soul that many people would still be able to embrace. It is strikingly modern that he does not place the soul in the heart but in the brain, the organ of reason (as Da Vinci and Descartes), and he justifies this, among other things, by medical observations – that brain damage not only affects one’s logical faculties, language and the intellect, can also lead to changes of mind and personality. But Montaigne does not link the soul as closely to the intellect and consciousness as Descartes did later. Via the brain it retains the physical anchorage, with passions and emotions and not only the ability to think. Desire also belongs to the domain of the soul. The person who desires something *wants* something, and that means that will belongs to the soul, as does the ability to act. That which the individual is personally responsible for and has control over is ascribed to the soul.

***Writing and shriving***

If the inner space is a void, it can be filled with something. This Montaigne attempts to do. And what he fills the inner void with is writing. The result is a kind of shriving, an honest confession and recognition of what he finds within himself and his attempts to capture this in words. This brings us to his medium, writing as a process and its result – the textual *corpus*. The emotions of his soul are the movements of the writing, and vice versa. That is why the medium and way in which he writes are of such importance. The medium is to a great extent already the message for Montaigne. The special thing is the way in which he treats his medium. When he writes, he abandons himself to a greater or lesser degree to spontaneous ideas and chance – randomness once more – and allows the pen of his thought to follow its own built-in logic and unpredictable course. In this way he is able, almost in passing or full flight, to grasp hold of something of value, for the time being. That is how he carries out his trials and attempts, *essais*. They can also be called examples – with such successful attempts that they become exemplary.

The Montaigne type of essay has somewhat misleadingly been linked to the free play of associations, without aim or design. That is incorrect, for there is an innate targeted drive in them. This is the theme that is in focus, and it is examined from various perspectives and in various ways. The presentation is not linear but ‘discursive’ in the true sense of the word, i.e. leaping from one thing to another, but without losing sight of the issue and that which is most important. This results in the issue being illuminated from various angles. It is life itself that is being examined, with all the contradictions and multiplicities it consists of. The life of the soul is also reflected in this way, which in itself is heterogeneously composed and with various meanings. Despite this, one experiences life as having a goal and a direction that are clarified in and through Montaigne’s essays, just as the soul also has a destination, in an unknown future. But it takes a whole life to clarify that destination, and many attempts to find the solution – and resolution. The essay is a well-suited form for such an endeavour. For essay also means attempt, experiment, exercise. *Care of the soul* is one such experimental area, where the goal is to find the solution to the problem of the soul, to write one’s way to realisation.

Hunting the soul is like trying to catch a truth *en route*, one of many small ones rather than the great false ones. It is possible to conceive different goals. Let us look at the extremities. The soul too has to relate to something other or something definite (*unity*, i.e. the One, God) or to the undefined void (*nothingness*) or *everything around it*, all or nothing – as long as there is not something in-between, life on earth for example. That problem has to be solved in practice. Even though Montaigne would most like to choose the golden mean, he also knows that the soul by means of great exertions is capable of transcending its conditions and of suspending the law of gravity:

*I find by experience that there is a large distinction between the moods and leaps of the soul and a resolute, constant mode of existence: and I well realise that there is nothing we are incapable of – indeed, some say we can even surpass the divine [···] It can happen that even we [...] sometimes when our soul is roused by discourses or the examples of others, fling it far beyond its usual trajectory: but it is a kind of passion that propels and agitates it, and which in some way enthralls it out of itself* [II, 29).

It is probably impossible to get any closer to the solution – and resolution – of the soul. Montaigne is well aware that here he is presenting an experience that it is difficult to verify or imitate. The flight of the soul he portrays here may nevertheless be the goal of the soul that he senses when he is seized by inspiration and flights of fancy. What Montaigne here makes an exception, a one-off experience, is the goal of the soul. The goal is an exception, as Kierkegaard also later claimed. And it is enough to be successful once. If one only has the one chance. The soul *must* perform the impossible and approach the divine by its own unaided efforts, and not by the example of others. Montaigne, though, does not want to proclaim the ‘truth’ he has experienced from the housetops, and allows the soul to drop down to its ‘normal level’. And he wants to keep the passion in check that spurs the soul on, whereas others use it as fuel for the soul’s soaring flight. For this will and passion *are* the soul, and the prerequisite for the leap.

Montaigne’s belief in his own experiences and in reason mean he is a true Renaissance man in line with Pico della Mirandola and Ficino, who also viewed man as the centre of the cosmos. Few people illustrate the literal meaning of the renaissance, rebirth – of Antiquity – more directly than Montaigne, as his three volumes of essays show themselves to be a coherent, although jerky account of classical Greek and Latin sources, from Heraclitus and Socrates to Horace, Cicero and Cato, with an over-representation of the Roman poets, headed by Lucretius, Virgil and Ovid (all the Greek classics had not yet been translated into Latin). And when, on rare occasions, he cites a medieval poet such as Dante, it is in order to praise and emphasise his doubt rather than his belief, as when he refers to the *Inferno* II, 93, where Dante states: *Doubting pleases me no less than knowing*. For *only fools are certain and resolute*, Montaigne replies (I, 26).

But he attempts to write his way forward to illumination. All life must be written and transcribed in such a way that the writing becomes lived life and vice versa, life becomes writing. In that way, Montaigne continues the autobiographical work of Augustine and Dante, based on the motto *everyone is present in his work* (II, 8): *I have devoted all my efforts to shaping my life. That is my profession and my work* (II, 37). In that way, the soul is dissolved, in the sense of resolved in a word image. With writing he forms an image of the soul that enables it to cohere. He creates an *essayistic story* of the soul, a *narrative* as it is now called. The way in which Montaigne manages to get the soul to integrate is by giving it a *linguistic* form and placing the soul in a larger narrative about man. Montaigne creates a new linguistic self a *related* or *narrated identity.*

Nor is Montaigne’s picture of the soul completely new. The Greek Sophists also viewed human nature as something that had to be formed and actively expressed. This *self-fashioning tradition* is something Montaigne can ‘underwrite’. The fact that the Sophists have been regarded as the truth-relative rogues, abused for more than two thousand years, is Plato’s doing, since by his belief in one eternal truth he made the Sophists into his opponents. Sophists, however, as travelling contract scholars and itinerant teachers, were well aware that truth is something relative, culturally relative. For they had seen with their own eyes that different societies in the Mediterranean area had different norms and religious persuasions. This self-fashioning tradition died out after Plato and is renewed and strengthened with Montaigne and further developed later by Johann Gottfried Herder and his expressivism, finally culminating in Nietzsche. In this self-fashioning tradition, *the art of living* is more important than the theoretical determination of consciousness according to allegedly universal laws. The art of living is not self-identical affirmation but an attempt to resolve the contrary forces in an expedient way into an *integrity*, in such a way that the ‘I’ can become master in his own house in a constructive and playful way. According to Montaigne, this also applies to the soul:

*I would rather fashion my soul than fill it with trifles. [...] It is the nature of the soul that is the crucial thing. The greatest among us make it a whole profession, for them thinking is life itself* (III, 3)

And some of the small change Montaigne fears will fill up his soul are words that are as wind, empty words. With what, then, is he to fill the inner void of the soul? Himself, thoughts about himself in order to understand himself and draw an image of himself, the whole human being. It is difficult to see that he has nothing else with which to build a full-length image of himself than words, the tools of thought. To talk or write about himself is to fill in the inner void. But it must be a complete image that he can completely vouch for. He will be solely responsible for who he is, and what he is and will become. Many people more or less think about their lives in terms of reflection or consideration, while Montaigne wanted to live in a way that was worth writing about, and vice versa. It is a question of fashioning oneself via self-awareness, of devoting oneself to one’s work. ‘Others’ and ‘one’s neighbour’ are nearly always second or third priority: *It suits me well not to have anything to do with other people’s affairs and not to feel responsible for them* (III, 2). There is not much love-of-one’s-neighbour hypocrisy here. And since feelings that all people allow themselves to be led and seduced by often bring us out of balance. Montaigne believes that *the soul must be judged on the basis of its most sober-minded state, when it is at home with itself – if it ever is that*, he adds (III, 2). And since emotions change, one must develop strong prudence: *My feelings may change, but never my prudence. [...] I guard my independent prudence so zealously that practically no passion can cause me to relax my grip on it* (II, 17). Montaigne approves only of such ‘strong and disciplined souls’, quoting Seneca at this point: *It is easier to tear them [passions] away from the soul than to control them* (III, 10). This does not mean that he rejects the idea that he also has a relation to others and is part of a social community, but that it is unwise to be one of the herd. *The man who merely follows someone else follows nothing. He finds nothing and he indeed is in search of nothing* (I, 26). Montaigne is otherwise scrupulous about observing his social obligations (he was after all a mayor and took part in the civil war as a combatant), *but only on loan and occasionally, so that the soul always remained healthy and calm, not without acting but without suffering and passion* (III, 10). There is never any doubt about his priorities and the relation between ends and means. The attention most people devote to other so as to gain honour and glory is not his way of doing things:

*I completely devote myself to myself and my peace of mind. [...] I turn my sight inwards. I have no other business but myself, I am eternally meditating upon myself, considering and tasting myself. [...] I roll myself in myself. This capacity of trying the truth, whatever it be, in myself, and this free humour of not subjecting my belief, I owe principally to myself; [...] And those with whom my position often brings me into contact with are by and large people with a poor faculty for refining their soul* (II, 17).

With such a pithy expression as ‘toroll myself in myself’ Montaigne underlines his concrete, sensual basis for the care of the soul.

***The soul as the imprint of the body***

The Renaissance view of the body results in an image of man – a paradigm shift as it is now called – when compared with the medieval period. While the Middle Ages fixed its gaze on the *supernatural*, i.e. in the direction of ‘another world’, the Renaissance fixes its gaze on the *natural*, this world, included *human nature*, i.e. the body. The first real broadside against the Christian Middle Ages is this focusing on, and belief in, *the temporal*, a paradise or hell before death. Montaigne carries out in philosophy what the explorers of nature do in science – to observe natural man. While the medieval period was speculative, the Renaissance is empirical and experimental, basing its knowledge on experiments and experiences, on observation. Natural scientists examine how nature behaves, and what universal rules apply in nature, while Montaigne examines his nature as an extremely individual body and that which is natural for humans: to eat and work, make love and sleep, dream and speculate. He also knows that he cultures (human) nature when he forms and shapes it as part of the development of his soul. He turns nature into art at the same rate as he naturalises art.

To know oneself, which is Montaigne’s aim, is to know oneself as a corporeal existence. The classical metaphysical ideal (the spirit) is turned into something physical and corporeal: *I study myself more than any other subjects. That is my metaphysics, that is my physics* (III, 13). Physics becomes metaphysics and vice versa. The cosmos of the body is the great cosmos in microcosm. Therefore, knowledge of the world is the same as knowing, *sensing* one’s body. Only when a person knows his body does he know the world – as opposed to philosophers and scientists, who often misrepresent the sensations of the body with their abstract reasonings. Montaigne shifts the epistemological perspective from *knowing* to *feeling* and in particular to *sensing*, and places crucial emphasis on knowing as something related to sensing tangibly, concretely and sensually. Thereby, experiences and sensations become the primary approach to the world. For what Montaigne meets when he turns his gaze inwards is not the soul, which is empty, but the body, which is the bearer of thoughts, sensations and emotions. Perhaps it was Montaigne’s implicit *sentio ergo sum* (I sense, therefore I exist) which Descartes was provoked by when he launched his *cogito ergo sum*? For Montaigne equates rational reasoning and sensory perception, and he evaluates himself solely on the basis of actual sensory impressions and experiences, not universal concepts and theory. Nor does he want to separate the spiritual (the capacities of the soul) from the physical, which he knows best. *but as to bodily health, no man can furnish more profitable experience than I, who present it pure, and no way corrupted and changed by art or acts of thinking* (III, 13).

It is not just epistemologically and anthropologically that Montaigne gives the body preference – he also does so aesthetically. Unlike modern science, which empties the body of that which has to do with the soul, he wishes to give the body back its rightful poetic function in human self-awareness and self-determination. The sensory body is the metaphorical repertoire which makes it possible for all of us to express our emotions and thoughts. Montaigne’s writing project can basically be reduced to a unifying formula by the stylistic figure chiasmus: *the text of the body* is resurrected as *the body of the text* in his essayistic metamorphosis. To express the body is really to return to the source, since it is possible to express so many objects – most of what can be said – through the body.

With such a strong emphasis on the body and correspondingly less explicit emphasis on the soul, one can ask oneself if the soul is taken up in the body – and dies with the body. This is an obscure point in Montaigne, perhaps consciously passed by in silence, for otherwise he would be forced to think along Christian lines. But everything does not all go the way of the flesh that goes the way of the body in Montaigne either. All the *essais* he makes in his essays can be read as drafts and projections of his own body, peelings and excretions of bodily knowledge. He is almost carnivalesque in his metaphorics: *What you find here, though more civilly expressed, are the excrements of an old spirit, sometimes hard, sometimes soft: and always undigested* (III, 9). But without help from the intellect the excretions of the body could not have attained such a beautiful form as his essays represent. For that reason, Montaigne praises *the reciprocal favours* that body and soul and life and teaching provide for each other, and he stresses that it is necessary to improve both at the same time. That is why he rejects dualism between the body and the soul, for *it is wrong to tear apart a person full of life* (III, 5). In other words, the body is animated. That life in all its many manifestations, anthropological and existential, is based on ‘reciprocal favours’, among other things between body and soul, is one of the most appealing ideas in Montaigne’s work. He does not think in *either–or* terms, but in *both–and*, and ends up by choosing a third alternative.

It is impossible to grasp human feelings without naming them in conjunction with the parts of the body that contain them, or with the bodily movements they set in motion. Technically speaking, the images one uses about emotions and ideas are often *metonymies,* transferred epithets where the part stands for the whole, or the part of the body stands for what that part contains or mediates, as the parts of the body functioned for the Homeric individual. The soul, for example, is linked to the heart because the heart reacts symptomatically when values of the soul are involved. In Montaigne the body is a metonymic expression for the soul. And it transpires – and this is one of Montaigne’s *incomparable discoveries* – that the words and images he uses to talk about his body and soul affect retroactively on bodily experiences and the qualities of the soul: When language has acquired body via bodily language, the words react back on the body and form the emotions that the body can contain and express. Language, especially the language of art, releases feelings that are connected to the body and that set it in motion in a way that, next time round, it is the task of language to catch hold of and control, canalise and form by means of new linguistic techniques, images and concepts. Call it dialectic if you will, or *reciprocal favours*. Both language and emotions became an unceasingly changing stream, generating and transforming. The images are not ambiguous as emotions are fluid. This the language of the soul is also, which is therefore impossible to grasp in its flowing stream.

But that is not all. The body is nevertheless more fundamental than language, emotions and the soul. The body predates language and the soul. For the body lies in its physical heredity and carries its genetic material along with it, whereas the soul is gradually created after the child has been born. That is why Montaigne places such great emphasis on heredity, that it is a given essential possibility in and through the biological process, inlaid as it furthermore is in the great cycle. In addition, the body is what we humans have in common as bodily existences. We meet as bodies and experience each other as bodies. The body always steals a march on us and reveals who we are.

So the question once more is: If the body predates the soul, and the soul gradually develops during the growing up of an individual in an individual course of life that is constructed, does the soul survive the body? The conclusion can just as easily be the opposite. Bodily genes live on, at any rate, in our descendants after our physical death, and not only in our sons and daughters but also in near and distant relations, and are continued as long as humanity survives in the form of a common ‘gene pool’. Since the soul is something that is constructed, it is on the one hand determined by the cultural genetic code and therefore also survives as a culturally determined construction. The soul is not immortal or divine in a religious sense. Montaigne understands the soul as being something that is shaped like a personal self, like a cluster of personal characteristics and attitudes, ways of thinking and conceptions. The extent to which these characteristics and qualities cohere is that which gives a person *integrity*, which is a far wider concept of the soul than identity, which implies something constant or given, the same (*idem*), identical with itself, while integrity emphasises the fact that the various mental qualities of a person together constitute a power centre with a direction, that wants something definite. *For it is neither a soul nor a body that one educates but a human being, and that may not be divided into two* (I, 26).

This emphasis on the living body does not, however, mean that Montaigne represses death – and its consequences for the soul. Death is in fact a more central issue in Montaigne’s essays than one might suppose from the above.

***Ars vivendi – ars moriendi***

Montaigne’s answer to the mystery of death is not conventional but completely his own. If the soul dies with the body and goes the way of the flesh or can make the quantum leap and be connected to something lasting a spiritual is a question of the art of dying, *ars moriendi*, which Montaigne attempts to master through his essays. He not only tries to find himself but also his soul’s ‘exit’ or ‘entrance’ (to something else or nothing). In other words, he practises dying. From this perspective, all his essays can be seen as exercises in preparing for death, which he refers to as the last *essai*, as a active undertaking. It is well-known to all those proficient in the art of improvisation that it requires practice. This also applies to death, the final essay, which takes place only *once* – for that reason, Montaigne argues, one must practise in advance. Since one does not know the circumstances and conditions for one’s own death, one must be prepared for all eventualities and be able to carry out the leap under all conceivable conditions. The poet’s corny ‘For death prepared you e’er must be! It never comes expectedly’ is not as banal as it sounds.

The assumption that there is an inner void perhaps explains why Montaigne the sceptic writes his essays in order to practise dying. Compared with his contemporaries, including church scholars, his view of death is original. The Renaissance carnivalist Montaigne portrays death as a social phenomenon that that dissolves the individual in the supra-individual and collective, while the Christian Pascal sees individual salvation from a perspective of eternity where the individual abandons himself to something absolutely supra-individual and transcendent, to *unity* with God (only God is one, without opposites). Montaigne adopts a paradoxical in-between position, in which death is staged as an exclusively earthly individual opus of social importance for the deceased. Socially speaking, the aim is to die a beautiful death and with distinction, an individual death that is one’s own and absolutely exclusive. But in order to be able to transcend death there has to be an integrity between live and teaching, with a clear awareness of the other end, the final end. This is the basis for saying that *ars vivendi* and *ars moriendi* are two sides of the same coin, according to Montaigne: *The one who could teach the individual to die, will teach it to live* (I, 20). To die is to release oneself from all the ties in this world through a spontaneous free sortie. *The one who has learnt how to die, has done away with being a slave* (I, 20). The final entrance is the soul’s spontaneous exit, dissolving into the universe or into nothingness, into something material (physical) or something spiritual (universal reason). Death is the last essay which has been prepared for by all the preceding ones: *I leave it to death to test the fruit of my studies. We shall see then whether my reasonings come from my heart or from my mouth* (I, 18). At the boundary of life, language is insufficient. To ‘talk one’s way out’ is impossible, the art of the impossible, the final great *tour de force* of life – with a word of power that dissolves all power. And here Montaigne assigns the heart, the symptom-bearer of the soul, a decisive role. In death, the qualities of the heart are crucial. At death, language, through speech and all the conceivable expressions of thought, has already done its work – it has formed the soul so that it can uncouple itself from the body and be free from and free of substance. Montaigne does not think small when it comes to his ability to save himself: *Never has anyone prepared himself so completely and fully to say farewell to this world; and no one has detached himself so thoroughly as I intend to do* (I, 20). Montaigne’s great boast is that he turns the soul into a work of art, a stylistic challenge to find a light and cheerful *modus vivendi* without the suffering caused by the passions and the sympathy and remorse of a bad conscience. According to him, it is exclusively a question (in the realm of free spirits) of human dignity, *de dignitate hominis*, and of dying with dignity.

The heart is the organ of life, and the yardstick of death. But in Montaigne, the heart is also a function of the soul and through its reactions it reveals what moral qualities the individual has. The one who has practised suppressing the spontaneous expressions of the heart (of consciousness and conscience), is in a very bad way in death. It is then too late to practise spontaneity and fidelity to the heart. The end—means concept is doomed in death. For no one can cheat death; in the final act of the comedy no one can pretend. Then one has to be oneself. If one is, this will particularly be evident from the language one speaks:

*But in the last scene between death and ourselves, there is no more pretending; we must talk plain French, we must show what there is that is good and clean at the bottom of the pot [= the heart]. It is the master-day, the day that must judge all the others.* (I, 18)

For that reason, Montaigne judges the individual’s life by how it ended – finally. Death is the last *essai*, in a double sense it is an attempt, the fulfilment of a beautiful soul as pure and purified form. Death becomes the jewel in the crown that life ought to be for Montaigne:

*The aim of our course of life is death, that is our inevitable sighting point: if it frightens us, how is it going to be possible to take one forward step without trembling? The common man’s remedy is not to think of it. But what sort of animal stupidity can lead to such gross blindness? [That of] an ass...* (I, 20)

To die is both transitive and intransitive, an active and a passive verb for Montaigne. Up to and into death, Montaigne carries on the indissoluble dialectic between body and soul, between action and reflection, between grasping something actively and being grasped, the very heartbeat of life. Live is on the one hand that which has been given us, that which is within us prior to all consciousness and personal action. On the other hand, life is also our action and the work above all other works, an aim that surpasses all other actions and works. While the medieval theologian had an aim for man, the salvation of the soul in some paradise-like existence beyond this one, Montaigne insisted on the precedence of *life* and on it being the yardstick of all things. Even though Montaigne prepares himself for death through his essays, he is still, right up to the point of dying, a life-asserting individual, subscribing to the motto: Be the one you are, be it totally and completely, follow your will and your reason, know yourself and trust in the nature that has created you as you are!

*With a flaming spear you crushed*

*All its ice until my soul*

*Roaring toward the ocean rushed*

*Of its highest hope and goal.*

*Ever healthier it swells,*

*Lovingly compelled but free:*

*Thus it lauds your miracles.*

(Nietzsche: *The Gay Science*)

# Conclusion. *A personal palimpsest and a source of strength*

We began this book by asking if the soul still refers to a real, necessary or desirable part of the individual, or if, so to speak, is outdated. This is of course not a yes or no question. The answer depends on how we understand and define the soul. In the previous chapters we have attempted to clarify the issue by means of a historical account of how the soul has been conceived by central thinkers and culturally representative writers in various epochs. In the course of the three thousand or so years we have followed the soul, considerable changes, reinterpretations and metamorphoses have taken place in the drama of the soul. The question now is what has survived these changes and reinterpretations, what still exists, and if the soul’s long history still has an impact on our view of humanity.

Perhaps the most important thing that happened to the soul in Greek Antiquity seen from today is that the soul, *psyche*, was *invented* and the very factthat it *was* an *invention*. This applies irrespective of whether it was defined as something innate or formed. The fact that it is an invention also means that it can be re-invented and used in our present-day understanding of the individual. That it constantly has to be re-invented by each and every one of us. That the soul is invented means that it has been created to satisfy a need to form humanity in the way one feels it actually is or ought to be. On the basis of this, the Greeks created a philosophy about the nature of man, an *anthropology*, in which the *psyche* is one of the main constituents along with the body (*soma*) as complementary entities with reason or spirit (*nous* and *pneuma*). Thereby, the soul also becomes a philosophical and theoretical *concept*. And that is how it has continued. We make up concepts about what a human being is so as to grasp, *literally* and *metaphorically*, the forces and parts that apply to us. For that reason, what the soul is remains a question of definition. In that way, there is also something *intentional* about the soul, for it says something about what we *want* as human beings, what we believe in and want with our lives. This is already present in the mythical soul which we meet in Homer. Psyche for him is an answer to what happens to a human being when it dies. Then, in death, the soul manifests itself as a shadow of the self, its *autos*, which is the body. This relationship is turned upside-down in Plato, who makes the psyche the person’s self as a bearer of reason, the only lasting value. Therefore, according to Socrates, we must give priority to *care of the soul* in the form of self-knowledge, a programme which becomes the core of the view of humanity in Western culture well into modernity. Many people feel that we still need the concept of the soul to become a fully worthy human being, and that it serves a purpose to detect all the diffuse but essential things that take place within us. In that way, one can discuss how the system, the anthropology of which the soul is a part, should be, and how the soul is to be defined more closely.

One of the subsequent crucial turns in the cultural history of the soul took place at the beginning of the Christian medieval period. At that point, the generally accepted philosophical understanding of the soul as a concept in a rationally theoretical system was replaced by a religious understanding of the soul. The soul became the subject of *belief*. And it was conceived as something innate, God-given and eternal, with a substance that survives death and lives on in the life beyond, in heaven or hell according to deserts or faith. Such a conception of the soul has retained its validity for many people right up to our own age and it has a strong position in many environments in east and west, north and south. With the exception of the secularised West, it still represents the core of the view of humanity to which most people around the world subscribe. The conception is extremely active in Islam, where the belief that the person is recreated with body and soul in a paradise-like existence beyond this life is also misused at a motivation for and legitimisation of *jihad*, often including terror and murder of ‘infidels’ in the assurance of becoming a martyr and receiving an extra reward in the other world in the form of sensual benefits.

The opposite of this is Buddhism, where the use of violence against innocent people will result in negative karma that will make it impossible to dissolve the soul in *anatman*, non-soul, and thereby break the chain of reincarnation and suffering.

The soul, however, is not dependent on a religious anchoring if it is to continue to exist in our time. Throughout history, we have seen that many philosophers and dissimilar views of life have operated with the concept of the soul without anchoring it in a religious system. We find such a purely human, anthropological and secular existential soul well substantiated in Aristotle. The crucial thing about Aristotle’s conception of the soul is an understanding of the soul as a form-principle. That the soul is form and must be shaped with insight and competence is a lasting legacy from Antiquity. Unlike Plato, the soul for Aristotle is not a *copy* of the idea, but some energetic interior that is actively shaped as it finds its own form. There is a direct line from Aristotle to the expressivism of the Romantic movement and Herder and then on to Wittgenstein’s view of language, where the phenomenon becomes real as it finds its expression, its form. For it *is* its expression.

Aristotle further understood the soul as being a life-principle that animates and gives life to nature with its organisms, flora and fauna. This conception of an animated nature has been tremendously important both scientifically and culturally down through the ages, and it gained a new lease of life in Spinoza’s pantheism in the late Renaissance and particularly in Romanticism, which also came to inspire the ecological movement in our own time. The idea of an animated nature, however, is not needed in order to explain organic life. Biology manages without. With Darwin’s theory of evolution, the idea of man being created ‘at one go’, once and for all and with a divine soul was doomed to fall. The conception of an animated nature that man is related to, applies however all the more than ecological awareness and comprises not only a feeling of being part of a whole that a law-abiding nature bears witness to. It also includes the experience of belonging to a larger spiritual whole where the same forces apply that the individual knows from within himself and his own cognitive abilities.

Both Plato and Aristotle operated with a picture of man that had different levels. Based on this, Plotinus, in late-Antiquity, constructed a hierarchical model in which the *psyche* is placed between the body (*soma*) and the spiritual (*nous* and *pneuma*). Here, then, the soul is a *concept* that is part of a philosophical system. This system, however, has been based on an understanding of the nature and composition of man (ontological). And as such, the human soul can still be understood as the dimension that lies between and interacts with the two objectively given dimensions in man, our body and our reason with its cognitive abilities. Between these two objective or given poles lies all the subjective: our emotions and sense perceptions, our thoughts and conceptions, our will and consciousness. The soul can be conceived as an umbrella term for all these subjective elements, so that it condenses into a knot or cluster, like Hume’s ‘bundle of impressions’. When, via reflection, experience and conscious choices of will, this cluster gains an inner cohesion and, to a greater or lesser extent, consistency in the individual, the soul assumes the appearance of a relational and integrated totality that intuitively acts as a personal guide that gives the individual identity.

A hierarchical view of man, however, has a tendency to result in dualism, as in the tradition from Plato to Kant. There are few philosophers who defend such a dualism nowadays. It is further made questionable by recent neurological research, which documents an interactive electro-biochemical internet in which the emotions are to a large degree controlled by certain profound nerve structures. Despite this, just how the actual transition takes place from the brain’s electro-chemical impulses to conscious thoughts, from the physical to the mental, is something the neurology is unable to explain to us, just as little as 7+5=12. That the mental is conditioned by the physical and a product of evolution is even so perhaps the most important and best substantiated argument in favour of claiming that the individual is born neither with an integral, substantial soul nor as a *tabula rasa*, but is a genetic palimpsest on which our biological inheritance has been inscribed, layer on layer, and thus has determined our psychical dispositions.

Aristotle used the concept substance (*usia*) in his metaphysics and also gave the soul substance. The concept has been interpreted in various ways at various times, from something material to being or essence. The substance concept accorded well historically with Christian teaching concerning the soul. The concept makes it possible to argue that man is born with a soul that is something more than an abstract ability to think, but with an integrated and constant core of being. A Christian soul without substance is impossible. The historical status of the soul, however, became progressively weakened as substance was taken away from it. This led to a schism between philosophy and religion, between belief and knowledge.

It begins with Descartes’ definition of the soul as something immaterial with substance, understood as a core of being linked to the ability to think. But the idea that the thinking ability of the soul, with roots in the various senses of the body, has a unified immaterial substance seems like a self-contradiction. For that reason, the English and Scottish empiricists dismiss substance from the soul. When it is not possible any longer to maintain the soul as a fixed unity with a core of being, it became unsuitable as something which determines the nature of man. The *soul* is relegated to the domain of belief and religion, whereas *mind* takes over its position in English-speaking areas as the bearer of both reason and cognition. Similarly, *sinn* (mind) is used in Norwegian about what is internal, and often synonymously with *sjel* (soul). The most tangible thing one has is an *I* that thinks, an *ego* or a *self* with a *consciousness* and capacity for self-reflection, a *self-awareness*. Along with *identity*, these concepts challenge the soul’s position as the centre, core and yardstick of the personality which Kant and the Enlightenment period, in the tradition of Descartes, supplement with *reason* as the yardstick of all things. The soul is provisionally rescued by being equated with reason. In Hegel, the soul is dissolved in reason as spirit and thereby really seems to have become outdated and been consigned to the scrapheap of history.

But the soul survives. Each metamorphosis and reinterpretation it is subjected to gives it renewed topicality in a new context. In this way it simply engraves itself deeper into its own palimpsest. This occurs, among other reasons, when the personal and moral qualities it is ascribed in Christianity acquire a new, existential meaning. For the effect history of Christianity is ineradicable. The European view of man is the strongest confirmation of the fact that Christianity and European culture are intimately interwoven. European culture is the culture of individualism. Individualism has its roots in the Christian conception of the soul, the focus being on the soul of the individual and the necessary conditions for personal salvation. The Socratic care of the soul, where one must constantly deliberate and consider what the consequences of what one says and does can have for oneself and for others, does not only apply to the Christian medieval period but for European man right up to the present day. As such, the soul has become identical with the personality and its characteristics. And as such it lives on, without substance and unity, as an integrative function of the qualities and experiences of the personality.

The particular Christian and Augustinian awareness of sin develops, as a positive effect, a particular mental and moral sensitivity and conscience, a co-knowledge that reacts when the internalised norms are breached. The soul is that part of the individual that is most closely connected with the evil as well as the good, as a restraining phenomenon which reacts against any infringement of our non-violation zone. The consciousness of sin thus develops care of the soul in both the emotional and ethical-existential dimensions. The positive counterpart to the agony of soul and often irrational sense of guilt that the preaching of original sin and fear of the day of judgment has created is Christianity as the religion of love, and the empathy and solidarity which love of one’s neighbour has created. For love is always directed towards something else, one or several other persons or something supra-individual that the loving person feels at one with. This sympathetic soul is developed in a secularised version during the sensitivity of Romanticism with its sentimental genres that literally inscribe themselves on the soul. Its salvation became a question of whether one follows the voice of one’s heart and is faithful to the demands of love. Through love the soul is part of something larger than itself, as an aim and yardstick for all that is human and humane.

The person, thinker and writer who to a special degree topicalised and revitalised the personal and ethical-existential dimensions which the soul represents is Søren Kierkegaard. He makes the choice of *one’s self*, the requirement of a real or authentic life, into something more than just a question of personal identity, into something that also involves the soul’s salvation. This salvation applies not only to salvation in the religious sense but also at the personal level of being authentic so as to preserve one’s personal integrity – something which was also of crucial importance for Kierkegaard himself as well. How is anyone to be able to make the leap from one existential level to another if he does not dare choose himself and have faith?

Even though Kierkegaard deep down was a Christian thinker who believes in an immortal soul and the soul’s salvation through Jesus’ love and compassion, he sees clearly that the salvation of the soul in both a personal existential and religious sense depends on the personal psyche in a psychological sense. In that way, he prepares the ground for the historical transition *from soul to psyche*, from a religiously and philosophically to a psychologically conceived soul, a transition that takes place in the period leading up to 1900, when Freud publishes his first work on psychoanalysis.

The transition from soul to psyche is the most radical change in the understanding of the soul since the transition from the medieval Christian period to the Renaissance and Enlightenment. It becomes a *symptom* of the personality, mental suffering, angst, depressions and neuroses that require therapy and treatment. So as *psyche* the soul absolutely continues to exist, as the way in which our age seeks to understand the complex inner life of the individual. After Freud, psychology developed in various directions with many different special disciplines: developmental psychology, child and youth psychology, social psychology, behavioural psychology, cognitive psychology, perception psychology, learning psychology, personality psychology – and a whole range of other disciplines and methods of treatment.

In a way, psychology has become what both Hume and Kant felt it ought to become as a basic knowledge about man, but on different, almost pathological premises than those they imagined, as mental sufferings seem to grow in extent and degree of seriousness in our age, especially among young people. For that reason, psychology and psychiatry merge into each other, and the boundaries between the normal and the mentally ill are erased. At the same time, each new generation leaves its mark on the soul’s palimpsest, whether it be with a knife in the form of self-wounding or digitally by exposing its private self on the social media; the scars remain as decipherable signs and images, intimate images of *the body in the soul*, and not vice versa, as the Norwegian psychiatrist Finne Skårderud has so aptly characterised this pathological fixation with the body in our welfare societies.

Viewed in this way, the psyche has become just as much a symptom of society and so-called outsideness as of the free, autonomous human mind that was the ideal of Hume and Kant. And those who are healthy and well-functioning are not as noble as Goethe, among others, imagined man to be. It is a gloomy picture of humanity and society that psychology as a critical discipline provides us with. Man openly seeks power and recognition, driven by motives that cannot stand up to scrutiny, packaged in a fog of makeshift motives and disguised self-interest.

Man is just as much consciously driven by unadulterated egoism as by irrational complexes and repressed needs. Ninety per cent is psychology, is the pictorial visualisation as an explanation of human behaviour, the soul as driven by the black horse in Plato’s team of two horses. After Nazism and all the atrocities committed by terrorists and thugs with no capacity for empathy with their victims, we have learnt that the one who cannot show concern for his own soul cannot show concern for others either, and vice versa. To that degree, the vulnerable and impressionable soul is not outdated.

The next question then, to continue the percentage metaphor for a moment, is how one can organise things so that the crucial ten per cent of the human mind is redeemed, the white horse and the charioteer of reason in Plato’s two-horse chariot, that aspect that is not subject to self-assertion and the power of makeshift motives, so that this creative aspect can fill out everything. This is the wise and willing, the courageous, self-transcending and creative psyche, which out of love can be engrossed in something larger than the self. It does not develop at the expense of others but can promote the common good in accordance with certain universal rights that can accommodate both single individuals and the differing cultural distinctive traits and views of life. This applies to the psychical powers, aims and motives that have filled the minds of a Carl von Ossietzky and Sofie Scholl, an Andrei Sakharov and Anna Politkovskaya, a Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Víctor Jara and many others, known and unknown, who have followed the dictates of their conscience. They have felt themselves to be bound by certain values and ideals that they have placed so high that they have been willing both the devote their lives to them – and sacrifice their lives if need be. It is a question of human integrity. To have integrity means that life and teaching belong together, that one does not compromise with a universal value, that one tries to live and act in accordance with one’s conviction and what one feels inside.

The soul is an expression of this integrity that every individual strives towards so as to cohere as a human being and also be part of something larger and more universal. To preserve one’s soul and to do something or nothing for the sake of one’s soul’s salvation is the same as retaining one’s integrity. The soul is what speaks out when this is offended against. The soul does not only exist as a delimited psychical dimension but as something irreducibly personal and ethical-existential. It is a totality of thoughts and emotions, of something physically sensual and something intelligible that goes beyond the self-sufficient and individual, as in love. According to Freud, it is the force and energy that is *primus motor* with all its tensions, which converts the physical into something spiritual. For tension is energy. And for the German best-seller philosopher Wilhelm Schmid too the soul is *energy* (2013, p. 289f). That is why others can notice its charm and attraction. It is this atmosphere or aura that surrounds the individual, that gives someone charisma. Reason alone cannot be the yardstick of this force. For one can think anything at all and use one’s reason for anything at all, good or bad. That is why Kant requires a person to use reason in accordance with certain universal norms that are not themselves put into practice, that are an end in themselves and not the means to something else. In addition to this insistence on validity, Kant believes that in deontological ethics what he calls a regulative idea is necessary, one that sets the norm for what one thinks and does, that speaks out with the senses and emotions when the norm is transgressed. The soul has this function in an interaction with the dictates of his conscience. ‘For the soul has its reasons which reason knows nothing of’, to adapt Pascal’s words about the heart.

All this means that the soul is not something substantially unified, with a core of being, but is something that is composite, made up of integrating relations between emotions and will, consciousness and thoughts, that ideally seeks agreement with some universal norms, that for its part has its concrete content determined via a socio-cultural and personal process of formation. The soul is the hub of the personality, *a relational universe of functions* subject to norms that are developed via a reflective use of reason and are gradually experienced as ‘natural’, the sifting mechanism that spontaneously or via reflection decide what can be integrated into the whole and what cannot be tolerated.

It is this kind of general concept of the soul that remains after the historical changes the soul has been through since Antiquity and up to the present day. The philosopher whose life and teaching belong to each other, who lives through his thought just as his writings reflect his mythical soul, is Nietzsche, in the tradition that follows on Montaigne and Goethe. As an integrity of body and soul he turns the soul into an inner force, the medium and yardstick of the will, a sensitive barometer of whether the person in every way is in accordance with his deepest nature and ethical-existential values. The soul changes but continues to exist, which is why he claimed: “It is not at all necessary to get rid of ‘the soul’ at the same time, and thus to renounce one of the most ancient and venerable hypotheses.” The hypothesis would seem to be confirmed.

The soul is not only a passive receiver and regulatory dimension in which the past has inscribed itself but also a motivating force-field borne by a will to transcend the self-sufficient self. It is open to discussion what values it is borne by, but the actual view of humanity still retains its validity. And it has survived the reduction by psychology of the soul to psyche, which definitively applies within its field. But psychology’s causally conceived psyche does not hold within the irreducible dimension which the soul represents in anthropological and ethical-existential terms. According to Kant and Nietzsche, we have a soul because we need one, because our deepest life-urge *demands* it in order to know what life is about, what norm the will is to follow. This soul continues to exist, and it also comprises the psyche in a psychological sense. This is reflected both in our general cultural self-understanding, in everyday speech and in art and writing as James Joyce, among others, portrays it.

In Descartes, the founder of the modern soul, the soul does not have such a meaning. From him onwards and up until the Enlightenment period, the soul is not an expression of something personal but something abstract that universally characterises mankind, something that in the Cartesian-Kantian tradition is reason and self-consciousness. But what reason and self-consciousness are conscious of is something we hear little about. It is here that Goethe and Romanticism come in and give the general and abstract-theoretical definition of the human soul a concrete and personal content. Goethe’s Faustian soul is both the quintessence of the personal characteristics and the individual’s striving towards something that fulfils its definition and enfolds it into something higher, a universal force that is in evidence in everything. It is this soul which the mythical will fulfils, a will that seeks ‘that entrance – and exit – that are determined for you and you only.’

Since man is ‘an as yet not specified animal’, open and undetermined, and lives in an artificially created world, he has to create himself – via language. According to Wittgenstein’s words we are caught in language pictures: “A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language.” The boundaries of our world, our reality, are the boundaries of our language. In this world of language one is at the mercy of the rules of the language games or – to use Foucault’s concept – the rules of discourses. The soul is identical with its language and the way we play the language games of the soul, with the words and expressions, images and symbols we use to give the soul form and meaning. In this book we have given an account of the images and concepts that have formed not only the historical discourse of the soul in our culture but also the soul itself as a linguistic palimpsest. It is inscribed in and by our common cultural inheritance, the alphabet of the soul from alpha to omega that each and every one of us can use as we form our individual soul and its aim.

Just as love was ‘invented’ in the high Middle Ages and defined with pictures and stories that had the heart as its symbol, so love is in fact invented in practice. This is also the case with the soul, which was ‘invented’ in Greek Antiquity. Once it has been ‘invented’ or constructed with concepts and images, narratives and explanations as part of our view of humanity, it has repercussions on how we as human beings actually are and become, with soul – or without – by an active deconstruction. With the strong tradition that exists both in European and other cultures to perceive ourselves as having a soul, it becomes reductionist to perceive the individual as a soulless being.

There has been a widespread conception that it is God’s script that has inscribed itself on human hearts as the seat of the soul. But it is not God who has inscribed himself and prescribed the soul. It is humanity’s script and various narratives about the soul with its images and symbols that have created and shaped our inner life, as has been expressed in the historical drama we have been following. The soul exists only as long as we have words and concepts and pictures for it, to describe, rewrite and prescribe it in various ways. The soul is, to a greater extent than other dimensions in the individual, subject of construction, of personal and cultural formation.

We hardly need to be convinced that the body exists, even though different perceptions of the body that are culturally created determine how we shape and relate to our own bodies. We also accept that we have a reason that is capable of reasoning logically correctly independently of our subjective opinions. For body and reason are objectively given entities. But that we have a soul calls for a different type of thinking and justification. For it is an individual and personal entity. It contains all the complex inner life that Shakespeare depicts, the conflicting emotions and unclear motives, the Kierkegaardian angst, Kafka’s suffering and Goethe’s striving. The soul is the way we choose to order and form all this subjective inner life. In the stream of time and consciousness it actively seeks its entrance and exit in accordance with the Law, its ultimate mythical goal in its dissolution into the universe, into nothingness or into unity. It is not only Buddhists who want to get rid of everything that burdens the soul and hampers it in its final essay, the *essai* that Montaigne portrays, to dissolve the soul, in order to avoid the boredom and suffering of eternity. Moslems and Christians have the unity of the soul with God as the ultimate goal, just as also others, artists and truth-seekers, search for and can achieve *unio mystica*. The soul is the answer to the mystery of death in the certainty that there is something exclusively *mine*, something each and every one of us wish to clarify and retain in order to die one’s own death in peace and reconciliation. For life too it applies that the *sortie* has to be in order. The soul is something energetic, an empathetic and intentional entity that forces its way forward out of an inner pressure, in a lifelong process. It is conditioned by how we, on the basis of history, cultural values and own experiences understand man, and how we on the basis of our goals and values believe man should be. This takes place by virtue of language.

The soul is our freedom to define ourselves in our own image, no matter whether we believe or do not believe we are created in God’s image (which in itself is a historically created image). The soul is a culturally formed dimension that distinguishes us from animals and that is not deterministically subject to invariable causal laws. The soul is the expression of our inviolability, our vulnerability and our frailty, that which suffers in love and compassion when the one or ones with whom we feel fellowship with are outraged. It only continues to exist for as long as we will, only as long as we believe we have a particular worth that it is our responsibility to feel concern for and fight for in order to protect, as Hannah Arendt has reminded us of and given us insights into. If one has the certainty that one has a soul to preserve, one has, with Nietzsche’s words, also a ‘basic certainty about oneself, something that one cannot seek, cannot find, and that one perhaps cannot lose either’, something which one does not exclusively owe oneself, but which it is one’s own fault should one lose it. This something is the unfathomable and self-surpassing that fills the mind with enthusiasm and awe, on which the sum of experiences has inscribed itself as an autobiographical palimpsest, because it is in this way that one becomes who one is, and will be when one lives up to one’s innermost conviction about what it means to be a man and a fellow man.

1. Alternative title: THE SOUL – HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

   Picture: [François Pascal Simon Gérard](http://www.myartprints.com/a/gerard-francois-pascal-si.html): Psyché et l'Amour (1798)

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