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Robert Kugelmann
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1 Reintroducing the Soul

Does the soul have a place in modern psychology? Apparently not. Yet the soul has survived. Everything has a soul – an essence, heart, central purpose, deepest meaning. Soul can be searched, murdered, lost, and found. Everything, science, new machines, corporations, music, food, and activities of all kinds, can have a soul. There are battles for the soul of science, of Western culture, of America, of Canada, of capitalism.

Everything, that is, except living beings. In 1890, William James declared the soul superfluous for scientific psychology, sounding a widely held conviction. For over a century, it seems that the soul has been an outcast category in mainstream psychology. Even granting that that last statement is true, does it matter? It matters because the soul has had its place in the ongoing, perennial, investigations into the nature of things: What sort of beings are we? In asking this question as the central one for psychology, I am locating this study within the context of alternative histories of psychology. These histories typically object to natural scientific psychology as not providing any answer to our question, or answering it in reductionistic terms. Earlier examples of alternative histories include important texts. First is Amedeo Giorgi's (1970) *Psychology as a Human Science: A Phenomenologically Based Approach*, which revived the human scientific stream in psychology's past, which had been ignored in mainstream histories. Second is *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology, from Erasmus Darwin to William James*, by Edward S. Reed (1997). Like Giorgi, he recovered a way of thinking in psychology that mainstream histories had overlooked, and he called for psychology to be "a science of the soul" along Romantic lines, a "science of experience" (p. 220) along the lines of William James, both depictions insisting on all of experience being addressed in psychology, not only what can be quantified and operationalized. Finally, there is Eugene Taylor's (2009) *The Mystery of Personality: A History of Psychodynamic Theories* that, along the lines of Giorgi and Reed, brings together material that the natural scientific approach dismisses as "soft." Taylor calls for psychology to address our uniqueness, with "the individual, at the center" of a psychology adequate to

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its subject matter. This book too is an alternative reading of psychology's past. It claims that psychology, to be worthy of its name, must return to the "soul."

What is the soul? Ideally, at this juncture a working definition of the term should appear. In what follows, we shall find the soul described in a number of ways. Central to all of them is that the soul has less to do with What we are than Who we are. As a "who," the soul is no object. There is no view of it from the outside, since it is through this Who that each of us encounters self, other, world. Let me leave it at that. Over the course of the text, we shall find it specified in many ways.

1.1 Dualisms

This book engages the question of what we are as ensouled beings, and in order to clear the ground, let me introduce some of the key terms that will recur in the book, not in order to settle them, but to highlight them. One of the terms that recurs is "dualism." Dualism is a philosophical category signifying that human beings (and in some versions, other animals, and even plants in others) consist of two substances, soul and body (or mind and body). There are different dualisms. For Plato, the soul preexists its union with the body and survives death. Embodiment mires us in ignorance, for the body is a tomb (*sōma sēma*). The soul itself for Plato is dual in structure, for although we are rational beings we have desires, some of which listen to reason (anger, for example) and others do not (lust, for example). Aristotle, Plato's student, modified the dualism of soul and body, with soul the "form" or guiding principle of a living being, body supplying the matter. Aristotle helpfully supplied analogies: if a knife were a living being, its soul would be the power to cut; if the eye were a living being, its soul would be vision; the soul of a living being is its ability to live, and for humans, this means we grow, nourish ourselves, reproduce, sense, desire, remember, choose, and think. This Aristotelian way of addressing the human condition is a "soft dualism," and Aristotle was vague about the possibility of the soul surviving death.

Dualisms abound. Plutarch compared the relationship between soul and body to that between the sun and the moon and between husband and wife. Writing in a patriarchal society, the soul (husband) rules the body (wife); however, ideal relations suggest harmony as the best way to do that, not tyranny. Soul for Plutarch was, then, the harmony of living one's life. For Augustine, drawing on his Platonic background, soul is an incorporeal substance and, drawing on his Christian foreground, the very image of God (*imago Dei*) within us. The turn of the mind inward, away from the outer world, leads us to this *imago* and so directs us outside and above ourselves to God. In the modern epoch (from the seventeenth century), the dualism of Descartes, who in many ways was Augustinian, is typically what dualism

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means. Body is a physical thing, a *res extensa* or an "extended thing" in Descartes' formulation, and soul is not a physical thing. The soul is a *res cogitans*, a "thing that thinks."

The most significant contribution of Descartes to the soul–body question is his conception of the body as a "machine." Machines do not need souls to function; their activities unfold in causal sequences. Earlier conceptions of the body included nonmechanical principles, such as "subtle bodies" and "humors" that were substances in between gross bodies (clay, water, etc.) and the immaterial soul. Descartes' body was the one that the anatomists describe. Questions thus proliferated: Where does the soul interact with the body? How can something immaterial affect a mechanism? If mechanical explanations account for perception, digestion, embryology, etc., what is left for the soul to do?

Negative answers to these questions have led to an ascendence of nondualist ways of conceiving human life. Some are "reductive": to be human is to be a complex machine or a carbon-based computer. These nondualist positions are called monist because we have only one principle that defines our being. "Idealism" is a monism widely held at the end of the nineteenth century in psychology, which denied the existence of matter. The more common monism is "materialism" or "physicalism" (see Stoljar [2021] for the distinction between these terms) that asserts that only matter exists. In one formulation, Logical Positivism, which had an influence on psychology in the mid-twentieth century, a unity of science was conceived, with all factual statements consisting of perceptual occurrences, in physics and in psychology. Nondualist answers to the question of what we are have been around as long as dualist answers. Democritus and Lucretius in the ancient world professed an "atomism" that conceived of the "soul" as a configuration of atoms (little seeds) that dispersed at death. Pierre Gassendi revived atomism in the time of Descartes. It seems that physicalism is at present the default position in natural scientific psychology.

1.2 A Soulless Psychology

There is "widespread agreement . . . that modern psychology has lost its soul" (Beck, 2003, p. 31), and this loss, if that is what it is, has received many diagnoses. For some, it resulted from the spread of secularism, such that psychology lost soul because society had turned a blind eye to the sacred (Drakeford, 1964). For others, the soul was a fatality of the development of a natural scientific psychology, which eschews metaphysical explanations (James, 1890a). For others, including some of those who hope to see it return, soul has a "problem of definition" and "we will err if we ignore the fuzzy background of the word even in Christian circles" (Beck, 2003, p. 32). Among

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the losses that accompany the loss of the soul are connections with psychology's long traditions, many of which addressed the soul, as well as a loss of a "depth" understanding of human life. We will explore and evaluate these claims.

More than fifty years ago, Max Horkheimer (1974), the philosopher and critical theorist, observed that while "belief in the soul may appeal to the various tribunals of spiritual authority . . . it finds dubious support at best not only in the natural sciences but even in philosophy and history" (p. 52). Many theologians have also abandoned the notion of the soul, as being either non-Scriptural or not in keeping with a unified view of the human person (Schmisek, 2013). While there have been many versions of soul–body dualism, stretching back to the ancient world, Horkheimer was correct in asserting that the seventeenth century, particularly the work of Descartes and Leibniz, formulated a dualism of soul and body that at the same time assumed the truth of the natural scientific conception of nature, particularly of the body. Moreover, "skepticism has continued to spread since the eighteenth century" (p. 57), and doubts about the immortality or even the existence of the soul have extended to popular culture. He cited Fritz Mauthner, who noted that psychology has rejected the soul-substance, although the term may endure for a while, "because common speech always contains many relics of religion and similar outdated types of 'knowledge'" (quoted, p. 57). Here is where Horkheimer offered an alternative, while not advocating for a return of the soul-substance. The sciences, including psychology, think instrumentally: "the purpose is mastery of nature, elimination of obstacles, manageable goals, and medicinal technology" (p. 59). Drawing on the meaning of the word "soul" in recent times, especially in its ties to a conception of a cultivated human life, for Horkheimer this concept of the soul opposed the increasing rationalization and leveling of human life: Soul is a concept "expressing all that is opposed to the indifference of the subject who is ruled by technology and destined to be a mere client. Reason divorced from feeling is now becoming the opposite of *Anima* or soul" (p. 60). In short, the ethical and cultivated human being has "more" soul than one who does not. He saw that concern with soul meant attunement to what lay beyond the mere play of phenomena in the Kantian sense. Such concern is "with the Absolute which transcends the reality whose existence depends on the mind" (p. 61). In the present age, then, "morality in the widest sense and the idea of something other than the world which we are able to order intelligently . . . enter into the specific transpsychological meaning which has accrued to the concept of soul" (p. 61).

If Horkheimer was correct, the idea of the soul has migrated from a substance to a possibility for living, the absence of which renders human life somehow severely impoverished. It is my contention that such a migration has happened in psychology since the late nineteenth century. As Deborah Coon

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(2000) indicated, "for the late-19th-century creators of psychological science, however, the soul had to be taken into account somehow" (p. 85). Even among some psychologists committed to a scientific vision of the discipline and supportive of instrumental reason, reasons for continuing to speak of the soul occur. The list of psychologists who found a place for the soul include those whose religious commitments were central to their thinking, such as the Thomist, Thomas Verner Moore, and some whose theoretical commitments were to a conception of the unconscious, such as Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, and James Hillman. All had to reckon with "psychology without a soul," to be sure, some, such as Moore, rejecting it, and others, such as Rank and Hillman, affirming it but still finding "soul" a meaningful psychological term. What they found meaningful was that the term indicated, on the one hand, possibility, imagination, and even the transcendence of the human self, and on the other hand, connection with fate, death, love, and suffering. For these psychologists who affirmed a psychology without a soul, soul signified not a substance but a kind of activity. This claim will be fleshed out.

Before undertaking that work of putting flesh on the soul, some preliminaries are in order. For in many ways, the soul has not been forgotten, and to them we turn first, by listening for "soul" in vernacular speech and culture. Since it is an assumption of this book that psychology is first of all a cultural psychology, it is necessary that we have some idea of what soul signifies in cultures. I am limiting this study to the English word, "soul," because its cognates in other Indo-European languages have different connotations, at the very least.

1.3 Soul in the Vernacular

Although mainstream psychology has rejected the soul as a meaningful category, in other places in contemporary life, "the soul is enjoying a considerable boom" (Stuckrad, 2022, p. xiii). With roots in transcendentalism, occult traditions, and Romanticism, one version of the soul has a place in psychological practices, such as transpersonal psychology, in some versions of the ecological movement, which reanimates nature and calls for a transformation of the ways we relate to the earth in order not to destroy our prospects for survival, and in literature and other media. Stuckrad includes the Harry Potter novels as one way in which the soul remains relevant in our time. The persistence of spirituality is another, with Stuckrad concluding that it is a mistake to "talk of secularization and of the supposed enmity between religion and science" (p. 243), the weight of physicalist assumptions notwithstanding. To use William James' (1903) phrase, "the more" continues to draw many of us onward. In that direction lies the soul.

Soul has a complex presence in everyday speech and in "the paramount reality of everyday life" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The verb, "ensoul,"

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means to "fill with soul," to "animate" ("Ensoul," n.d., para. 2). There is another verbal use, "a souling," meaning "to go about asking for donations of food, etc., traditionally on the eve of All Souls' Day" ("Souling," n.d., para. 2). This regional English usage bears mentioning because in contemporary psychology in some quarters, soul appears primarily as a verb, as something one does and makes. The word, soul, also occurs as an adjective (the equivalent of "soulful"), notably in Black American contexts, such as "soul food" and "soul music," which deal with the profound issues of love, suffering, death, oppression, racism, and slavery. Intense emotional expressiveness characterizes soul music since passion reveals soul.

These examples suffice to indicate that "soul" has a place in everyday life in North America and elsewhere in nominal form, in adjectival form, and as a "doing." Nevertheless, it is soul as a noun that occurs most commonly. Chief among its many meanings are: "animate existence," "the principal part of a person or animal," "the principle of intelligence ... typically regarded as an entity distinct from the body," "the seat of ... emotions, feelings, or thoughts ... the central or inmost part of a person's being," "the spiritual essence of a living organism," "the leader or inspirer of some business, cause, movement," the essence of a thing, and, of course, "the immaterial part of a person" ("Soul," n.d., sections I and II). Soul signifies the heart, the center.

1.3.1 "Soul" and Culture

In ordinary English speech, to do some "soul searching" or to advise someone to do the same is meaningful discourse, as is the prayer, "Praise the Lord, My Soul." As any number of psychologists attuned to the soul will assert (Hillman, 1975; Beck, 2003; Corbett, 2010; see Leeuw, 1930), "soul" is not easily defined; it is more a symbol than a concept. Although "soul" is not a category in modern scientific psychology, soul has its place in cultural psychological studies, and in related fields, such as cultural anthropology, linguistics, and literature.

These many meanings are not, to be sure, derived solely from indigenous cultural practices. To some extent, they also derive from philosophical and theological conceptions that have become social representations (see Moscovici, 1961/2008). Various cultural institutions play a role in this transmission of ideas about soul, especially religious institutions. Beck and Demarest (2005) show that in the Scriptures the soul and other terms related to the human person abound, and religious texts over the centuries have elaborated upon them. Peter Tyler (2016) observes that "soul-discourse has a long and lively history in Western thought" (p. 5), reaching back to antiquity.

The soul figures into cultural psychologies in various ways. A few examples will illustrate the variabilities of "soul" terms in different cultures. Bering

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(2006a) discusses connections between the soul and considerations of immortality, of personal meanings of experiences, of reading meaning into natural events, and of considerations of the morality of actions. People invoke soul in their prayers and other forms of worship of the Divine. Especially when it comes to death and what if anything comes next, soul figures prominently. Hodge (2016) found that many people believe that others survive death – and not just as diminished ghosts – but as in some sense themselves as they were before death. Many a person feels that a deceased loved one has become present in dream or in feeling, that the relationship with the other continues, and that the other has a soul that survives the death of the body.

Wierzbicka (1989), who has studied the cultural psychology of soul and its cognates in other languages (especially Russian *duša*), had a number of observations about the soul in cultural discourse: (1) soul refers to body as its counterpart; (2) soul refers to the "transcendent," to what is outside ordinary waking experience; (3) soul has a moral dimension, such that the phrase "to lose one's soul" means having sold out one's higher values for some lower gain. Wierzbicka observes that (4) there is a historical dimension to folk psychology and hence to soul: "It is interesting to note that in older English the meaning of *soul* was different from what it is now and reflected a different folk philosophy. The existence of *soul* in that older meaning could not be so readily denied because the older *soul* was open to introspection (rather like *mind* is in contemporary English" (p. 44). Finally, Wierzbicka writes that (5) soul can also signify what lies hidden in a person, unknown to others and even to one's self (one sees here a connection with notions of the "unconscious").

There are many cultural practices in which soul can make an appearance: religious rituals and celebrations, especially funerals, as well as in experiences of severe illness, where dying and death loom near. Cultural practices surrounding dreaming and dream narratives are common, especially those in which the dead appear. Intimate relationships are another realm, in which a person seeks "a soul mate" and "bears one's soul" to another.

Giraudon (2008) studied cultural practices of sweeping out one's house in Celtic societies, including Brittany and Ireland. The very emotional dead (they can get angry, for example) remain in relationship with the living and can influence their descendants. An old and persistent belief is that the souls of the dead return to the house on such occasions as *Samhain* (the same time of the year when Mexicans celebrate *Día de los Muertos*), with one Irish report saying that "the souls of my own dead [are] as thick as bees around me" (Danaher, 1972, quoted in Giraudon, p. 124). The souls "used to be considered as a physical body, smaller than a normal human one" (p. 125), so that they might be swept out the front door if one was not careful. The sweeping in the evening must be done toward the hearth and only thrown away in the morning, Danaher asserting that the belief persisted but was not taken seriously (p. 127).

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Giraudon found such beliefs and practices still present in his own research in Trégor in Brittany. The persistence of the dead as souls among the living feature significantly in two Irish novels, in which the protagonists are dead: Máirtín Ó Cadhain's *Graveyard Clay* (1949/2016), and *Solar Bones* (McCormick, 2016).

In southern Indonesia live the Sa'dan Toraja in the region of Sulawesi. While most Torajans have converted to Christianity, Adams (1993) found a combination of traditional "soul" practices alongside the Christian. The Torajans have a number of soul-words, including *sumanga'*, an "animating force" (p. 57), that is bird-like and can fly off; in old litanies "it was used to hail the ancestors" (p. 57). *Penaa* is the "soul of the living" (p. 57), and "responds to everyday social and physical experiences; it grows larger after a hearty meal and smaller after physical exertion, illness, or distress" (p. 57). It is communal in its connotations, emphasizing consensus. The soul of the dead is *bombo*, which is "frequently sighted at funeral rituals" (p. 58). After a period of mourning, the *bombo* typically travels to *Puya*, the land of the dead. One variation is the *batitong*, "humans inhabited by the angry souls of pregnant women who died in childbirth" (p. 59), this last akin to the Irish banshee (*bean sí*, fairy woman), who was sometimes a woman who died in childbirth. These soul-words stress the continued community of the living and the dead, as well as the links between the members of the living community.

Among peoples living in Amazonia, the soul is a kind of body and is a capacity of bodies, including the ability to transform into other bodies (Whitaker, 2016). Instead of the contrast between soul and body typical in educated Western conceptions, among at least some Amazonian societies: "humans, spirits, and some animals share the same universal subjectivity, except that it is refracted differently through the particularities of their different types of *bodies*" (p. 202), so that "bodies 'are' souls, just . . . as souls and spirits 'are' bodies" (quoting Viveiros de Castro, 1998, p. 481). There is a difference between soul and body in these cultures (to use the English words) but not in any way like a Cartesian dualism. The "body" in these cultures is not an anatomized or biomedicalized image of the body; it is something of a "lived body," capable of knowing and transforming. In some of these societies, "the *soul* [is] a capacity of the *body* for transformation, rather than . . . another body" (p. 203). Part of the difficulty in grasping the meanings of these categories in Amazonian societies is that "the *soul* is 'a complex concept which defies definition even within the English-speaking world'" (p. 204, quoting Rivière, 1997, p. 139).

Morphy and Morphy (2020) found some resemblance between Australian indigenous people, the Yolngu, and Western meanings of "mind," and also with "soul": "Birrimbirr [soul] is an expression of an ancestral (Wangarr) process that connects a spiritual domain with the lived and living world

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through a transformational process that includes spirit conception, the growth of the *birrimbirr* in the living person and the return of the spiritual dimension on death" (p. 267). However, unlike English "soul," *birrimbirr* is "associated with material objects" (p. 268) that manifest "the Wangarr" (p. 268). The Wangarr "are ancestral determinants of the present" (p. 260). They are beings who "think their way through the world and externalize their thoughts and actions in the form of objects and features of the landscape" (p. 260). This suggests something like the "soul of the world" in Platonic thought.

In the middle of the twentieth century, a distinctive form of "soul" flourished in American Black culture. Charles Keil (1966), a cultural anthropologist, and a jazz musician as well, helped to bring this soul to the academic limelight, interviewing Chicagoans as well as blues musicians such as B. B. King. Keil noted that soul became an explicit aspect of Black culture "a year or two after the Supreme Court decision of 1954" (p. 165), which declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. Soul was thus tied to struggles for recognition and identity under conditions of oppression. Remembering was soulful: Al Hibbler, a bluesman, told Keil of the three ingredients that make a soul-singer: "having been hurt by a woman, being 'brought up in that old-time religion', and knowing 'what that slavery shit is all about'" (p. 152). The remembering that "soul" entails runs deep, with Mason (1992) contending that "soul, in this context, is the socioethnic phenomenon peculiar to African Americans as manifested in the retention of African elements in African-American culture in the United States" (p. 52).

Soul had a political, assertive attitude, Keil referring to the "soulful slogan 'Burn, baby, burn!'" of the 1965 Watts riots (p. 187, n. 19). Soul contains an implicit criticism of the impersonality and rationalistic way of life of the majority population. According to Keil: "Every jazzman or bluesman worthy of the name has mastered and transformed his instrument to suit his own special purposes. Contrast this sort of mastery with the master of the symphony musician, who strives to play his instrument as it ought to be played . . . and you will have another idea of what soul is all about" (p. 176). Keil refers here to Lerone Bennett, who wrote that "soul" partakes in a tradition that is "definitely nonmachine, but it is not anti-machine; it simply recognizes that machines are generative power and not soul" (Bennett, 1964, p. 53, cited in Keil, p. 176).

W. E. B. DuBois, in *The Soul of Black Folk* (1903/2007), written at the beginning of the twentieth century and depicting the existential position of Blacks "behind the veil" of color, said that Blacks lived a double life, "with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes" (p. 122). This sense of doubleness has been incorporated into soul, as Keil observed: "Negroes have a dearly bought experiential wisdom, a 'perspective by incongruity,' that white American can only envy and certainly never share. Soul is the higher

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value that, in retrospect at least, may justify all the terrors, anguish, and degradation of the preceding centuries" (p. 170). Soul in this context was a way of life, as the musicians told Keil: soul signifies "'talk that talk' 'walk that walk,', 'it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing'" (p. 173). In these ways, this "soul" signifies the depth of human living, enduring, and transcending. Soul was felt, felt strongly.

Without attempting to subject all these soul-words to some higher-level concept, there are common themes. One relates to the ongoing relationships between the living and the dead, and the ways in which the dead desire to be remembered in daily life. The second relates to the body: How one understands embodiment is in relation to how one understands the soul. The third theme is that of transcendence, in various ways, of the here and now. Human existence takes place on many plains in addition to the quotidian. The differences between these formulations vary considerably.

1.3.2 The Soul in "Primitive Phenomenological Experiences"

The soul also receives attention in cognitive psychological studies of contemporary cultural psychology. The studies deal primarily with North Americans and Europeans, so that this folk psychology is limited to these groups. Instead of calling it a folk psychology, we can say that these studies explore intuitions or naïve theories about the existence of the soul, which the researchers tend to believe are prescientific at best. Lisa Osbeck and Barbara Held (2014), in introducing the various ways that philosophers and psychologists have understood intuition, report that for some developmental psychologists, "naïve theories" are "innate conceptual 'structures' organized around domains or modules of knowledge" (p. 14). These early understandings are "theories" in the sense that they "enable the child to interpret and make sense of the world" (p. 14). Osbeck and Held cite Carey (1996), for whom "the central components of an intuitive theory are its ontology and the causal mechanisms it exploits in explanation" (p. 190, cited in Osbeck & Held, p. 14). We can compare these intuitions about the soul to other intuitions, such as that the sun rises and sets, an experience that many of us witness daily, only to be told by Copernicus that we are mistaken. Another such intuition is in extramission experiences, namely that when we see, something comes from the eye out into the world. This last has its source in "primitive, phenomenological experiences" of an "outer-directed, dynamic quality of seeing" (Winer et al., 2002, pp. 422–423), experiences that optics does not confirm.

What are the experiences that underlie intuitions of the soul? Intuitions of soul/mind–body dualism are conclusions based on "phenomenological experiences" (Forstmann & Burgmer, 2015, p. 234), such as: "the feeling of occupying our bodies . . ., having a private mental life . . ., experiencing dreams, or

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