

5 What Is the Human Soul?

When the author debates electronic immortality, religious people have trouble regarding the soul. Let us consider this problem.

5.1 General Note: Soul

The soul, in certain spiritual, philosophical, and psychological traditions, is the incorporeal essence of a person or living thing. Many philosophical and spiritual systems teach that humans are souls; some attribute souls to all living things and even to inanimate objects (such as rivers); this belief is commonly called animism. The soul is often believed to exit the body and live on after a person's death, and some religions posit that God creates souls. The soul has often been deemed integral or essential to consciousness and personality, and *soul* sometimes functions as a synonym for *spirit*, *mind*, or *self*, although the soul is said to function in a distinct enough way from both the spirit and the psyche that the terms should not be treated interchangeably.

5.2 Soul in Religions

Christianity. The majority of Christians understands the soul as an ontological reality distinct from, yet integrally connected with, the body. Its characteristics are described in moral, spiritual, and philosophical terms. When people die, their souls will be judged by God and will be determined to spend an eternity in heaven or in hell. Though all branches of Christianity—Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox, evangelical or mainline Protestants—teach that Jesus Christ plays a decisive role in the salvation process, the specifics of that role and the part played by individual persons or ecclesiastical rituals and relationships is a matter of wide diversity in official church teaching, theological speculation, and popular practice. Some Christians believe that if one has not repented of one's sins and trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, one will go to hell and suffer eternal separation from God. Variations also exist on this theme, for example, some hold that the unrighteous soul will be destroyed instead of suffering eternally (Annihilationism). Believers will inherit eternal life in heaven and enjoy eternal fellowship with God. There is also a belief that babies (including the unborn) and those with cognitive or mental impairments who have died will be received into heaven on the basis of God's grace through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Buddhism teaches that all things are in a constant state of flux: all is changing, and no permanent state exists by itself. This applies to human beings as much as to anything else in the cosmos. Thus, a human being has no permanent self. According to this doctrine of *anatta* (Pali; Sanskrit: *an tman*—“no-self” or “no soul”), the words “I” or “me” do not refer to any fixed thing. They are simply convenient terms that allow us to refer to an ever-changing entity.

Judaism. The Hebrew terms שפן *nephesh*, רוּחַ *ruach* (literally “wind”), and הנשמה *neshama* (literally “breath”) are used to describe the soul or spirit. The soul is believed to be given by God to a person by his/her first breath, as mentioned in Genesis, “And the LORD God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). From this statement, the rabbinical interpretation is often that human embryos do not have souls, though abortion is often opposed by the orthodoxy as a form of birth control. Judaism relates the quality of one’s soul to one’s performance of mitzvot and reaching higher levels of understanding, and thus closeness to God.

In **Hinduism**, the Sanskrit words most closely corresponding to soul are “Jeeva,” “Atmaan,” and “Purusha,” meaning the individual self. The term “soul” is misleading as it implies an object possessed, whereas self signifies the subject which perceives all objects. This self is held to be distinct from the various mental faculties such as desires, thinking, understanding, reasoning, and self-image (ego), all of which are considered to be part of Prakriti (nature).

Islam. Allah narrated in the Quran: “And they ask you (O Muhammad SAW) concerning the Ruh (the Spirit); Say: The Ruh (the Spirit): is the AMAR of your Creator. And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little” (Noble Quran, Surat Al’Isra’, Verse 85) (Figure 5.1).

Further in the Quran, the definition of “Amar” is “And the AMAR of your Creator is such that when it intends for something to happen, it says ‘Let it be’ then it is done.”

Combining the two verses; Ruh (soul, spirit) is that creation of Allah that has the knowledge and authority to use that knowledge.

The definition of that knowledge is also given in the Quran, surah “Al-Baqrah” Chapter 2, verses 31–32, when Allah tells angels about the creation of the first soul, Adam: “That I want to appoint a representative on the Earth ...” (Chapter 2, verse 31) further, Allah says, “And we gave him the knowledge of all the attributes” (Chapter 2, verse 32).

Now this verse explains very clearly about the importance of the soul (Ruh). It has the knowledge of all the attributes that Allah wanted to be revealed; and because we know that a portion of infinity is also an infinity, therefore that knowledge is also boundless. And all this is present in soul, the real human being, without which the physical body is nothing. The physical body is similar to our clothes; when the soul puts it off, it is useless. Hence, it is the soul that is the real you and me, the physical body is just clothing.

Science and medicine seek naturalistic accounts of the observable natural world. This stance is known as methodological naturalism. Much of the scientific study relating to the soul has involved investigating the soul as an object of human belief, or as a concept that shapes cognition and an understanding of the world, rather than as an entity in and of itself.



Figure 5.1 “A soul brought to heaven” by William Bouguereau.

5.3 Summary

1. In the author’s opinion, the soul is only the knowledge stored in our brain (see Part II of this book). More than 99% of it is the permanent knowledge about our own history (all that we have seen, heard, spoken, felt, and done), knowledge received in school, college, university, from books, TV, radio, and so on. A very small part (<1%) is variable, our own opinion about people or their actions. That part is changed by new knowledge, information, and situations.
2. Most information is received in our brain from our sensory organs: eyes, ears, tongue, skin, muscles. This information may be easily intercepted by the current sensors, written and stored by current electronic devices. That means our soul may be written and kept safe for a very long time. It may be loaded in new electronic chips (brain). If this electronic brain is provided, the sensors—micro-video camera, microphone, audio speaker, TV screen, and the executive bodies (artificial legs, arms), we get the immortal man (E-being) who continues the life of the real man and will have his initial soul (see Part II).
3. This artificial man will have gigantic advantages over his ancestor. He will not need a body, sleep, or housing. He can live in space and on the bottom of an ocean, travel to other planets by a laser beam with light speed, and be indestructible by any weapon because he will save himself in special storage and restore himself at any time (see Part II).
4. This situation is well described in beautiful fiction book titled *Price of Immortality* by Igor Getmansky (Moscow, ЭКСМО, 2003). This book is only published in Russian. More detailed description of human soul is in the author’s article “Science, Soul, Paradise, and Artificial Intelligence” (1999) found in Part II of this book.