

THEOLOGY AND NATURAL SCIENCE TOPIC SESSION

Topic:	The Nature of the Soul
Convener:	Richard W. Kropf, Diocese of Lansing
Moderator:	William Stoeger, S.J., Vatican Observatory and the University of Arizona
Presenters:	Terrence Ehrman, C.S.C., Catholic University of America Marian Maskulak, C.P.S., St. John's University
Respondent:	Michael Dodds, O.P., Dominican School of Theology, Berkeley

Terry Ehrman, C.S.C., began the session by addressing the current state of the question concerning “soul” language in theology, philosophy, and science. Resisting current opposition to the soul as a meaningful concept or reality, Ehrman defended the indispensability of soul language and the reality of the human soul for both Christian anthropology and eschatology by developing David Braine’s philosophical anthropology, which fills the conceptual space between dualism and materialism. Braine’s anthropology is rooted in a non-dualistic Aristotelian-based notion of the soul, which preserves the unity of the human person as an organism and that eschatologically receives its fullest coherence from resurrection of the body. Both contemporary dualism and materialism are inadequate anthropologies because they undermine the unity of the human being by separating the human animal from a thinking person. Braine draws upon the insights of contemporary philosophers of language, such as Wittgenstein, Ryle, and Austin, to dismantle the Cartesian view of the person and matter and to recover a richer ontology provided by Aristotelian hylomorphism, which properly understands humans and higher animals as psychophysical wholes with irreducibly hybrid powers. Proper to human beings is their linguistic understanding and thinking in a medium of words, neither of which Braine argues are physical or bodily processes. Like Aquinas, Braine concludes that the body has no organ of thought and that humans as linguistic animals have a form, life, or *esse* that transcends the body and death. Since human beings are essentially psychophysical wholes, eschatological hope is not the continuation of a disembodied soul; instead, resurrection is the fullest coherence of Braine’s anthropology.

In her paper titled, “Edith Stein’s Body-Soul Holism,” Marian Maskulak first noted some distinctions that undergird Stein’s tripartite view of the human being. These included Stein’s differentiation between the living body (*Leib*) and the physical body (*Körper*), as well as the delineation of *Geist* as *intellectus*, *mens*, and *spiritus*. While the tripartite view reflects the trinity of the Trinity and distinguishes the human being from animals and finite spirits, Stein is speaking of the one spiritual soul. Stressing the total permeation of body and soul and the unity of the human being as one substance, Stein rejects any notion of substance dualism.

Given Stein’s stance on the importance of being knowledgeable about current scientific theory, Maskulak highlighted common ground and differences between Stein’s understanding of the human being with that of Nobel laureates John Eccles and Roger Sperry. Despite a few points of agreement with Eccles’s work, Stein would reject his interactionist dualist account since she eschews dualism. Maskulak found more common ground between Stein’s body-soul holism and Sperry’s monistic model. A major divergence, though, is that Stein upholds matter and spirit as distinct and mutually irreducible genera of being, and does not relinquish the role of God and the element of mystery. Maskulak maintains that Stein’s body-soul holism remains intelligible to contemporary science and helps to reclaim the concept of the “soul” and its long tradition in theology and spirituality. She sees the biggest challenge to the reception of Stein’s holistic model to be averting any immediate association of dualism with the mention of the soul.

In his response to both papers, Michael Dodds, O.P., compared discussions of mind/brain or soul/body issues to tightrope walking—with the ever-present danger of falling off into materialism on one side or dualism on the other. He noted that both talks found sure footing on the hylomorphic theory, especially as they intertwined it with contemporary philosophy and science.

Beginning with Maskulak's paper, Dodds highlighted Stein's distinction between the "living or ensouled body" (*Leib*) and a mere material body (*Körper*), noting that confusion is often introduced into body/soul discussions when we say the human being is composed of "body and soul" or that at death the "soul is separated from the body"—as if the dead body were still a human body (*ein Leib*) and not just a thing (*ein Körper*).

Regarding Ehrman's paper, Dodds reviewed the benefits and costs of David Braine's use of language as a foundation for the body-soul discussion. He noted the benefit that language allows us to distinguish humans from other animals without falling into dualism. One cost, however, is the possibility that language (since it always involves physical organs) is an insufficiently immaterial activity for grounding an argument for the immateriality of the soul.

Finally, Dodds asked whether the mind/brain question itself might exceed the limits of empirical science and whether an alternative scientific method were needed. He suggested that the "delicate empiricism (*zarte Empirie*)" of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe might be useful here.

In subsequent discussion, one auditor questioned whether or not we can talk of language regarding the "soul" apart from intersubjectivity? Another asked if there is not a preverbal or preconceptual knowledge of the "soul," adding that we get stuck in discussions of the working of the machine (mind) rather than the *telos*, purpose, or end of the workings. Special references were made to the work of Gerald Edelman's and J. R. Searle's books on the subject of mind.

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