

Exploring the Concept of the Human Soul from a Religious,
Psychological, and Neuro-Scientific Perspective

Jenna M. Cleversley

Medaille College

Author Note

Jenna M. Cleversley, Department of Psychology, Medaille College.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jenna M. Cleversley,
Department of Psychology, Medaille College, 18 Agassiz Circle, Buffalo NY 14214.
Email: jc3452@medaille.edu

Abstract

This paper focuses on one of the dissimilarities between science and religion. The main objective of this paper is to explore the different perspectives on the human soul from Christian, Buddhist, Psychological, and neuro-scientific perspectives. By the end of this paper one will have a greater understanding on the concept of the human soul and potentially develop his or her own perspective in greater detail.

Keywords: religion, spirituality, psychology, neuroscience, human soul

Introduction

The human soul is a controversial topic that is defined by several different perspectives. Since the soul is an immeasurable material, it is impossible to prove whether or not the soul actually exists. However, many people define their own viewpoints on the soul and argue they have indeed figured out the answer. This topic provides an abstract viewpoint on the concept of life, who we are as individuals, and what our purpose is on this earth. The human soul is a concept that has been accepted for a long period of time; however, the perspective on the human soul has evolved. Generally speaking, the human soul is the unphysical part of the human. The disciplines discussed in the paper (religion, psychology, & neuroscience) use different terms to describe the human soul but they are all referring to the same general concept. “Soul” is a term that is most commonly used within the Christian context while academic disciplines and other religions may use the term interchangeably with other words. Buddhists did not even acknowledge the existence of the soul, although their text’s translations used the term soul. They may have used a term such as “human essence” or “transcendental” instead of soul. Psychology uses words such as “unconscious”, or “mind” to describe the soul while neuroscience uses the term soul, but doesn’t fully believe in the existence of the soul.

Generally speaking, the human soul is the unphysical entity of the human being apart from the physical matter. Before modern science, humans defined the concept of the soul from a religious point of view. They portrayed the soul to be a mystical and divine existence that existed within the body. As science advanced, the concept has evolved into a physical/materialistic viewpoint. For a long time it was not socially acceptable or technologically possible to research the human soul. Scientifically studying

the soul would go against traditional religious views and would be looked down upon by society. In modern day, after the 20th century, it is more technologically possible for humans to scientifically investigate the soul, which is also making it more socially acceptable. With these changes in the modern world, traditional religious beliefs are beginning to fade.

The objective here is not to find the ultimate truth about the soul, but rather look at the soul from various differing viewpoints. The objective is to explore the human soul from several perspective to grasp a better understand of the overall concept. Exploring the human soul will help people, including myself, develop the understanding of life beyond the physical and explore how all life forms are connected on a level beyond the physical and seen world. The purpose is not to find answers; the purpose is to deepen the perspectives and knowledge on the topic in order to help others develop their own personal understanding of the human soul. Whether an individual has a religious, spiritual, psychological, neuro-scientific, or any other related perspective on the human soul, it is important for an individual to identify what their viewpoints are. Forming these beliefs allows an individual to understand himself on a deeper level it gives a deeper understanding to life

There are three disciplines from which the soul will be explored: religious, psychological, and neuro-scientific perspectives. Each of these disciplines follows a chronological sequence throughout history, with each discipline representing a different time period throughout the evolution of the soul. The religious viewpoint influenced the psychological viewpoint, which then influenced the neuro-scientific viewpoint. Although religion and science are generally understood as contrasting viewpoints, there are ways in

which they can be integrated with one another. It seems there has always been a clear separation between faith and science, but the more science explores religion, the more humans realize religion cannot be explored. There are some things that science alone simply cannot explain. After exploring the evolution of the concept of the human soul, it becomes apparent where the two disciplines are headed in the future. Humans are becoming more curious about the unknown and are finding that religious theories may be more logical than originally predicted. Researching the evolution of the soul will help bridge the gap between science and faith. As much as psychology and neuroscience attempt to disprove the concept of the soul, the ability to obtain physical evidence may not be possible. Traditional Christian and Buddhist beliefs are metaphysical in nature, which makes it impossible to scientifically investigate.

What is the soul?

According to a dictionary definition, the general understanding of the soul may be defined as, “the principle of life, feeling, thought, and action in humans, regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body, and commonly held to be separable in existence from the body; the spiritual part of humans as distinct from the physical part” (Dictionary.com). However, such a question cannot be answered by one universal definition because the nature of the human soul is still undetermined and there are many theories attempting to explain what exactly the human soul is. An early definition comes from a religious definition, which can also vary due to the different branches of religion. For example, traditional Buddhism does not acknowledge the presence of a soul, or a “self”; it mainly focuses on the concepts of selflessness. According to religious studies scholar Stephen Prothero (2010), “Buddhists say if you think carefully enough, you will

see you are not” (p. 179). Although the nature in which Buddhists view the self may change over time, and even create different branches of Buddhism because of it, the original Buddhist teachings do not reveal a belief in the soul, or the self. The combination of human sensations, perceptions, thoughts, and consciousness, also known as the five *skandhas*, make up the illusion to the self. The belief that human, “*I*”, is a “permanent, unchanging, independent essence”, formulates a potential for untold sufferings and also the construction of an ego. If the human believes in the concept of the self, it will devote attention on oneself and thus create wants and desires. Thus, the original Buddha did not acknowledge the existence of the soul (Prothero 2010).

Christianity takes a completely different perspective on the human soul (many Christians use the words soul, spirit, and mind interchangeably but usually have the same meaning). Christians make a clear distinction between the concept of physical body and the concept of the nonphysical soul, also known as dualism. After the body dies, the human soul will exist long after the body has died. Life does not end after the physical world. Based on how life was lived, either pure or sinful, Jesus will judge life upon the arrival of death (Davies-Stofka n.d.).

Psychologists define the soul from a slightly different perspective than a traditional religious viewpoint. Early psychology in the 19th century was known as the science of the soul and usually supported traditional religious views. As the field advanced, the term ‘soul’ soon turned into the term ‘mind’. John Bovee Dods was one of the first scientists to explore the human soul as something more than a religious experience. Dods’ speech on electrical psychology in 1850 at the Hall of Representatives in Washington, D.C provided a new insight on psychology as a science. His theory

suggested that electrical psychology could be used to measure the existence of the soul. He believed that the connection between the soul and the body was electromagnetic. After studying mesmerism and animal magnetism, he concluded that spirituality in the brain excited nerve impulses, which became a nerve force; this then led to muscle contractions and human action (Reed 1997). His theory is not based off of scientific evidence; it is based off of observation. He would view these occurrences in its natural environment and generate a theory based off of these observations. Modern day psychologists (after the 20th century) describe the soul as a self-manifestation due to the mind's abstract components such as consciousness, thought processes, emotions, attachment, dreams, and visions, as defined by Wolfgang Giegerich. Giegerich is a Jungian analyst and psychologist born in 1942. His focus was Jungian psychology and psychoanalytical therapies, and also his definition of the soul in relation to the psyche. He said that the soul is not a separate entity that inhabits organisms but rather the *concept* of one's total self-developing maintaining character (Anderson 2014). Many modern day mainstream psychologists argue that the soul is just a fabrication of the conscious mind, unconscious mind. These claims are investigated and supported by neuro-scientists who state that certain areas of the brain contribute to the concept of the soul.

The neuro-scientific perspective provides perceptible evidence that supports some psychological perspectives of the soul. This theory states that the human soul is just an illusion of the brain due to neural firings. Neuro-scientists argue that the belief in spirituality, the soul, and God are hard-wired into our cognitive processes as a part of human instinct. These notions may be attributed to the advancement of technology and

also the evolution of science. Neuroscientists agree with psychologists in that the soul is just a limited understanding of the human mind. Psychologists Jesse Lee Preston, Ryan S. Ritter, Justin Hepler, agree that, “the extent that belief in the soul is used as a metaphysical explanation for the mind, this belief may be threatened by physical explanations for the mind” (Preston, Ritter, & Hepler 2012). The belief in the soul has transformed from a mystical, nonmaterial being of life to a physical, scientifically explained concept.

Religious Perspective

History of the Concept

The concept of the soul can be traced back as early as 9 or 8 BCE during the time of Homer and his writings of Iliad and the Odyssey (Kirk n.d.). The concept of the soul originated in Greece and then Epicureans, Platonists, Aristotle and Plato, and Hellenistic theories further developed the concept. The understanding originated with a broad conception and slowly developed into an attribution to thought, perception, and desire, and is eventually understood as a vital material for organism’s performance. Homer was not necessarily a philosopher or a religious leader, but rather a Greek speaker and writer. When he mentioned the soul within his two poetic writings, he was suggesting death. Essentially, he used the soul to help describe the occurrence of death. The only living beings that possessed a soul were humans and they did not realize they had a soul until the moment of death. Homers writings suggest that humans are the only species capable of having a soul and also losing a soul. Although the very basis of the soul originated in 8 BCE, the idea didn’t spread until the fifth or sixth century in Greece. During this later time, it was believed that every *animal* being possessed a soul. Having a soul influenced

the way people thought and acted, and conducted their lives as they were always trying to fulfill their souls desires. “People are said, for example, to satisfy their souls with rich food, and the souls of gods and men are claimed to be subject to sexual desire. In contexts of intense emotion or crisis, feelings like love and hate, joy and grief, anger and shame are associated with the soul” (Lorenz 2003) Most importantly, the soul played an important role in battle. The strength of the individual’s soul was measured through being (or not being) courageous and/or bold during battle. Courageous men had a strong soul while frightened men had a weak soul. The connection between the soul and personality characteristics (courage, temperance, and justice) is attributed to the evolution of the soul in the fifth century. Towards the end of the fifth century, Greek speakers made a deeper connection between the soul and significant moral character; they connected it to practical thought and cognition. If the soul is responsible for courageous acts, then it must also be responsible for the circumstances in which courage must be performed. Meaning, the soul is not only responsible for the actions of moral behavior but also for the thinking and planning of moral behavior. Lastly, the Greeks believed the soul is responsible for emotions that come with moral behavior. Emotion and cognition work in a parallel: when there is cognitive processing, emotion follows action and the soul is responsible for such actions and feelings (Lorenz 2003). The spread of these ideas in the fifth century did not originate from philosophers or religion leaders. The Greeks writers were responsible for the establishment and spread of the concept of the soul.

Philosophers of the sixth century such as Empedocles and also Pythagoras started expressing new ideas through philosophical writings. These thinkers suggest that not only do animals have a soul, but plants have a soul as well. Since plants were also living, the

Greek philosophers categorized plants as being animals. The soul distinguishes the animate from the inanimate aspects of life; plants are living things as well so they must also be an animal and have a soul. Empedocles believed that his soul was once a bush in a previous incarnation, as well as a bird and a fish, before he was human. In the mid-sixth century, Pythagorean speculation especially contributed to the expansion of the understanding of the soul. They were especially concerned with how the soul and personality are interconnected. According to Lorenz, "...there was, after all, the familiar Homeric use of 'soul' as that which endures in the underworld after a person's death. To make the continued existence of this soul significant as the continued existence of the person in question, at least some of the states, activities, operations and the like that seemed crucial to the identity of the person had to be attributed to the soul who goes further than that, writing of the need for the soul" (Lorenz 2003). The understanding of an afterlife and how the soul passes onto an afterlife was unclear and undermined around the fifth century. The development of this concept of the soul contributes greatly to later interpretations of the soul by Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek philosophers. Aristotle had notably "comes very close to providing a comprehensive, fully developed account of the soul in all its aspects and functions, an account that articulates the ways in which all of the vital functions of all animate organisms are related to the soul" (Lorenz 2003). Aristotle proposed that the soul lived within the living organisms body as an in-formed matter. He simplified the concept so that most people were easily able to understand the notion. Contrary to psychological beliefs, he also argues that there is not an organ in the body that constitutes thoughts, that is one of the functions of the soul. Therefore, reasoning and cognitive functioning (which seem to be unphysical occurrences of the

body) are attributed to the possession of a soul (an unphysical matter). By the end of the fifth century, 'soul' has become part of ordinary language and society understood what the soul is and how it related to them as a person. Each philosopher had his own understanding of the soul: a hypothesis of the substance that makes up its entity, the soul's purpose is, and what happened to the soul after death. Their theories were based off of these early Greek writings (Lorenz 2003).

Christian Perspective

The origin of Christian beliefs is not certain and is highly debated today. Some theories argue that the basis of Christian theology comes from Pagan philosophies while others argue Christian beliefs were based off of the exact word of God, recorded by Moses (Rall 1953). Although it is difficult to track the exact origin of the Christian religion, one can infer that Greek writings had an influence on Christian viewpoints of the soul. "Christian concepts of a body-soul dichotomy originated with the ancient Greeks and were introduced into Christian theology at an early date by St. Gregory of Nyssa and by St. Augustine" (Soul | Religion and Philosophy n.d.). One of the most influential Christian theologians, St. Augustine, described the soul as a "rider" of the body, making a clear distinction between the animate and inanimate. Although he believed the body and soul were separate, he believed that the soul died with the body, which is different than most Christian beliefs today. Early Christians agree that humans are more than a physical body, that there is more than the physical entity of a person but Christians have never been able to agree on the ontology of the human whether they are trichotomous, dichotomous, or monist. The trichotomous person believes in the body, soul and spirit (each as a distinguished entity) while a dichotomous person believes in a

body and a soul/spirit (terms may be used interchangeably). Many Christians believe that the soul is given to an individual upon conception and has an afterlife upon death. The soul is the everlasting form of life that will live after the body has died. According to the New King James translation of the Bible, “he who keeps the commandment keeps his soul. But he who is careless of his ways will die” (Holy Bible 1990). This quote suggests that those who live their life according to Christian teaching will achieve eternal life in Heaven. If one lives his or her life according to the Ten Commandments, the soul may live forever. If an individual violates the Ten Commandments without reconciliation before death, the soul will be given to Satan. Each branch of Christianity has a different viewpoint on the soul, however, it is most important to understand that the “persons survive outside their bodies” (Burns 2003). Over time there has been different variations on how the soul came into existence and when it died, but traditional Greek views and traditional Christian views agree that the soul is immortal and lives after the physical body dies.

Buddhist Perspective

Buddhists have a different viewpoint than early Greek and Christian beliefs on the soul: they reject the idea of a soul completely. While Christians focus on the idea of fulfilling the soul's desires, and preserving the soul after death, Buddhists do not acknowledge the existence of a soul. They believe the existence of a soul is false because admitting there is a soul is also admitting there is a self, an *atman*, which also doesn't exist. Stephen Prothero describes this concept as so, “The false belief that ‘I’ am some permanent, unchanging, independent essence unleashes all sorts of untold suffering. It gives rise to the ego, and then it gives the ego the reins so we are dragged through each day by thoughts of ‘I’ and ‘mine’” (2010).

A dialogue between the Buddhist sage Nagasena and a king of Meander helps to describe this concept. It is difficult to deny the existence of a physical object such as a king's chariot. It is visible, tangible, and easy to acknowledge as being real. However, Nagasena points out how the chariot is just an object that is made up of multiple parts. It comprises of wheels, a frame, and so on. So he concludes that it is not a chariot but rather a coming together of other various objects. Thus, 'I' is just a union of other various objects such as hair, feet, hands, thoughts, emotions, etcetera (Prothero 2010, p.184). The disbelief in a human soul should not be confused with the concept of eternal life. Buddhists believe in eternal life but not in the same way Christians do. For Buddhists, eternal life is neither created nor dies (Dockett 2003, p.230). Richard Causton (1995) describes what the concept of eternal life really means to a Buddhist:

Is also not to be confused with the Christian concept of an individual's soul living eternally after death in either Heaven or Hell; rather, the Buddhist concept of the eternity of life places the life of the individual in the context of the universe as a whole, asserting that since the entire universe exists in one form or another throughout eternity, so must all the living things contained within it exist eternally in one form or another. (Causton, 1995, p. 137)

Dialogues between Vacchagotta, a spiritual wanderer, and Gautama, the original Buddha, were recorded in ancient Buddhist scripture called the Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta. Vacchagotta was very curious regarding some of the issues regarding the soul so he inquired about such concept. He was curious about the universe, whether it is eternal or not, and whether or not an enlightened man would be reincarnated, and whether the soul existed or not. Referring back to the metaphor about the chariot, the Buddha described

the soul as follows. The Buddha could not explain his perception of the soul through explanation or logic, but through direct experience with meditation. The soul can't be described; it has to be experienced. After some thought, he concluded that the self can be described through five ever-changing components called skandhas. These components are form (material world of the senses), feelings, perceptions, emotions, and consciousness. The combination of these five components creates the illusion of the self and a fixed identity. However, the Buddha believed having a sense of self would create all our unnecessarily suffering in the world. The Buddha never gave a definite answer about the existence of the soul and left Vaccha wondering. The disbelief in a soul didn't occur from the denial but rather the of lack acknowledgment. A translation published in 1898 of the Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta by Robert Allen Mitchell was found in his attic after he passed away; there was a small excerpt discussing the existence of the soul.

“Finally, in complete exasperation, Vaccha said, ‘Venerable Gautama, have you nothing to say about the existence of the soul? Does the soul exist?’

At these words Gautama was silent.

‘How is it, Venerable Gautama? Is there no such thing as the soul?’

Gautama was again silent” (Richmond 2011)

Responding in silence confused and bewildered Vaccha and left him questioning the Buddha's credibility. If his religious leader won't comment on the nature of the soul then how does he know to trust him? This is just one of the several dialogues that occurred and was recorded in the Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta between Gautama Buddha and his students. Buddhist leaders that succeeded the Gautama Buddha that gave similar answers to the same complex questions by simply stating “I won't say” or “to say that

does not fit the case”. Although the students grew frustrated, the Buddha explained how these concepts are ungraspable by intelligence and are beyond basic logic. Trying to understand these concepts is not useful because the human will never be able to reach such knowledge. It is not that the Buddha didn’t want to share his knowledge; he just didn’t know the correct answers. “These answers are not actually designed to obfuscate, confuse or conceal. They are just honest responses pointing to a deep truth that -- like love -- lies deep in the inexpressible core of the human heart” (Richmond 2011).

Religious Discussion

Christianity and Buddhism have two opposing perspectives on the human soul. These religions do not appear to be influenced by one another and seem to be isolated in their own beliefs. While Christianity believes each individual possesses a soul that is separate from the physical body, traditional Buddhism does not even acknowledge the existence of a soul. Buddhism does not even acknowledge the existence of a God. Buddhists base their practices on the experiences and teachings of the Buddha who is viewed as a human being, not an immortal. Although it was significant to follow the Buddha’s teachings to reach nirvana, Buddhism mainly stresses the importance of individual experience. The Four Noble Truths gave guidance to a practicing Buddhist but nirvana was achieved through individual experience, which is something that cannot be taught to another man. Christianity, on the other hand, is highly based off of prophets’ teachings. Ancient Christian texts spoke about the existence and nature of the soul, which was later accepted as a part of the Christian belief system. Christian prophets spoke about the soul as a being separate from the body. Each human is made up of a physical body and an immaterial soul. The understanding of the concept of the Christian soul is based

off interpretations of these ancient texts. Although these two religions had dissimilar views on the nature of the soul, each religion expressed an awareness of the soul. The foundations for their beliefs were hypothetical and were similar in the way they were instituted.

Religion is man's curiosity towards life; it provides explanations and reason for the meaning of life and also gives an explanation for the afterlife. Some people believe it is human nature to search for a purpose of life beyond the physical realm and religion gives comfort to those looking for meaning and explanation. Religion will always spark human curiosity because there is no way to prove religion to be either true or false. Humans simply cannot investigate an intangible matter. Understanding matters beyond the physical world may be beyond a human's comprehension. This concept is known as agnosticism. The disciplines of religion, psychology, and neuroscience, to some extent, attempt to answer deeper questions about human existence. A firm argument is presented with an abundance of "evidence" to support the disciplines' argument on their perspective on human existence. However, such a concept seems too deep for human comprehension. Humans can only make an inference on the meaning of life from a bias human perspective, religion being one perspective. Although these concepts seem to be unfathomable, humans will continue to investigate religion and its validity regardless of the outcome due to one's instinctive curiosity.

The belief in the human soul may be a way religion looks at the metaphysical aspects of life. Based on the Christian and Buddhist perspectives, religion uses a hypothetical definition of the soul. Religion has little scientific evidence to support their principles of belief. The only evidence religion has are the ancient texts written by

religious persons, based on individual claims and observations. Buddhists use the teachings of the original Buddha, Siddhartha Guatama, as the basis for their beliefs and Christians use the Holy Bible to guide their beliefs. Psychology and neuroscientists see little factual evidence to support religious claims and question the validity of religious beliefs. Modern psychologists and neuroscientists are interested in investigating the purpose and accuracy of these texts, and science serves as the investigators to these religious gaps.

Psychological Perspective

Throughout the 19th century, psychology was used to reinforce philosophical and traditional religious views. Early 18th and 19th century psychology was based on mere speculation, but was emerging as a new science. Philosophers and theologians saw psychology as a science to preserve the religious world and support the notion of God in an increasingly materialistic scientific world. In 1815, psychology was known as “moral philosophy” and in 1890 the name changed to “science of the soul”. By the end of the century, psychology evolved from “the science of the soul” to “the science of the mind”. John Bovee Dods (1795–1872) was a psychologist of the 19th century who presented the concept of “*electrical psychology, phrenology and mesmerism*” to attempt to prove the connection between the body and the soul. He argued that the mind and body were instruments of the immortal soul and this idea dominated European scientific and medical thought between 1848 and 1890 (period of time when modern experimental psychology entered the scientific realm). For example, Scottish physician who taught at medical school of the University of Edinburgh Robert Whytt, discovered spinal cord reflexes in the 1740s and attributes these physical functioning’s on the soul. He stated that the spinal

cord could not regulate bodily functions such as breathing, sexual movements, and heartbeats on its own; the soul is distributed throughout spinal cord. However, Wyhth's discoveries were widely opposed and were opposed by "cerebralists" who later argued that the mind (soul) was situated in the brain. By the late 1800s, many psychologists supported the idea that the soul was present in the brain, and was known as the unconscious or the mind. Traditional theologians would question this concept because putting the soul in the brain fails to explain the things that seem to occur in and around the human bodies and brains that people are not aware of. This caused problems for modern day psychological theory. Many of these innovative concepts on the soul were not dependent on religion or philosophy; they were based off on scientific reasoning alone. Wyhth used these concepts to try to prove how science and religion were allies rather than contradictory. Psychology succeeded in becoming a science in the 19th century due to its defense of a mystical concept of human nature and human existence. Thus, the commencement of psychology as a science originally supported traditional religious and philosophical beliefs. Emerging psychologists supported the notion of the soul but used different terms such as unconsciousness and mind to define the role it played in the body. As time progressed throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century, atheist and materialist authorities began to question these concepts and new scientists proposed new ideas on the soul (Reed 1997).

Carl Jung and Wolfgang Giegerich are two psychoanalytical psychologists who acknowledged the soul in relation to psychology. These psychologists were part of the modern day psychology movement in which scholars divided the concept of the soul into three parts: the unconscious, mind and body. They did not deny the existence of the soul;

they simply changed the definition of the soul towards a more scientific perspective. There were a few theories to explain the existence of the soul through unconsciousness, dream analysis, and the psyche, but generally speaking, these psychologists were referring to the same concept as the traditional religious leaders. Wolfgang Giegerich based his studies off of Carl Jung's work, and Carl Jung was inspired by Sigmund Freud's work. Although Sigmund Freud did not necessarily believe in the existence of a soul, his work is important to psychoanalytic studies and therapies.

Sigmund Freud was the first psychologist to bring out the importance of dreams and free association and research these impenetrable manifestations of psychic life. He was the first psychologist to propose the idea of depth psychology (the psychology of the unconscious) and every subdivision of psychotherapy (Hostie 1957). Many divisions of psychotherapy practices are primarily concerned with investigating the deeper and hidden dimension of human experience. Freud described his perspective on psychoanalysis as "a science of the life of the soul" and used the concept of the soul as a symbol for his concept of the psyche. His work often uses the German word "seele", which is the English interpretation of the word "soul". Over his entire collection of works, Freud used the terms *soul*, *psyche*, or their cognates approximately 5,000 times. Freud did not elaborate on his definition of these terms, therefore, Freudian psychology is based off the English interpretations. The English language interprets the word "*seelisch*" in regards to the human soul but in the German language, "*seelisch*" and "*psychisch*" essentially mean the same thing in regards to psychological perspectives. Several psychologists and religious theologians argue believed in the presence of the human soul when he was actually an atheist and was referring the human psyche in scientific terms (Craig 2008).

On May 6, 1926, Freud addressed the Society of Bnai, a Jewish congregation regarding some of his work in relation to Jewish beliefs. He states that despite his Jewish association, his scientific discoveries lead him to become an atheist. He was attracted to the Jewish population not because of his beliefs, but because of the “obscure emotional forces, the clear conscious of inner identity, and the safe intimacy of a common mental construction.” The Jewish community was accepting of Freud’s nature of beliefs and he was free from prejudice, regardless of his religious standpoint (Freud 1926). Many religious scholars and psychologists interpret his religious association as being a mystical association, however, he did not believe in a divine or the human soul as being a supernatural occurrence. Freud argued that the human psyche comprises of complex components that make up human existence in relation to the unconscious mind. Many people view Freud’s perspective on the soul to be purely mental, intellectual, and cognitive (Craig 2008).

Carl Jung, doctor of psychology, is a product of Sigmund Freud. Meaning, he was highly influenced by his work but his beliefs were not parallel to Freud’s. Carl Jung once worked with Freud in discussing psychoanalysis (the study of the unconscious). Although he conversed with Freud regarding psychoanalysis, he made it clear that he was not a student of Freud and his discoveries of the unconscious were independent of him. Jung was simply influenced and motivated by Freud’s work on psychoanalysis such as *Interpretation of Dreams*. The work of Carl Jung, was not defined in religious expressions, but he used religious practices to develop his understanding of the soul and the psyche. Between 1921 and 1926, Carl Jung explored religions and philosophies of China, Tibet and India and developed a unique insight on religious perspectives of the

unconscious. Jung argued that Freud did not take religion into consideration while discussing psychoanalysis and he ultimately underestimated its level of relevance. He believed there was more to the unconscious than Freud originally thought (Hostie 1957).

Therefore, Jung broke off from Freud in 1915 when he created his own branch of psychology termed “analytical psychology”. Analytical thought is the basic observations and definitions of the human soul, or in other terms, the human psyche. According to Jung, classic psychiatry and experimental psychology relied too heavily on physiological reasoning; he believed that some mental troubles were derived from the psyche. Most of Jung’s thought and viewpoints were based off of observations, which makes his theories difficult to prove or disprove. Jung said, “The psychologist’s observations are all personal observations, and his judgments all come from his own experience. In this field, every theory is ultimately a subjective personal statement” (Hostie 1957). Thus, Jung believed analytical psychology could never be experimental because one cannot derive facts from his observable theories.

There are three elements that Jung uses to describe the unconscious: the imago, the symbol, and the archetypes. The imago is the expression of the unconscious, which is activated by an object; the activated totality is the result of the activity of the unconscious as well as the conscious attitude. An example used by Raymond Hostie is as follows: parents have an objective existence. That is, the parent leaves an impression on his or her child’s imago simply through his existence. The parent is seen and known by the child, and the child knows nothing outside of its own immediate experience. The child is then unaware of the influence the parents has on his imago. Although the idea of the imago describes the ignorant influence on consciousness, any observer that stays attentive to the

objects around him will begin to realize the impact these matters have on the imago (Hostie 1957).

More importantly, Jung described the role of the symbol. He described the symbol as “indistinct by associations of a thought, causing more vagueness than perspicuity” and a “very inferior form of thought” (Hostie 1957). The symbol is a complex reality that cannot be identified with precision, clarity or richness of meaning. It is difficult to identify the symbol because it’s comprised of unconscious elements that have never come to consciousness at any time throughout one’s lifespan. It is nearly impossible to identify an element that has never been apart of the conscious mind. Further, the symbol is the unification of the psychic condition; it understands both the conscious and the unconscious, past and future, unifying them into an actual present. It summates the rational and the irrational in man and may explain spontaneity in man at any moment. The symbol is the interaction of the conscious and the unconscious and helps man understand his own thought and action. Both the imago and symbol compliment the conscious and unconscious and make up the psychic totality of man. Jung then delves into the concept of the archetypes.

Raymond Hostie (1957) describes the archetype as a *hypothetical* concept of the unconscious. The archetype is defined as the deepest part of the unconscious mind because it is inaccessible upon demand. By nature archetypes are images of the unconscious that are of universal reference across cultures. He argues that these images occur independently of the individuals concern and they are apart of the unconscious without the person being aware of them. The images that are represented by the unconscious usually have a universal meaning and interpretation regardless of the

individual and their background. One example of the archetype occurs in dream motifs. An individual that has a reoccurring dream with a reoccurring image may be experiencing an archetype of the unconscious. Although there might not have been a previous exposure to these images, they still existed in the unconscious and appeared in dreams to represent a deeper meaning. He supports his discoveries through the images represented in ancient mythology. Some of the images he describes as archetypes are common amongst ancient mythological stories, although the individual experiencing an archetype may not have been previously exposed to the particular myth. Jung uses this observation to conclude that an archetype is a “poetic creation” or an “oniric element” that are universal across every human beings unconscious, whether or not they are aware it’s existence. Jung strongly believed that the unconscious had an impact on an individual. He gives the name “collective unconscious” to describe his notion of the psyche; the collection of all the *is* unconscious “that is to say all the inherited possibilities of representation which are not individual but common to the whole of mankind” (Hostie 1957).

Carl Jung frequently speaks favorably of Catholicism and their fundamental beliefs, potentially because he was raised a Protestant. Many of his discoveries may have been based upon his religious background and attempted to underlie his personal beliefs. Although he did define his scientific discoveries through religious expressions, his fundamental beliefs may have been approached from a Catholic viewpoint. Jung not only had Catholic background, but he also studied customs and ideas of primitive peoples in Central Africa and North America, religious philosophies of China, Tibet, and India, and ancient alchemy. While most of his studies were focused on analytical psychology, he

may have used these religious ideas to formulate his psychological viewpoints. Thus, his science of analytical psychology may have been a result of his observations of the human soul (defined in terms of psychology) (Hostie 1957).

Wolfgang Giegerich, born in 1942, succeeded Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung and he also associated the soul with psychology. He is one of the most modern psychoanalyst psychologists to associate the soul with psychology. His writings propose new ideas and theories on how the soul can be implicated to psychological practices and clinical settings. According to Giegerich, the soul is embedded in history and is inseparable from culture's consciousness. Meaning, both religious institutions and scientists will always be inquiring about the existence of the soul. Throughout history, during religious times, basic beliefs were embedded into culture and society and were rarely questioned. Humans solely depended on nature for a basic understanding of life. This shift, which emerged in the West in the early 1800's, was characterized as a shift "from the cosmos and religious forms to subjectivity and interiority". He believes that the shift in character of the soul was due to the emerging disciplines of psychology and neurosis. People started looking for explanations and reasoning used logical approached to theories. Giegerich also uses subjectivity and interiority when he examines the notion of the soul. He takes a psychoanalytical approach to the concept and integrates psychology into its definition (Anderson 2014).

Giegerich bases lot of his theories and practices off of Jungian psychology; he studied psychotherapy and how the soul related to this psychological practice. Giegerich psychology focuses on the relationship between history and consciousness, his own ideas on modern consciousness, and the implications this has for therapeutic practices, based

on his own perspectives: an emancipation from the power of unconscious images, or soul. The soul is the general make-up of consciousness. He does not believe there is a way to clearly define the soul because it is the mind's formulation in response to our deepest essence; contrary to traditional religious beliefs. The soul is so complex that it can't properly be perceived by the human mind through definition. "For me there is no such thing as a soul. The soul does not exist. It is the depth of the logical life at work in what happens, no more" (Anderson 2014). Giegerich did not see the soul as a separate entity, but rather a set of dynamics and relations in soul phenomena. He believes that life is not an entity that is separate from the body but rather the concept of the organism's total self-developing, self-maintaining character. This can relate to his views on the mind. He states that we don't have a mind; we are a mind (Anderson 2014).

Psychology Discussion

During the 19th century, the field of psychology emerged as a defender of traditional religious viewpoints. Emerging psychologists thought that religious beliefs could be supported in a scientific way, and thus use scientific methods to preserve these traditional beliefs. As the science of psychology evolved over time, the concept of the soul began to progress into an understanding of the unconscious mind rather than a hypothetical concept originating from religious beliefs. People began to question traditional viewpoints on the soul and developed his or her own theories based on observation.

The idea of psychotherapy is the branch of psychology that mainly focuses on the concepts of the unconscious in relation to the human mind. Conclusions drawn from psychotherapists may not be absolute in relation to psychological viewpoints; other

psychologists from different branches of psychology may have different interpretations on the concept of the soul. The literature only mentioned the soul from the perspective of psychoanalytic psychology, and did not discuss any other branch of psychology. This may mean that psychology does not even acknowledge the existence of the soul, or the soul is just an outdated term for psychology. It is rare to hear the soul mentioned within the field of psychology in modern day. The concept of the soul is not discussed or mentioned as a basis of psychological beliefs unless one is discussing psychotherapy. An exception would be within a therapeutic setting when the patient requests that the therapist uses religious practices to assist the therapy process.

Some modern day psychologists may use religious ideas and practices as a means of therapy per request of the patient. Religion may be used as a form of healing within the therapy setting if the patient feels as though religion may be a part of their healing process. An example of this may be using prayer to cleanse and heal the soul in a time of despair. It seems as though many people would prefer to use religion within the therapy setting due to religious backgrounds, preference and beliefs because religion can be a comfort zone to many individuals. Some Christians, for example, use the Sacrament of Reconciliation to resolve any acts of sin with God. This cleanses the soul of any sins and allows the individual to free themselves from feelings of guilt. Thus, a patient may want to use a similar tactic within a therapeutic setting to aid the therapy process.

Another example would be the emergence of meditation and Buddhist practices within the therapeutic setting. Especially in Western culture, there has been an increase in “mindful” practices in the therapeutic setting. There people often affiliate themselves with being “spiritual”, however, these practices are based off of traditional Buddhist

meditation practices. Meditation practices are not a traditional method of therapy but some people may feel as though this can help the therapy process.

Unfortunately this is where the gap exists between religion and psychology. Modern day psychologists are not taught or trained in religion beliefs and practices, and might not even have the same religious background as their patient. As cited by psychologists Elizabeth M. Rose, John S. Westefeld, and Timothy N. Ansley, the Princeton Religion Research Center, about 90% of Americans report some sort of religious affiliation and around 92% of American a belief in God. Richards and Bergan (1997) claim that psychologists and psychiatrists traditionally have not been trained to address religious and spiritual issues within the therapy. The extent to which the patient wants to discuss religious issues within a therapy setting has yet to be researched in detail but Rose, Westefeld, and Ansley attempted to explore these issues. They surveyed patients from across seven different counseling sites, which included 64 women and 10 men. Each participant was asked to complete a series of questionnaires in attempt to collect some data on how patients felt towards religion and spirituality within a therapy setting. More than half of the participants (55%) reported that they would want to discuss religious or spiritual issues during therapy and 27% reported that religion and spirituality was important to their personal healing and growth. One participant reported on the open-ended question, "What you believe spiritually or religiously can help with solving problems. If the counselors don't know what you believe, how can they help?" (Rose, Westefeld, & Ansley 2008). Many of these clients reported discussing these issues with their counselor but they reported they have not discussed it within the therapeutic setting because they feel as though the psychologists is not fit for these discussions, which may

be true. Participants felt uncomfortable discussing these issues with an individual that was not educated within the religious discipline and preferred not to bring it up. One participant reported, “It would be hard to discuss if the person was [sic] not understanding of your religion”, which another stated, “I would be willing to discuss such issues if that would be helpful in solving my problems, but a counselor who had uncritical faith in God, the soul, or personal immortality would be rather offensive to me” (Rose, Westefeld, & Ansley 2008).

Unfortunately, most psychologists don’t have any religious or spiritual training to assist patients with religious preferences. It is not typical of a psychologist to have any religious affiliation because it does not seem to be a characteristic of this population to have such beliefs. After exploring the human soul from a psychological perspective, the only psychologists that discussed the human soul were psychoanalytic psychologists; they described the human soul as being apart of the unconscious human mind instead of hypothetically describing it as an immaterial entity.

The Neuro-Scientific Perspective

As time and culture advances, humans are now investigating issues that are beyond their previous the investigational scope. In the past, it wasn’t necessarily socially acceptable to question and/or scientifically investigate traditional religious beliefs but as time moves forward, people are questioning tradition religious beliefs with a more open spectrum. Within the past decade, scientists are beginning to explore different areas of the brain associated with the religious experience (Seybold 2005). After investigating the human brain, neuroscientists may suggest that functioning of neurons in the brain is the

human's entire existence. In other words, there is no "I"; humans are a physical body containing a physical brain that performs physical functions.

According to American neuroscientists Eugene G. d'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg, the method of exploring the brain in relation to religious experience and knowing God is called neurotheology. Neurologists are attempting to detect the existence of God in the brain through scientific reasoning; looking at the brain and discovering where God is "located" and how the brain can explain religious phenomena. Neuroscientists observe the physiology of the brain during a religious experience and use that physical data to make inferences on life's non-physical world (Seybold 2006). Some people fear that neuroscientists are trying to prove or disprove the actual existence of the God, and some may be trying to do just that.

There have been several propositions and theories to try and explain how the brain relates to religion. Michael Persinger from the 1980's was one of the first scientists to explore the brain's involvement with religious experience. Persinger emphasized the role of the limbic system, especially the hippocampus and the amygdala, in religious and mystical experiences. He predicts that religious experiences are due to short-termed, localized electrical activity in the limbic system, which is also associated with seizures and hallucinations. These electrical activities inside the temporal lobes are the firings of neurons inside the brain, also known as temporal lobe transients. The temporal lobe also demonstrates post-stimulation electrical instability, which leads Persinger to believe that it is responsible for the perception of fantasy. Many neuroscientists accept the idea that the temporal lobes are responsible for seizures and hallucinations but Persinger provided little evidence to prove his theory. He associated religious experiences with these areas of

the brain because of similar experiences connected with each occurrence (such as crying, facial distortions, speaking in tongues, and amnesia). Thus, he argues that humans are able to experience God because of the temporal lobes. If humans would have developed any other way, humans might not have been able to experience religion since God and religion are hypothesized to be biological artifacts of the brain (Seybold 2006).

Neuroscientists Eugene G. d'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg (2001) have perhaps received the most praise in the combined fields of neuroscience and religion. Their research entailed monitoring the areas of the brain that were active during prayer and meditation. He used a technique known as SPEC (single photon emission computed tomography) which tracks long-lasting radioactive tracers to measure activity level on specific areas of the brain during religion experience. During one research study, d'Aquili and Newberg used SPEC while Franciscan nuns and Buddhists either prayed or meditated in their religious environment. Both the Franciscan nuns and Buddhists yielded similar results; brain activity level was decreased in the posterior superior parietal lobe, an area within the parietal lobe. According to Newberg, this area of the brain is associated with orientating ourselves in relation to space and distinguishing the self from the rest of the world. Therefore, Newberg proposes that during prayer, a Franciscan nun will feel closer to God, and a Buddhist will feel a sense of "timelessness or "infinity" during meditation. Simultaneously with the decrease of activity in the parietal lobe, there is also an increase of activity in both the frontal lobe and the limbic system increase in activity. These areas of the brain are responsible for functions such as concentration, attention, and focus during prayer and meditation. Although this data does not entirely explain the role of the brain in religious experience, it displays the effort of neuroscience to search for physical

data that results from religious experience. This was the first attempt to test the hypotheses proposed by neuroscientists about the effect religion had on the brain (Seybold 2005).

Within the past five to ten years, there has been an emergence of physical data that demonstrates how the brain works in response to religious concepts, especially the human soul. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) allows scientists to measure brain activity during certain environmental stimulation(s), such as religious experience and the belief in the human soul (Preston 2013). An fMRI tracks blood oxygenation in the brain, which is then correlates with the activation of nearby neural tissue; demonstrating how specific neural firing patterns are physical evidence for the “human experience” (Russell, Murphy, Meyering, & Arbib 1999). Some physical evidence attempts to supports the claim that the mind and soul are physical entities rather than metaphysical entities.

According to psychologists Jesse Lee Preston, Ryan S. Ritter, Justin Hepler, the “location” of the human soul on brain functioning is still being explored and researched. Neuroscientists do not universally accept one area of the brain to be responsible for the belief in the human soul. However, there have been neural correlates to abstract human experiences such as “moral judgments, emotion, and personal agency” which may lead one to believe that the existence of the human soul is also attributed to a certain brain functioning (Preston 2013) According to neuroscientists Michael A. Arbib, Joseph E. LeDoux, and Marc Jeannerod (1999), humans have a sense of religion and they do have a sense of the soul, but it can be explained in terms of physical properties of the brain. Characteristics of the mind such as self-consciousness, wonder, emotion, emotion, and reason make an individual appear to be more than just a physical, which may encourage

the belief in an immaterial soul. The *neuroscience of the person* and the *concept of God* are still in the process of scientific research and there is not yet any evidence to completely prove or disprove the existence of these concepts. However, these neuroscientists think that they will be discovered eventually after further research and investigation. One day, the physical properties of the brain will be able to explain the abstract perception of an essence that is greater than a human's physical existence (Russell et al. 1999).

Why Religion Still Exists

With the abundance of hard data to demonstrate how brain activity is tied to religion and the human soul, one may think that religious beliefs and the belief in God would fade into nonexistence. However, the 21st century illustrates that this is not the case.

Neuroscientists Eugene G. d'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg argue that religion is still apart of culture today as a system of self-maintenance and an aid for survival and adaptability. It appears as though religion is engrained into basic human instinct and the ability to understand religion is favored in the gene pool (d'Aquili & Andrew B. Newberg 1998)

The phenomena of gods, spirits, demons, or any other power source are arguably apart of every human's reality whether or not they are religious believers. These occurrences are sources of personalized power sources in relation to an individual's reality whether they occur through personalized dreams, daydreams, or other forms of fantasy. The construction of these fantasies in the brain is a human's way of gaining control over its environment. Humans will always experience aspects of reality that they will not be able to explain and religion serves as an explanation to the unexplained. The

ability to think abstractly generates curiosity about one's own morality, and through experience, humans postulate their own definition of reality. Eugene G. d'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg predict that humans experience anxiety when they are not able to "cure the curse of cognition" (the ability to think abstractly) and religion is the attempt to gain mastery over their environment. The human need for control over its environment can be a form of self-maintenance. The feeling of having control over one's environment promotes positive psychological outlooks and the formation of social groups and social interactions, which in turn aids in human survival (d'Aquili, E. G., & Newberg, A. B. 1998).

Bridging the Gap

Christianity, Buddhism, psychology, and neuroscience all present strong opinions on what they believe to be the human soul. Individually reviewing each discipline allows one to see the soul from varying perspectives and how the concept has evolved over time. It seems as though religion used observational approaches and individual claims to formulate their perspectives on the human soul. As time advances, humans looked for evidence to either support or disprove these claims. The emergence of psychology and especially neuroscience has threatened traditional beliefs. While many psychologists and neuroscientists attempted to disprove the existence of God, religion, and a human soul, there are gaps between the evidence. Will science and religion ever meet on mutual grounds, or will they always contradict one another? Neuroscience downgrades the existence of a God and a soul through scientific research and logic. Psychologists and neuroscientists claim their research to be factual and static without fault. It may be possible for religious experience and God to occur in the brain but it shouldn't discredit

the existence of spirituality. It might be the reasoning behind the ability to comprehend such complex concepts. For example, the brain is responsible for the perception of light. This does not mean light does not exist; it is simply the brain perceiving light. This might also hold true for the perception of the soul and religion. Even though the brain can physically exemplify the perception of God, religion, and the soul, it does not discount the experience from being religious or mystical. It simply demonstrates why the brain is *able* to perceive such experiences and concepts.

During the making of a documentary film titled *Donated to Science*, medical students were interviewed while dissecting a human cadaver. The goal of this documentary was to demonstrate what happened after a body was donated to science, and perhaps encourage people to donate their body as well. The interviews yielded some unexpected and interesting results. While the students were dissecting the cadaver, they frequently mentioned the human soul in relation to the human body. This phenomenon interested Helen Martyn, Anthony Barrett, Helen D. Nicholson, anatomists from the Otago School of Medical Sciences. Therefore, they conducted their own study and interviewed 91 second-year graduate students on their perspective on the human soul. These anatomists were interested in finding out if medical students still possessed a belief system after learning the complete mechanics of the human body. Each participant was administered a questionnaire with a series of questions regarding their belief system and their personal viewpoint on the human soul. One question was a free response question that directly asked them to describe their understanding of the soul is (if applicable). Of the students that participated in the survey, a surprising 64.8% of the population declared a belief in the soul. Approximately 12.1% of the students were unsure of the concept of the soul, and

23.1% of the students did not believe in the concept of the soul. Some of the student responses are as follows:

“I do not have a soul, I AM a soul...”

“The soul is like the spiritual side of yourself and is not part of your physical body. I believe that when you die, your soul leaves your body, and I guess that’s what contributed greatly to my ease with dissection of the cadavers. The fact that I knew that those people were in a better place and not inside their bodies helped me a lot emotionally.”

“Dies when they die but can be passed on through their interactions with others while they’re living.”

“Before doing the dissection, I was pretty firmly of the belief that there was no soul. If somebody had asked me then I would have said there was no such thing. After the first dissection, going home I could not help but wonder what happened after you died. It seemed weird that there was a lifetime of memories and movement and all sorts of other things that had happened in this body. And now, nothing. Surely it must have gone somewhere? Since then though I still cannot make up my mind on what could possibly happen. Nobody knows!” (Martyn, Barrett, & Nicholson 2013).

These responses are contrary to what was originally anticipated. The students appeared to be highly influenced by the idea of death, and what happened in the afterlife. Believing in the soul may be a comfort to these students while they encounter death and may give them some security that death is not the end of life, according to Martyn, Barrett, and Nicholson. Experiencing death may cause some uncertainty on the meaning of life and the belief in the afterlife and the human soul may be a way of coping (Martyn et al., 2013). However, facing death could be a validation to their existing religious or spiritual beliefs. Knowing the physical body and its entirety might discourage the belief

in the soul because this might encourage a mechanical perspective on the human body. A student might see the body as a mechanic operation that carries out its vital roles then passes on when it stops working properly. These students exhibited that this is not necessarily correct. Although there may be an explanation for every cognitive and motor function in the human body does not mean there is not a human soul. This is just one example of how the gap may be bridged.

A second example comes from a book titled *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul*. Nonmaterial neuroscientist Mario Beauregard explores the issues of neuroscience and how it relates to the existence of the soul. Many neuroscientists use the physical data found from brain scans in attempt to disprove the existence of God or any mystical experience. Beauregard is unique within his field of neuroscience. Instead of trying to disprove the existence of the human soul, he uses neuroscience to try and support the existence of the soul. He does not believe that thoughts, emotions, and spirituality can be justified through the brains neural firings and other physical phenomena alone. His argument states that the abstract mind does exist, mystical experiences do exist, and religion is not an illusion of the mind. Beauregard used Carmelite nuns at the Université de Montréal in attempt to demonstrate how the physical world is not the only form of reality (Beauregard & Leary 2007).

His study included both functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and quantitative electroencephalography (QEEG) to track brain activity during mystical experiences. Through combination of the brain imaging techniques with personal interviews of the Montreal nuns, Beauregard was able to draw conclusions on brain activity associated with prayer and mystical experiences. The main objective was to

determine which areas of the brain were active during prayer and see whether or not the temporal lobe was active during a mystical experience (which is frequently referred to as the “God module”). Results from the brain imaging demonstrates activity in the temporal lobe along with other areas such as the inferior parietal lobule, the visual cortex, caudate nucleus, the left brain stem, and several other areas of the brain. These findings conclude that there is not a “God spot” in the brain and the belief in God is not a result of one specific area. The brain activity was significantly more active compared to the baseline measurement. These findings demonstrate how religious experiences are a cultivation of perception, cognition, emotion, and self-consciousness. Just because the brain scan allows the individual to observe which area of the brain is activated during religious experience does not discount the existence of these experiences (Beauregard & Leary 2007).

Some religious leaders accept and encourage neuro-scientific research because they feel as though the scientific findings only support their traditional beliefs. The Dalai Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism, encourages science to investigate the issues of consciousness and also encouraged his Buddhist monks to participate in neuro-scientific studies. He has always been interested in science and he is interested in the results of their religious studies. Buddhists have been exploring the concept of consciousness for the past two and a half millennia and it appears as though scientific discoveries are only supporting their traditional religious beliefs on consciousness. His support for scientifically investigating religions is ironic because science has not been able to prove or disprove the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation nor the Christian doctrine of incarnation. It is very difficult to research such an immaterial concept. The only way to

research the effects religion has on the individual would be through brain scans but the gaps that exist within that field of data is immense. It is possible to study the effects meditation has on the brain but it does not prove nor disprove whether or not meditation actually exists as a mystical experience or if it's just an illusion of physical neural firings. Inferences that are drawn from the physical data are bias and vary in interpretation (Beauregard & Leary 2007). Religion does not seem to be threatened by the research conducted by psychologists and neuroscientists. Scientists can repeatedly attempt to disprove religion and still get the same results each time.

Conclusion

After investigating the soul from a Christian, Buddhist, psychological, and neuro-scientific perspective, no absolute conclusions can be drawn from the research. Understanding the concept of the human soul is a personal viewpoint that may be influenced by Christian, Buddhist, psychological, or neuro-scientific perspectives but ultimately, the concept is based off of personal beliefs. These disciplines can attempt to provide evidence to support their claims, whether they are the word of God or physical data displayed through a brain scan, but will still fail to prove one perspective over the other. Therefore, I conclude that there are no academic conclusions on the existence of the human soul.

The objective of this paper was to explore the concept of the human soul from varying perspectives to determine a personal viewpoint on the soul. The first part of the objective has been met, however, the second objective is a lifelong development of experiences and beliefs. There has been an abundance of research in the related fields, but it is still unclear which perspective seems to be the most accurate. In reality, there is no

right or wrong belief about an abstract metaphysical entity. This may be why one calls these questions the mysteries of life. Through life experiences, life interests, and self-education, the formation of a belief system develops over time alongside the development of the individual human being. After completing the research, it seems to be slightly impractical to conduct academic research on the human soul. To argue that one's belief system is superior to another, without any concrete evidence does not serve any other purpose other than satisfying the basic human instinct of curiosity.

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