

Phenomenological language in ancient revealed narrative

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Eshelbrenner¹ suggests that my restriction of "souls" to "higher animals"² is incompatible with the creation narrative's "swarms of living creatures",³ pointing to Cambrian invertebrates. But I used the term in a phenomenological way appropriate for an ancient text.

What would the ancient formulation imply in our modern way of speaking? Not that the writer knew, or that God teaches, modern science! But taking the creation story as narrative rather than myth is based on the premise that God revealed it to an ancient prophet. Surprisingly, a plausible reading is compatible with Earth's history, although God certainly used the prophet's own thought and vocabulary.

In the fifth "day" (or epoch) of the creation narrative we have the first mention of animals, called "living souls", some of them dangerous, a host of swarming ones, all in the water, as well as "winged flyers" (including insects). What is common to these animals is their macroscopic size and their rapid, well-controlled movements. The ancients couldn't know microorganisms, which are therefore not expected to occur in this story. Each "day's" characteristics extend into all subsequent ones. That water and flying animals were created in the fifth "day" only implies that their first representatives appeared in that period.

In the late Precambrian multicellular animals evolved, but only in its last part, the Ediacaran, they reached macroscopic sizes. This became possible by the increased availability of free oxygen needed by each living animal cell. An enhancement of gas exchange was achieved with the evolution of a blood (or hemolymph) circulation, which made three-dimensionally extended body plans feasible, being no longer dependent on diffusion alone.

Nutritional benefits of predation grew, and evasion from predators improved, with fast movements. These required an active blood circulation and nerves linking sensory organs with muscles. Increased sophistication of nervous control systems in a brain allowed "deliberate" choices between alternative behavioral routines (e.g. feeding, flight, fight, courting), directed by a sentient functionality.

As stated,⁴ the biblical "living souls" appear to be animals large enough to need an inner circulation and having a nervous system of sufficient complexity to allow fast movements. This would include many Cambrian and some Ediacaran invertebrates. For lack of a better biological term I called them "higher animals". The only macroscopic pre-Ediacaran species were seaweed-like plants, in accordance with plants arising in the third "day".

In line with this "blood-and-nerves" specification of the first "living souls", the Old Testament correlates blood and "soul".⁵ Significantly, God spoke to these creatures and blessed them.⁶ For ancient Hebrews, organisms not conforming to this characterization wouldn't be "living souls".

That the "living souls" were specially created doesn't deny their biological evolution. But a new dimension was created in them, sentient or psychological functionality, whose physical substrate had evolved. Science has not yet found a convincing explanation of the sentient (as distinct from behavioral) aspect.

Eshelbrenner's remark notwithstanding, I dealt with the spiritual dimension.⁷ Humans alone are created in God's image, which provides a spiritual mode inaccessible to science. Furthermore, those accepting God's salvation are "born again" into a new, spiritual, eternal life. Thus, four "life dimensions" are shared by all such believers, three by all humans, two by "higher animals", while "lower" organisms and plants have the dimension of biological life only.

Eshelbrenner alludes to problems of a separation of body, soul and spirit at death, of its reversal at resurrection, and even of a speculative intermediate state (unknown in the Bible). A plausible solution may be a "God-time", which is not collinear with physical time, but something like a second time dimension, allowing for an immediate shunt over large physical time periods for those "asleep".⁸ God would keep the dead alive as hidden "seeds",⁹ like information in a mental database.

I agree with Eshelbrenner that Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection are absolutely unique. Nevertheless, Christ's assuming common human body-soul-spirit dimensions provides for the cross and the resurrection, and thus for all believers' justification and transformation into eternal life. Although we have a foretaste through the Holy Spirit, we cannot yet conceive what we shall be as multidimensional body-soul-spirit-eternity persons after Christ's image.¹⁰

Peter Rüst
ASA Fellow
CH-3148 Lanzenhäusern
Switzerland
paraske@aneste.ch

¹ Eshelbrenner, D., "Soul-Doctrine", *PSCF* 57 (December 2005), 342-343.

² Rüst, P., "Dimensions of the Human Being and of Divine Action", *PSCF* 57 (September 2005), 191-201.

³ Gen. 1:20.

⁴ Rüst, P., loc.cit., footnotes 21 and 24.

⁵ Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11-14.

⁶ Gen. 1:22.

⁷ Rüst, P., loc.cit., 195-197.

⁸ Luk. 23:43; 1 Thes. 4:13-17.

⁹ 1 Cor. 15:37-42; Mat. 22:31-32; Ps. 139:16.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 15:47-54.