

*THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN SOUL/MIND IN THE LIGHT
OF THE EVOLUTIONIST THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE:
SCIENTIFIC EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASPECTS AND
METAPHYSICAL IMPLICATIONS*

The conference title, “*From the animal soul to the human mind*”, seems to highlight a double value of the debated theme. On one hand, it evokes that passage from the ancient animistic animalistic ideas, which would constitute the source and the gathering basin of the first hypothesis of “*soul/breath*”, to the modern scientific ideas on the nature and origin of the human mind/conscience. On the other hand, the peculiar ontological placement of the concept of man, of individual, sentient being, which has deeply marked the western philosophy and theology, where the human subject is seen with a completely different meaning as “*by itself*” compared to external reality (also in contrast with the other living species).

It is to underline that the treatment of this subject cannot do without references to typically theological aspects as the soul concept has always been in the middle between “*physiologic naturalistic*” theories afferent to the immanent sphere, and philosophical theological speculations, as such idea is at the basis of all the known religious systems as well as an implicit assumption of important fields of western philosophy.

In this work we want to face the problem of the comparison between the classical animistic/dualistic positions and the modern sciences, particularly the biological ones, to develop then, alternative interpretations. So we will deal with the historical and anthropologic aspects where it is possible to find traces of the philosophic evolution of such concepts, as well as with the conflicts among the most common meaning of soul, human mind and the ones which come from the present neuroscience, particularly the evolutionist theories, all this seen inside the frame of the evolutionistic theory of the knowledge.

In the end we will try to show how it is also possible to find new meanings to the problem – though always regarded as “*metaphysical suppositions*” – far less in contrast with the modern scientific ideas.

The origin and the evolution of the “soul” concept are historically connected with two fundamental moments of the man psycho cognitive cultural evolution that are metaphysical hypothesis of a purely naturalistic type on one side and on the other the emersion of a concept of “*soul/person*” debtor to the more recent society/cultures juridical assumptions.

The prominence of these two factors is proved by the cultural anthropologic analysis of the known human societies. Starting from the most elementary and primitive “*physiologic*” concepts of “*spirit/breath*”, well diffused in pre-literate societies (clans, parental groups,) founded on the hunting for food modality, we can arrive to more recent theological meanings which communicate a refined idea of “*individual soul*” where are mediated juridical philosophic meanings of “*citizen/person*” as the ones developed from the Greek polis to arrive to the foundation of the Roman law and to medieval theologians.

It is this last idea of “*soul/person*”, refined inside the western catholic theology under the influx of the Greek philosophers, that we find at the basis of the modern confessions of faith and moreover in a great part of the western philosophy. More or less implicitly in fact the history and the development of philosophy and of modern science, are heavily impregnated of implications coming from the modern concept of “*soul/spirit/person*”.

On a scientific basis it is interesting to underline how an implicit assumption of such metaphysical concept has a strong relevance in the epistemological interpretation of the “*scientific observation*” in various ambits and in particular it refers to those paradoxes as the indeterminateness principles of Heisenberg that develop the “*quantum collapse*” ontological problem, so far interpreted according to an anthropocentric and animistic key.¹

The idea of “*soul/breath*” is present, with a series of different shadows and peculiarities, in all the known human cultures also the oldest ones, with a meaningful formal sort of coincidence.

Modern researchers agree with the idea that the emersion of such concept has followed a long “pre-animistic/pre-religious” phase in which the socio-cultural background had already assumed relevance hence the forthcoming religious/animistic phases will mediate decisive conceptual, ethic and cognitive contributes.

Man used “*to read*” reality, we could say “*all the reality*” he knows according to spiritual/animistic hypothesis. The world is an arena where animistic spirits flutter, wave and pursue “*animating*” very deep hypostasis with human beings, animals and plants, inanimate objects. In this respect, cultural anthropology gives us evidence of a real kaleidoscopic explosion of spiritual/animistic concepts.²