
The Soul

Two Perspectives

From the Catholic Requiem Mass

Offertorium

Domine, Jesu Christe, Rex gloriae,
libera animas omnium fidelium defunctorum
de poenis inferni
et de profundo lacu.

Libera eas de ore leonis
ne absorbeat eas tartarus,
ne cadant in obscurum;
Sed signifer sanctus Michael
repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam,
Quam olim Abrahae promisisti
et semini eius.

Lord Jesus Christ, king of glory,
deliver the souls of all the faithful departed
from the pains of Hell
and the bottomless pit.

Deliver them from the jaws of the lion,
lest hell engulf them,
lest they fall into darkness;
but let the holy ensign Michael
lead them into the holy light,
as you at one time promised to Abraham
and to his seed.

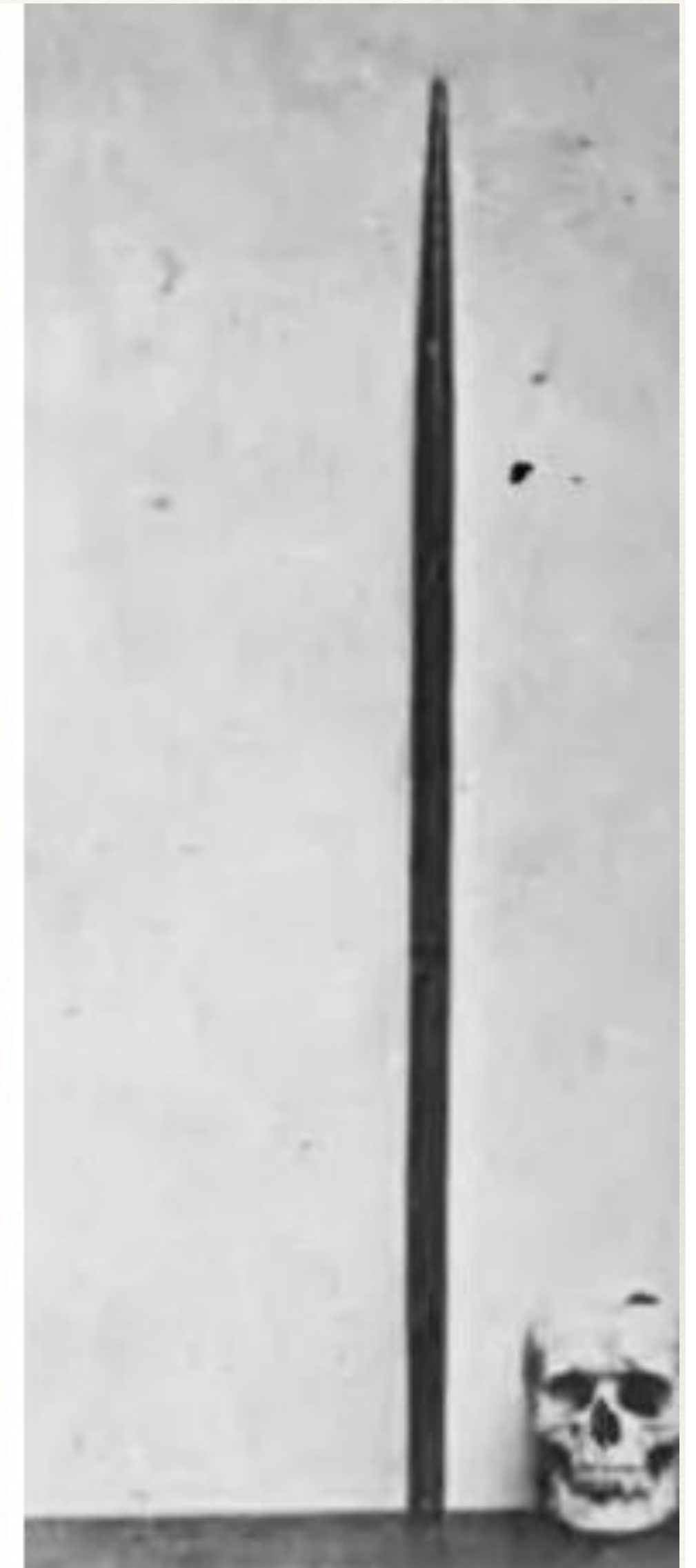
Some Presuppositions

- ❖ First, existential: there are souls
- ❖ Second, personal: souls are the bearers of personal identity
- ❖ Third, moral: souls may be punished or rewarded, as divine justice appoints
- ❖ Fourth (less clearly): souls have no mass or extension; they are incorporeal

Phineas Gage

Gage to this day shows up in psychology and neurophysiology text books.

His was one of the cases that simultaneously undermined various psychological theories and spurred early research into brain localization in the 19th century.



The Case of Phineas Gage

- ❖ Phineas Gage, a railway worker, suffered a horrific accident on 13 September: 1848: an iron rod passed through his skull, entering his cheek and emerging from the top of his skull.
 - ❖ As a result, his personality changed drastically:
 - ❖ Where he had been gentle and responsible, he became aggressive and erratic, threatening co-workers and attempting to molest women.
 - ❖ What happened?
 - ❖ Two hypotheses:
 - ❖ His soul was suddenly skewed at the moment the spike shot through his brain.
 - ❖ His brain, house of cognition and emotion, was severely damaged when penetrated by the spike.
 - ❖ More exactly, his Limbic system (the seat of his emotions), his frontal lobes (the location of reasoning and decision making), and Broca and Wernicke's areas (the areas responsible for language use and understanding), were all severely damaged by the spike.
 - ❖ Nothing happened to his soul.
 - ❖ There is no soul.

Duelling Arguments

❖ There is no soul:

(1) There is reason to believe in the soul only if the soul explains something about human beings which is otherwise inexplicable.

(2) Everything about human beings can (and will) be explained by biology, psychology, and neurophysiology—in short, by the body and its intricate workings.

(3) So, there is no reason to believe in the soul.

❖ There is a soul:

(1) There is reason to believe in the soul only if it explains something about human beings which is otherwise inexplicable.

(2) There are many facets of human beings that are inexplicable, even in principle, by biology, psychology, and neurophysiology, or any other empirical science—and these facets are in fact explained by positing the existence of the soul.

(3) So, there is reason to believe in the soul.

Some Questions?

- ❖ Are there reasons to believe in the existence of the soul?
- ❖ Has the utility of the soul been superseded by the advances in biology, psychology, and neurophysiology?
- ❖ If there is a soul, how is it to be conceived?
- ❖ Do *you* have a soul?
 - ❖ Or, if you like, *are you* a soul?

A Word of Warning

- ❖ Though going along, traversing every road, you would not discover the limits of the soul: so deep is its account (λόγος). —Heracleitus (B 45).
- ❖ ψυχῆς πείρατα ἴων οὐκ ἂν ἐξεύροιο πᾶσαν ἐπιπορευόμενος ὁδόν· οὕτω βαθὺν λόγον ἔχει (B 45)