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The Soul of an Animal

Posted By *Jerry Martin* On March 30, 2016 @ 5:07 AM In Faith | [Comments Disabled](#)

Our most intimate involvement with animals is having a pet. We welcome these little creatures (or large, in the case of horses and my friends' Great Dane) into our families. We take care of them when they are ill and they, in their way, take care of us.

We do not relate to them generically, as if all cats were alike. Each is a distinct individual, with a personality all its own. Some are smart, some less so, some so clever you can barely believe it.

The tragedy of having a pet is that animals have shorter lifespans than we do. We always lose them. And we don't stop missing them. You can get another cat — but it's not your Toby. It's not your Lucy. You might as well say to a grieving mother: "You can always have another." Getting another cat is a good idea — it fills the hole left in your life by that animal's disappearance — but it can never truly fill that pet's footsteps. Not exactly.

All of which raises the question: Do animals — does Toby — have a soul? Until recently, this is not a question that ever would have come to me. I was a lifelong agnostic, a philosophy professor with an entirely naturalistic worldview. "Soul" was not in my conceptual vocabulary. Nor was "God."

But one day I had occasion to pray. Quite to my surprise, I got an answer — in words. After that, usually when I prayed, I would receive a verbal response. Being a philosopher, I asked all kinds of questions: about life and death, good and evil, love and loss, about what to make of the world's many religions. I would write down the answers (which are being published under the title I received in prayer: "God: An Autobiography, as Told to a Philosopher").

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One topic I prayed about was Creation, the Big Bang and all that came next — people and human cultures, I assumed. But instead, the words that came to me, as if directly from God, were about animals and God's delight in them:

The creatures that began to stir on the earth are amazing, more amazing than anything that had yet occurred in creation. There is birth, growth, death, mating, offspring, colonies and flocks, emergent social orders — ideality as well.

Personality develops — think of your own pets — as well as intelligence and problem-solving. There is living with continuous purpose and plans, as well as individual recognition of one animal by another, and lifelong mates.

And then I heard the "S word": *Animals do have uniqueness. Each animal is distinct, and has its own soul.*

There was the answer to the question I had never asked. Each animal is unique, lives its own life drama, and does indeed have a soul.

Which then raises a further question: Might you meet your lost pets again on the other side? Might Toby right now be well and frisky in some eternal place? I did not ask that question in prayer but, as a philosopher, I would say: If animals have souls, then why not?

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Someone might object that, even if animals have souls, they do not have the kind of spiritual life that "earns" an afterlife, as humans do.

Here is what I believe because I was told it in prayer: *They are sensitive to, and in tune with, nature and hence with Me. Their world is much less dualistic, more holistic, with less individuality and separateness and hence less separateness from Me. It is mainly an instinctual unselfconscious rapport that we have.*

Maybe it's not just us — but God, too, who welcomes their company in eternity.

Why wouldn't a benign God love our pets as much as we do?

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