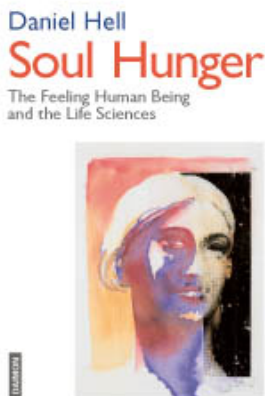


Review:



Soul Hunger

The Feeling Human Being and the Life Sciences

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The book's title takes one straight into the intense conflict that the psychiatrist Daniel Hell (who was Director of the University Hospital of Psychiatry in Zurich, the famous Burghölzli) tries to explore and contain: the 'Soul' that is commonly associated with the spiritual and the religious versus the 'Hunger' that evokes primal, bodily, visceral sensations. 'The Feeling Human Being' refers to the subjective and the personal domain versus the Life Sciences that are striving to be objective and collective.

In his sophisticated (yet jargon free) and multilayered text Hell succeeds in what Winnicott (1966) describes as the challenge of the psycho-somatist: 'to ride two horses, one foot on each of the two saddles, with both reins in his deft hands'. I will add this book to the survival kit that helps me to stay alive and hopefully soulful in the phenomenological, statistical and pharmacological world of the 21st century psychiatrist. (In this kit I already have books by two other psychiatrists: C.G. Jung's *The Psychogenesis of Mental Disease* [CW₃] and Robert K. Hobson's *Forms of Feeling* [1985] - both of whom speak a very similar language to Professor Hell.)

Hell's message is repeated in variations throughout the book but it can be found in a concise form in the concluding section:

'While various forms of psychological misery are accompanied by altered cerebral function, this does not adequately explain the personal experience. It is not a brain that is ill but a person... The meaning and importance of psychological suffering is not found in the brain,

but in the attitudes people have in evaluating their experiences and in the verbal communication between people and their culture' (p. 347).

This commonsense, 'experience-near' summary comes at the end of a 'long journey' (dotted with quotations from philosophers, novelists, poets, psychiatrists, scientists and many moving clinical vignettes).

The three parts of Hell's book are obviously connected but, as he suggests, can be read independently. In the first part, Historical Development: 'A Short History of the Soul' and 'Diseased Soul?', he attempts to follow the historical preconditions of currently prevailing concepts of psyche and disease. In the second part, The Unfolding of the Concept: 'The Body of the Soul is Emotional - A Personal Concept of the Soul' and 'Overwhelming Self-Assessment - An Attempt to Reach a New Understanding of a Feeling Person's Illness', he develops methods based on the latest biological and sociological views or illness for finding direct access to the soul and illness. In the third part, Practical Application: 'A Basic Therapeutic Problem', 'The Shamed Shame and Depression', and 'The Discouraged Feeling', he tries to relate the concepts to their importance in everyday life. As a clinician I found the last two parts very useful and insightful.

Focusing on what he defines as 'Problematic Emotional Groups' (p. 202), Hell starts with the 'Problem-Group of Anxiety' (p. 203), then continues with the 'Problem-Circle of Sadness' (p. 227) followed by the rarely studied feeling of Disgust (p. 236). He then explores thoroughly Shame and Depression. He makes important, sharp and subtle differentiations between anxiety and fear, the different types of anxiety-phobias, panic and generalized anxiety, between sadness and depression, between shame and shaming and guilt, and he stresses the crucial clinical implications of understanding their differences as well as their positive aspects. For example: 'Shame presupposes an inner relation to oneself' (p. 256).

Hell's view is that these feelings are part of our normal emotional repertoire but become disorders only when they are not allowed to be lived, accepted, or are feared and therefore avoided and rejected: 'In abnormal grief reactions it is not grief, but the refusal of sadness on which treatment must focus. Also, in phobias or compulsions that go hand in hand with feelings of disgust, one must not doubt the disgust' (p. 245). The core idea which is interwoven into all the chapters of the book is that of the importance of being attuned to 'the first-person perspective' - the unique individual feeling, the 'soulish' experience of the particular patient, whilst keeping in mind the 'third-person' objective perspective of the diagnosis (an idea that echoes Martin Buber's 'I-Thou' as opposed to 'I-It').

Hell does not deal with the unconscious in his book, he focuses on the here and now of the feelings of his patients and on how to help them to live their feelings and have what he calls a 'soulful' experience. He reminds us that the origin of the German word for Soul, 'Seele', contains the root word 'See' (lake) 'recalling the ancient Germanic idea that the souls of the unborn and the deceased live in the water' (p. 13). Hell conveys the feeling that the Soul is not a mystical, airy entity but rather a flowing, vibrant, real, embodied presence who can be met every day in clinical practice if one looks for her. This of course was also the approach of Jung, who defined psychiatry as 'the art of healing the soul' (Jung 1914, para. 320). I was surprised therefore that although the book is in a way inspired by Jung's spirit he is mentioned only twice. In the reference section there is one mention of his *Collected Works* and, in the text, a patient disagrees with Jung's comparison of depression to a 'woman in black' to whom one must listen. This patient experiences depression as 'an octopus that suddenly emerges out of the depths and disconnects the soul from the body and spirit' (p. 308). I think however that Hell would agree with the following statement of Jung, which echoes the essence of his book:

'We have long known that we have to do with a definite organ, the brain; but only beyond the brain, beyond the anatomical substrate, do we reach what is important for us - the psyche, as indefinable as ever, still eluding all explanations, no matter how ingenious' (Jung 1914, para. 320).

At a conference in London in 2011 Murray Stein suggested that Jung's cry in the *Liber Primus* of *The Red Book* 'My soul where are you?' (2009, p. 232) might be related to Jung's encounter with positivistic science. Professor Hell's *Soul Hunger* stems from exactly the same experience.

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