

AI souls

The Urth list — 13 messages, 8 voices, 04 Dec 2004

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4268>

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Roy C. Lackey — 04 Dec 2004, 01:01

Sidestepping the dubious notion that chems were "implanted" with the brain scans of particular human beings, let us look at another example of machine-based autonomous entities in Wolfe's work, one in which the author's presumed conviction that non-biological "persons" do indeed have "souls" comparable to those of human beings can, I think, be more clearly demonstrated. I refer to Sidero and his kind.

Sidero's kind started off as glorified spacesuits. He speaks first in the following exchange with Severian in Chapter VIII of URTH:

"You asked how we came to be. Do you know how your own race came to be?"

"Only that we were animals who lived in trees. That is what the mystes say. Not the monkeys, since the monkeys are there still. Perhaps something like the zoanthropes, though smaller. The zoanthropes always make for the mountains, I've noticed, and they climb trees in the high jungle there. At any rate, these animals communicated with one another, as even cattle do, and wolves, by certain cries and motions. Eventually, through the will of the Increate, it came to be that those who communicated best survived while those who did so poorly perished."

"Is there no more?"

I shook my head. "When they communicated well enough that they could be said to speak, they were men and women. Such are we still. Our hands were made to cling to branches, our eyes to see the next branch as we move from tree to tree, our mouths to speak, and to chew fruit and fledglings. So are they still. But what of your own kind?"

"Much like yours. If the story is true, the mates wanted shelter from the void, from destructive rays, the weapons of hostiles, and other things. They built hard coverings for themselves. They wanted to be stronger too, for war and work on deck. Then they put the liquid you saw into us so that our arms and legs would move as they wanted, but with greater force. Into our genators, I ought to have said. They needed to communicate, so they added talk circuits. Then more circuits so we could do one thing as they did another. Controllers so we could speak and act even when they could not. Until at last we spoke in storage and acted without a mate inside."

This passage describes the evolutionary paths by which both man and android reached their present states, and it was by the Increate's will that it was so. At some point Sidero's kind became self-aware. In the case of both "races", speech was the defining element, what made a man a man and an android an android -- that and the ability to act autonomously.

If men have souls, according to the Bible, and if the men of the Bible were such as we, and if the Bible exists by the will of the Increate, then Sidero has a soul, so far as Wolfe is concerned.

Consider this: at one point Sidero expressed regret to Severian for certain actions he had taken against Severian. His conscious bothered him. To experience guilt is to have knowledge of a concept of right and wrong. Such knowledge, and the ability to act in accordance with that knowledge, are the criteria by which, according to Wolfe's chosen religion, the Increate judges men. That judgement implies a reckoning of some kind, which doesn't necessarily happen in life. That's where the notion of the soul comes in. No matter how good or bad a man may be in the eyes of the Increate, when the body dies, as it will eventually, it isn't over. It is the soul that survives and must endure that reckoning, to be rewarded or punished by will of the Increate.

Sidero didn't fear Severian or "punishment" by Tzadkiel for his actions; the worst Tzadkiel could do was "kill" him in some way. He was worried about how the Increate would judge him. There was nothing to worry about if he didn't have a soul.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 04 Dec 2004, 09:39 · follows Roy C. Lackey

I wrote:

actions he had taken against Severian. His conscious bothered him. To

I meant, of course, "His _conscience_ bothered him." Sheesh.

-Roy

James Wynn — 04 Dec 2004, 11:15 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I agree with Roy that Sidero expressing genuine regret for his actions does suggest that Sidero might have a soul. But it isn't necessarily so. I'm a bit at a disadvantage since I'm currently working a contract in Savannah and all my books are in storage in Austin. Before I continue. Could someone post the relevant text?

My conviction that the chems had *human* souls is a great deal more complex than merely Rose's testimony. And Sidero, unlike Rose, never, as far as I recall, considers the validity of his existence. Nevertheless, if it could be proven that Sidero had evolved a soul it would at least show that Wolfe had exemplified a situation in which Rose's rationale was irrelevant.

~ Crush

Roy C. Lackey — 04 Dec 2004, 15:45 · follows James Wynn

Crush wrote:

I agree with Roy that Sidero expressing genuine regret for his actions does suggest that Sidero might have a soul. But it isn't necessarily so. I'm a bit at a disadvantage since I'm currently working a contract in Savannah and all my books are in storage in Austin. Before I continue. Could someone

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From Chapter XIII, Sidero speaking:

"Let me explain before we argue again. I hurt you. It is my right and duty to correct and chastise. Then I had joy of it." I asked him if he referred to his striking me when I lay unconscious, and he nodded. "I must not." He seemed about to speak further, but did not. After a moment he said, "I cannot explain." "We know what moral considerations are," I told him. "Not as we. You believe you do. We know, and yet often make mistakes. We may sacrifice men to save our own existence. We may transmit and originate instructions to men. We may correct and chastise. But we may not become as you are. That is what I did. I must repay."

Sidero considers himself and his kind the moral superior of men. When he took pleasure in inflicting pain in Sev he crossed a line he shouldn't have crossed--and he knew it. He felt he must make recompense, in this case by excusing the dragooned Sev from the looming battle. He was pissed at Sev in the first place for Sev having tricked him and then put him on like a suit of armor. Sev was killed in a fall a few minutes later.

-Roy

Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 05 Dec 2004, 11:48 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

It's an interesting typo, though. Oddly appropriate.
Don

On Saturday, December 4, 2004, at 09:39 AM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:
I wrote:

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I meant, of course, "His _conscience_ bothered him." Sheesh.

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 06 Dec 2004, 10:54 · in reply to Lisa Schaffer-Doggett

H'mmmm ... Interesting.

Another example of machines MAYBE becoming ensouled
would be the Talusses (Tali?) of the Long Sun Whorl.

It seems clear to me that Wolfe is suggesting that something like a soul happens at a certain level of complexity and especially of _communication_. The word he uses is "speech," but I suspect that the word he is avoiding - and why should Wolfe not avoid key words and facts every bit as much as his own characters? - is "word," or rather "Word," _logos_.

God speaks World into existence, and all the creatures in it; God then ensouls Man by

"breathing" into his nostrils

- but the Hebrew word translated as "breath" can as easily be translated "spirit" or "wind." And we speak with our breath.

Speech is breath is spirit.

--Dan'I

www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer
Freedom has no barcode.
--J.G. Ballard

Roy C. Lackey — 06 Dec 2004, 22:14 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Dan'I wrote:

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Speech is breath is spirit.

Just so. And Wolfe goes out of his way to make Apheta and her kind have no tongues. In Chapter XIX, aptly named "Silence", Apheta says:

"You have listened to my voice for a long while now, Autarch. Listen to this world of Yesod instead and tell me what you hear, other than my words, when I speak to you. Listen! What do you hear?"
I did not understand. I said, "Nothing. But you are a human woman."
"You hear nothing because we speak with silence, even as you with sound. Whatever noises we find we shape, canceling those which are unneeded, voicing our thoughts in the remainder. That is why I led you here, where the waves murmur always; and why we have so many fountains, and trees to stir their leaves in the wind from our sea."

Then she shows Sev that she has no tongue. What is Wolfe trying to say? Sev then beds her, and from that bizarre union the New Sun is born, which is himself. I'm so theologically confused!

-Roy

zvi at vex.net — 07 Dec 2004, 10:18 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy write:

Dan'I wrote:

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Just so. And Wolfe goes out of his way to make Apheta and her kind have no tongues.

[...] What is Wolfe trying to say?

I think it's further evidence that Apheta's kind are 'pure'.

In many cultures, 'tongue' is metonymy for 'language, speech, communication'; further, it's often used in contexts where the language/speech/communication is evil, tainted, 'bad'. 'Forked tongue' is just one example; lashon ha-rah (Hebrew) is translated as 'evil speech' but it's literally 'the bad tongue'.

Is it possible that Wolfe is literalizing the metonymy especially with regard to the tongue's associations with evil speech? By definition, the language of a tongue-less people could not be 'the bad tongue'.

Cf.:

<http://www.mountzion.org/fgb/Spring95/FgbSP2-95.html>

'The Evil Tongue' which contains some lovely lines:

The apostle James in this Scripture,
describes the evil of the tongue,
“The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.”

1. “It is a fire.” It burns with intemperate heat;
it causeth the heat of contention; it sets others
in a flame.

2. “A world of iniquity.” It was at first made to be
an organ of God’s praise, but it is become an instrument
of unrighteousness. All the members of the body are sinful,
as there is bitterness in every branch of wormwood, but
the tongue is excessively sinful, “full of deadly
poison” (verse 8).

--Zvi

zvi at vex.net

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 07 Dec 2004, 10:24 · in reply to zvi at vex.net

What Apheta's speech-through-silence has always reminded me of
was the prophet (was it Ezekiel? Can't recall) who listened for God's voice only to find Him
speaking in a quiet breeze.

--Dan'l

www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer

Freedom has no barcode.

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James Wynn — 07 Dec 2004, 11:20 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

What Apheta's speech-through-silence has always reminded me of
was the prophet (was it Ezekiel? Can't recall) who listened for God's
voice only to find Him speaking in a quiet breeze.

It was Elijah. It reminds me of the spirit of the dead witch in THE KNIGHT, whose voice could be heard in the falling rain.

I'm not convinced there's anything important thematically about Apheta's method of speech (surprisingly, since I tend to see purpose in so many things that others don't). It strikes me as a clever possibility that has caught Wolfe's fancy...speaking through anti-sound...the louder the noise the more clearly one can be heard, etc.

This discussion has filled my mind with so many things and changed my view on some things. I'll try to post something tonight.

~ Crush

Stanisław Bocian — 07 Dec 2004, 12:30 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Tuesday, December 7, 2004, 7:14:04 AM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

RCL> Just so. And Wolfe goes out of his way to make Apheta and her kind have no RCL> tongues. In Chapter XIX, aptly named "Silence", Apheta says: RCL>
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those which are unneeded, voicing our thoughts RCL> in the remainder. That is why I led you
here, where the RCL> waves murmur always; and why we have so many fountains, RCL> and
trees to stir their leaves in the wind from our sea." RCL> -----

Compare with the Hierodules in the Sword of the Lictor:

"I asked, "You have left them these machines, then?" I was acutely
conscious, as I spoke, of the eviscerated woman mumbling beneath her
glass somewhere behind me, a thing that once would not have bothered
the torturer Severian in the least.

Barbatus said, "No. Those he found, or constructed for himself.
Famulimus said that he wished to learn, and that we saw to it that he
did, not that we taught him. We teach no one anything, and only trade
such devices as are too complex for your people to duplicate."

Dr. Talos said, "These monsters, these horrors, do nothing for us.
You've seen them you know what they are. ...

....

"Now we must go," Ossipago told Baldanders, and he handed him the
Claw. "Think well on all the things we have not told you, and
remember what you have not been shown."

"I will," Baldanders said, his voice as grim as I was ever to hear
it."

I wonder whether my ideas about Tolkien's Valar would not apply here. I think that all
supernatural forces in the Lord of the Ring tend to act upon the material world in a specific way

- they don't cause anything themselves, but manipulate natural causes. I don't think here about lesser natural spirits such as ents etc, but about more powerful being.

For example Valar and the wind - the change of direction of wind at the battle of Pelennor is entirely natural, but it is no accident that it happened then, and not at any other time. The idea is, by the way, from Tom Shippey.

Using an idea from modern science, the Valar and similar beings don't influence the probability wave, but set a particular result when the wave collapses, that is, when it is measured or reacts with some object. In other words, Sauron could roll any number he wanted on the dice without cheating - he could, to some extent, simply select it.

The idea I want to express is a bit difficult. I want to say that such beings can influence events without exerting any kind of force. When something can happen, according to chance, one way or another, they can try to select an outcome. But this power doesn't allow them to cause anything which wouldn't happen by itself - they cannot cause anything which wouldn't happen naturally - although, of course, they are a great many things which could happen naturally, but never do, since they are so improbable.

The most interesting thing in such a case would be that the cause of such an event would be entirely natural, since it would be only the more or less probable outcome of the forces operating independently of the Maiar/Valar. At the same time it would be caused by the Valar. Therefore, the event would have two independent causes, natural and supernatural. So the question whether the wind at Pelennor was natural or sent by Valar would have as the answer - both.

I will not say that this is the only power of the Valar over the material world, but it is the one most often seen in the LoTR. Here belong such words of Gandalf, as "Chance, as you call it" etc. It explains also the limitations of their power. For example as Gandalf states on Caradhras, he cannot go against the nature of the things, he must have something to work on.

"`If Gandalf would go before us with a bright flame, he might melt a path for you,' said Legolas. The storm had troubled him little, and he alone of the Company remained still light of heart. `If Elves could fly over mountains, they might fetch the Sun to save us,' answered Gandalf. `But I must have something to work on. I cannot burn snow.'"

The magic of the Elves seems to be mostly similar, if sometimes instinctive and not fully conscious.

For the example the incident with the rope in the Two Towers: "He looked up and gave one last pull to the rope as if in farewell. To the complete surprise of both the hobbits it came loose. Sam fell over, and the long grey coils slithered silently down on top of him. Frodo laughed. `Who tied the rope?' he said. .... 'Then I'm afraid it must have been the knot,' said Frodo. Sam shook his head and did not answer. He was passing the rope through his fingers thoughtfully. `Have it

your own way, Mr. Frodo,' he said at last, `but I think the rope came off itself — when I called.' He coiled it up and stowed it lovingly in his pack."

Stanislaus Bocian

Startuj z INTERIA.PL!!! >>> <http://link.interia.pl/f1837>

Chris — 08 Dec 2004, 12:59 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Another statement of the obvious: the spirit/breath connection is cross-cultural, definitely not strictly Hebrew (though it is certainly important there). It's there, for example, in the greek - although I don't think that the communication aspect was originally tied to spirit in this way in the Greek tradition, though it may have been associated later on. If I recall correctly Aristotle does sort of place communication in a primitive "evolutionary" scale of mind, in that supposedly creatures without the ability to hear lack the ability to learn (and thus cannot proceed past a certain level of consciousness). One assumes he hadn't met many deaf people, but perhaps the point he was making there was metaphorical.

I was always struck by Apheta's peculiar non-speaking-speech, and I suspected that it reflects a general concept in some mystical traditions about the second type of wisdom, apart from that sort of logos that *is* in a positive sense and that we can speak of. You can vaguely associate it with Taoism, Zen buddhism, or even stick within the Hebrew or Greek traditions. In any event I was never really able to tell if this was an essential thematic element, or whether Wolfe just thought it was a nifty idea.

"You must not be soft, but cover yourself up; for you must discover an intellection abstractional and fraudulent."

Dan'I wrote:

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-Roy

maru — 08 Dec 2004, 13:09 · in reply to Chris

Y'know, I don't think that bit with Apheta is an isolated peculiarity- I recall, in one of teh Island stories, Dr. Island spoke to the patients in the same manner. Seeing it twice leads me to think this is a mJOR point, some sort of meaningful inversion. ~Maru

Chris wrote:

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