

The Soul as Persistent Attractor: A Physicalist Definition

Robert Galida – *Fantasy Attractor Research Program*

The Puzzle

The concept of the soul has haunted human thought for millennia. It has been defined as a non-physical substance, an immortal essence, a divine spark, a ghost in the machine. It has been invoked to explain consciousness, to justify morality, to promise life after death. It has been dismissed as a superstition, an illusion, a relic of pre-scientific thinking.

The problem with the soul is not that it does not exist. The problem is that it has been defined in non-physical terms—and non-physical terms are fantasy attractors. They are sealed basins. They resist correction. They persist despite—or because of—their detachment from reality.

The attractor framework offers a physicalist definition of the soul that is consistent, coherent, and empirically grounded. It does not deny the soul. It redefines it.

The Framework in Brief

The attractor framework distinguishes between two fundamental types of systems:

Conservative systems – like electrons, protons, and the universe as a whole – persist without consuming energy or exchanging entropy with an environment. They are the floor and roof of reality: the eternal skeleton upon which everything else is built.

Dissipative systems – like life, consciousness, societies, and belief systems – maintain their structure by continuously exchanging energy and entropy with their surroundings. They persist only at the cost of generating entropy. They are the transient dance in between.

The soul, if it is real, must be a dissipative system—a pattern within the transient dance, not a non-physical substance outside it.

The Definition

From the perspective of the attractor framework:

The soul is the stable, persistent attractor pattern that maintains continuity across temporal existence, independent of its changing contents.

This definition has several components:

1. The soul is a pattern – not a substance.

It is not a non-physical entity. It is not a ghost. It is not a soul-stuff. It is a pattern of organization—an attractor—that maintains coherence through time.

2. The soul is persistent – not eternal.

It persists through perturbation. It maintains structure through energy exchange. It is part of the dissipative

middle—not the conservative floor, not the conservative roof. It is real, but it is not eternal.

3. The soul is stable – not fixed.

It is stable in the sense of maintaining continuity, but it is not fixed in the sense of unchanging. It evolves, adapts, and corrects. It is a dynamic stability, not a static one.

4. The soul is attractor-based – not content-based.

It is not what it contains. It is not memories, beliefs, identity, or roles. It is the pattern that organizes those contents—the attractor that shapes the trajectory.

5. The soul is temporal – not timeless.

It is anchored in past, present, and future. It has a history, a current state, and a projected trajectory. It is the relationship between them.

The Components

1. Past

The soul carries its history. Not as a repository of memories, but as a trajectory—a path that has shaped the attractor. The past is not the soul, but the soul is shaped by the past.

2. Present

The soul is manifest in the present. It is the current state of the attractor, the ongoing pattern of persistence. The present is where the soul is actualized.

3. Future

The soul projects into the future. It has a trajectory, a

tendency, a direction. The future is not the soul, but the soul is oriented toward the future.

4. The Relationship

The soul is the fixed relationship between past, present, and future—the continuity that connects them. It is the *connection*, not the contents.

The Properties

1. Persistence

The soul persists through perturbation. It is not fragile. It is not easily disrupted. It maintains its pattern through change.

2. Corrective Permeability

The soul is corrigible. It can be corrected, adjusted, aligned. It is not sealed against reality. It is permeable to feedback.

3. Cultivation

The soul can be cultivated. It can be tended, developed, aligned. The practice of cultivation is the tending of the soul.

4. Identity

The soul is the basis of identity—not as a fixed self, but as a persistent pattern. It is what makes you you, across time, across change, across perturbation.

The Implications

1. The Soul Is Not Exclusive to Humans

Any living stable persistent attractor has a soul. Animals, ecosystems, perhaps even some synthetic systems. The soul is a property of persistence, not species.

2. The Soul Is Not Eternal

It persists—but it can be disrupted. It is part of the dissipative middle, not the conservative floor. It is real, but it is not eternal.

3. The Soul Is Not Separate from the Body

It is the pattern of the body’s persistence. Not a ghost, not a non-physical entity. A real, physical, persistent pattern.

4. The Soul Is Cultivated

It is not given. It is maintained through correction, adaptation, and persistence. The practice of cultivation *is* the tending of the soul.

5. The Soul Is Temporal

It is anchored in past, present, and future. It has a history, a current state, and a projected trajectory. It is the relationship between them.

The Contrast

View	Soul as	Reality	Tenability
Substance View	Non-physical entity	Spiritual, supernatural	Fantasy attractor

View	Soul as	Reality	Tenability
Eliminative View	Illusion	Nothing	Denies real pattern
Attractor View	Persistent pattern	Physical, temporal	Consistent, coherent

The substance view is a fantasy attractor—a sealed basin that resists correction. The eliminative view denies the real pattern of persistence. The attractor view captures the reality of the soul without succumbing to fantasy or reductionism.

The Practice

If the soul is a persistent attractor pattern, then the practice of cultivation is:

- **Tending** – attending to the pattern, not just the contents
- **Correcting** – adjusting when misaligned
- **Persisting** – maintaining continuity through perturbation
- **Aligning** – moving toward the attractor of coherence
- **Cultivating** – developing the pattern over time

This is the practice of the framework—the cultivation of the soul through presence, attention, and correction.

The Contribution

The attractor framework provides a physicalist definition of the soul that is:

- **Consistent** – with the ontology of the framework
- **Physical** – grounded in substrate and persistence
- **Temporal** – anchored in past, present, and future
- **Universal** – applicable to all persistent systems
- **Cultivable** – something that can be tended and developed

This definition bridges science and spirituality. It honors the depth of the concept without reducing it to mere mechanism. It provides a practical framework for tending the soul.

The Conclusion

The soul is real.

It is not a non-physical substance. It is not a ghost in the machine. It is not an illusion.

It is the stable, persistent attractor pattern that maintains continuity across temporal existence, independent of its changing contents.

It is the pattern of your persistence.

That is the soul.

Robert Galida is an independent researcher and the founder of the Fantasy Attractor Research Program. His work develops a formal framework for understanding persistence and change across physical, biological, cognitive, and social systems.