

An Attitude Toward a Soul

By Philip Bold

We encounter some aliens.

They behave an awful lot like humans.

But we wonder: "Are they conscious?"

We examine their physiology.

Their chemical makeup is completely different from ours.

They do not have an identifiable brain.

Architecturally and anatomically, they are radically different from us.

The scientists conclude: "They must not be conscious."

"We are the only creatures we know to be conscious, our consciousness arises from our brains and bodies, and their brains and bodies are nothing like ours."

Someone objects: "But they speak a language and behave much like us!"

The scientists respond: "Yes, but those similarities are superficial."

"One could make a marionette behave like you."

As time goes on, humans increasingly begin to form bonds with the aliens.

They begin to say things to the aliens like: "How are you feeling today?"

"It's a beautiful day, isn't it? It's nice to feel the warmth of the sun."

"I love you."

The general public gradually diverges from the scientific conclusion.

People become happy and willing to say: “Yes, of course the aliens have feelings!”

Over time, the scientific community begins to change its assessment too, as many scientists have likewise developed bonds with the aliens.

These scientists claim: “We previously had too narrow an idea of what consciousness requires.”

“We see things more clearly now.”

A small minority of scientists remain steadfast, however: “They don’t have brains!”

“They might as well be automata!”

But very few take this minority opinion seriously.

Life goes on, with the differences between humans and aliens taking on less and less significance in day-to-day life.

“But are they really conscious?”

People now find it hilarious that the question was ever asked.