

# The Daily Pennsylvanian

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THE DAILY PENNSYLVANIAN

## OPINION

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## Rediscovering my soul

*Just because Wharton students talk in monetary terms does not mean they lack morals*

It has been said that Wharton students lack souls.

It's an awful cliché and I admit that there is some wisdom in it, but I beg to differ: We are not soulless, but rather our thinking is a habitual product of our discipline, every bit as soulful as every other major or undergraduate division.

Consider the following:

As part of their empty-nest syndrome, my parents bought two finches, which have since been fruitful and have multiplied profusely (as have the parakeets, rabbits, turtles, hamsters, fish and guinea pigs, but that's another matter). And because my parents don't believe in "boundaries," they let all the birds fly freely through the house and sing and crap everywhere. I do not mind this system — except for the occasional extra "seasoning" on my food — but over Thanksgiving one of the finches — "Birdy," or "Sir Shitsalot," as I called him — flew behind the refrigerator and suffocated to death beneath the refrigerator's radiator pipes.

When my mom — a soulful woman if there ever was one — discovered his mangled corpse, she cried. Conversely, when she told me the news over dinner, all I said was, "See? This is what happens when you let dumb birds fly around the house and crap everywhere," and continued to munch on the rotting carcass of

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Cezary Salad

our Thanksgiving turkey.

The next day my mom decided to take a trip to the local pet store to buy a "Birdy" replacement. And as we looked at the finches at the pet store, my mom said, "Had Birdy not died, I could have sold him for \$15 to the pet store."

My heart sank. Suddenly I realized the full magnitude of Sir Shitsalot's death. Fifteen dollars. But it wasn't just that — oh no! I go to the Wharton School, so I realized that Sir Shitsalot's death meant not only the loss of \$15, but also the demise of all future cash flows related to the bird's reproductive capacities, as well as that of his offspring — a perpetuity that I (over?)valued at \$600 at a 5 percent interest rate. How tragic it is that he died!

Whatever happened to my soul?

Indeed, the greatest tragedy of all was that I did not care about Sir Shitsalot's death until my mom put a price tag on him. This, then, is what it means when people say that we Wharton students have no souls: we sometimes fixate too much on money instead of other seemingly unquantifiable

values such as life.

But here the wisdom of the cliché ends. Yes, I am a terrible bastard for not being able to feel sadness at the loss of an innocent, beautiful creature until I found out it was worth something. At the same time, however, for a College, Engineering or Nursing student to call me soulless assumes that the humanities and the sciences have some monopoly on the human soul — that is, compassion, emotion and moral/ethical thinking — precisely the qualities I lacked in my reaction to Sir Shitsalot's demise.

I heartily disagree.

First of all, it is more often a matter of habit, rather than greed and soullessness, that Wharton students tend to re-cast everything in terms of money. If business is what you know best, it only makes sense that most of your thinking, your analogies and your vocabulary will make reference to business concepts.

A science major may compare Bush's presidency to a virus that destroys its host; a Wharton student may compare it to cannibalization of profits by a tragically misplaced product line; a literature major may argue that letting Bush run America is like letting Lennie from *Of Mice and Men* pet a rabbit. Why should my thinking be called "soulless" or "toolish" simply because my first instinct is to make reference to a

business concept?

Naturally, this begs the question: what is so "soulful" about learning chemistry, comparative literature, political science or any other major, as compared to learning business? Certain courses and majors, such as bioethics, philosophy or religious studies, may be more soul-friendly than business, but, for the most part, in America we do not teach compassion, emotion and moral/ethical thinking. We leave that to the churches and other institutions outside the classroom. However, most business schools now have a business ethics course requirement, which means that, ironically, it is possible for a Wharton student to come out of Penn with a better "soul" than a College student who never took a soulful class.

So do not call us soulless. I do not defend greed and selfishness or, as in my case, letting the analytical monetary thinking that we've been taught overshadow more important values. In the end our thinking is more often a matter of habit rather than soullessness, and no undergraduate division or major has a patent on the human soul.

Rest in peace, Sir Shitsalot.

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