

What Does It Mean to Be a Bodily Soul?

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Until at least the nineteenth century, there was an overwhelming consensus among Christian thinkers that some form of mind-body (or soul-body) dualism constitutes the truth about human beings.¹ One could here cite almost any significant theologian, but Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin will serve as (enormously influential) illustrations. Here is Aquinas: “Man is composed of a spiritual and a corporeal substance.”² Calvin is just as clear: “The soul is an incorporeal substance.”³

This anthropological dualism is far from being an esoteric, abstract metaphysical doctrine, because it bears directly on what happens to human persons after death.⁴ When the Heidelberg Catechism says that “my only

ABSTRACT: Evangelical scholars have recently offered criticisms of mind-body dualism from the disciplines of theology, philosophy, and neuroscience. We offer several arguments as to why these reasons for abandoning mind-body dualism fail. Additionally, we offer a positive thesis, a dualism that brings together the best aspects of the Cartesian view and the Thomistic view of human persons. The result is a substance dualism that treats the nature of embodiment quite seriously. This view explains why we, as souls, require a resurrected body as well as accounting for the great good of our embodiment in general. A human person is at the same time wholly soul and yet fully bodily.

1. One qualification to this claim needs to be made. The history of Christian thought also contains a “trichotomist” view that distinguishes soul from spirit and views human beings as having three fundamental parts. For our purposes this trichotomist view can be understood as a particular type of dualism, since, like dualism, it maintains that there is both a physical and nonphysical aspect to human persons. The distinction between soul and spirit can be interpreted as one particular view of how the nonphysical aspect of humans should be understood.

2. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.75, a.1., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Ypsilanti, MI: NovaAntiqua, 2009).

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960) 1.15.6 (vol. 1, p. 152).

4. Additionally, there are significant ethical implications for dualism. See J. P. Moreland and Scott B Rae, *Body and Soul: Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP

comfort in life and death is that I belong, body and soul, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ”⁵ the reference to “body and soul” is not merely a poetic flourish. This is evident when the same catechism says later, explaining the resurrection, that “not only will my soul be taken immediately after this life to Christ its head, but even my flesh, raised by the power of Christ, will be reunited with my soul and made like Christ’s glorious body.”⁶ The Heidelberg Catechism’s view of what happens at death is by no means unique or unusual, but reflects the standard way Christians have thought about such things: At death the believer is immediately “present with the Lord” in an “intermediate state,” but looks forward to a future bodily resurrection in which soul and body are reunited. It is obvious that this eschatological picture presupposes soul-body dualism.

The Move Away from Dualism Toward “Nonreductive Materialism”

This consensus about Christian anthropology has eroded, first in the nineteenth century under the influence of idealism, which tended to reject bodily resurrection by reinterpreting it as a symbolic expression of immortality, and in the twentieth century under the influence of materialism, which, naturally, leaves no room for an intermediate disembodied state. The erosion in the last fifty years has become an avalanche, as Christian theologians, biblical scholars, philosophers, and scientists have joined in denunciations of dualism. Recently, Evangelical scholars such as Nancey Murphy and Joel Green have joined in the chorus.⁷ The alternative to dualism generally seems to be a position described as “nonreductive materialism” or “nonreductive physicalism.”⁸

Academic, 2000).

5. *Heidelberg Catechism, A New Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Reformed Board of Publications, 1975), question and answer 1.

6. *Heidelberg Catechism*, question and answer 57.

7. See Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). Also see Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a reply to Green and Murphy see, John W. Cooper, “The Bible and Dualism Once Again: A Reply to Joel B. Green and Nancy Murphy,” *Philosophia Christi* 9 (2007): 459–69. For scientists who reject dualism, see Malcolm Jeeves and Warren S. Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology, and Religion: Illusions, Delusions, and Realities about Human Nature* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2009). For Christian philosophers who are materialists of sorts, see Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); and Kevin Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

8. Malcolm Jeeves is an exception, in that he characterizes his view not as a form of materialism but as “dual-aspect monism.” See Jeeves and Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology, and Religion*, 130.

There seem to be a number of different motives for this repudiation of a traditional teaching of the church. One motive seems to be philosophical; dualism is massively unpopular among contemporary philosophers. The most common philosophical objections are linked to the dualistic view that souls and bodies interact. Many philosophers think that interaction between a material and nonmaterial reality is impossible or unintelligible. Some object that positing that a nonmaterial mind or soul has effects in the physical world would violate the conservation of matter and energy, or simply argue flatly for the “causal closure of the physical,” by which they mean that only physical things can have effects in the physical world.⁹

A second type of objection stems from new readings of the biblical materials. Many biblical scholars have shifted away from a traditional reading of the Bible as teaching a dualistic anthropology toward the claim that the biblical view of the human person is monistic.¹⁰ On this view the “Hebraic” view is holistic, seeing humans as unified bodily beings, and dualism is seen as a “Greek” perspective that early Christians projected on to the biblical materials.¹¹ The view that the Bible teaches a form of dualism is alleged to be the result of reading the Bible through Greek philosophical lenses.

A third type of objection stems from science. Joel Green, for example, although he is a biblical scholar and not a scientist, thinks that contemporary neuroscience shows that dualism is false. As Green tells the story, neuroscience today affirms the basic unity of the human person, and makes clear the total dependence of mental activity on neural activity. Green is particularly impressed by the way contemporary neuroscience has successfully pursued a strategy of “localization,” in which particular mental functions are associated with particular regions of the brain. Green is not alone in thinking that contemporary science gives us strong reasons to reject dualism and embrace the unity of a person and the person’s body.

We will argue that none of these three reasons for abandoning dualism is strong. We shall say a little, but only a little, about the first two. They are important and cannot be ignored, but we want to spend most of our time addressing the third type of issue, the objections from science, which we judge to be the most influential of the three.

9. For a reply to the conservation of energy objection see Robin Collins, “The Energy of the Soul,” in *The Soul Hypothesis: Investigations into the Existence of the Soul*, ed. Mark C. Baker and Stewart Goetz (New York: Continuum, 2011), 123–37.

10. Not all biblical scholars agree. See Robert Gundry, “Addendum: A Biblical and Philosophical-Scientific Conversation with Christian Nonreductive Physicalists,” in *The Old Is Better* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 187–94), for sharp criticism of this claim that the Bible teaches monism. This book will soon be reprinted in paperback by Wipf and Stock.

11. E.g., see Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*. For a reply to Green see, John W. Cooper, “Exaggerated Rumors of Dualism’s Demise: A Review Essay of *Body, Soul, and Human Life*,” *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 453–64.

Philosophical Objections to Dualism

The philosophical arguments for abandoning dualism seem to us to be very weak, especially for Christians. Anyone who is committed to theism and believes in a creator God must reject the claim that a nonphysical entity cannot act causally in the physical world. Nor is it easy to see how a theist, much less a Christian who accepts the possibility and actuality of miracles, could accept the “causal closure of the physical.”¹² Much of the popularity among philosophers of materialism about human beings surely reflects the fact that most philosophers are atheists and materialists. It is hardly surprising that those who are committed to the view that only physical things exist will say that human beings are purely physical. Christians then should not be moved by worries about whether a nonphysical reality can interact with physical entities.

As to how this interaction occurs, there may be a genuine element of mystery, but mystery is not necessarily a problem. It seems to be true that when we reach basic causal laws, there is always going to be an element of mystery. We know *that* matter behaves in a certain way, but once we reach bedrock, we can say little about *why* matter behaves that way. (Though perhaps theists may say that this reflects God’s sovereign creative will.) In a similar manner, dualists may say that it is a basic feature of the natural world that human minds can affect human bodies (and vice versa), even if they cannot say how the causal interaction takes place.

Actually, it would be very instructive if Christian thinkers paid more attention to the debates currently raging between the different types of materialism. When one looks carefully at the arguments, it becomes clear that contemporary materialists are very sure *that* some form of materialism must be true. After all, if one is convinced that matter is all there is in the universe, humans can hardly be the exception. However, this *a priori* confidence that some form of materialism must be true goes hand in hand with uncertainty about which *which* form of materialism is true, and even bafflement as to *how* any form of materialism could be true. Each form of materialism makes devastating criticisms of the other forms. This has even lead to a school of thought labeled by Owen Flanagan the “new mysterians,” a group of philosophers who claim that though materialism must be true, we humans will never understand how it could be true.¹³ These thinkers claim

12. See Alvin Plantinga, “Materialism and Christian Belief,” in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 99–141.

13. Owen Flanagan, *The Science of the Mind*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 313. The new mysterians include Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); and Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

that the mind-body relation is “cognitively closed” to us humans, an essential mystery.

The philosophical case for materialism is then hardly a slam dunk. Christians who jump on the materialist bandwagon should soberly consider the fact that many atheistic materialists, *who have no other choice than to affirm some form of materialism*, honestly admit that their position faces daunting problems.

Biblical and Theological Objections to Dualism

Contemporary biblical scholarship has made some helpful points with respect to biblical anthropology. One is that the words used by the various biblical writers for the different parts or aspects of the human person carry a variety of meanings in different contexts. Thus, one cannot assume that a biblical writer who uses a term such as “soul” or “spirit” means exactly the same thing that a different biblical writer might mean, much less the same thing that a Greek philosopher might mean. In particular, when a biblical writer describes a human person as consisting of “spirit, soul, and body” (as in 1 Thess. 5:23), this does not necessarily mean that humans are composed of three distinct substances, any more than the combination of “heart, soul, mind, and strength” in Mark 12:30 implies that humans are composed of four parts.¹⁴

It seems fair to say that not all theologians have been sensitive to these differences, and have sometimes imported meaning to biblical texts that the original writers did not intend. For example, the biblical writers do not teach a “natural immortality,” but see the survival of the soul after death as dependent on God. However, some theologians, perhaps under the influence of Platonic views of the soul, have assumed that when the Bible refers to the soul, it speaks of a naturally immortal substance.

A second major contribution of contemporary biblical scholarship has been to underline that the major thrust of biblical anthropology is towards anthropological wholeness. The Bible always views humans as unitary beings, bodily souls, and thus it makes sense that the final biblical hope is for a bodily resurrection, rather than a disembodied immortality. However, this emphasis on the unity of the person, including the body, is, as we shall try to show, quite compatible with forms of dualism. Humans are indeed unified, but that unity may be a functional unity that is the product of the integration of distinct elements.

However, the claim that contemporary biblical scholarship has made a solid case for a monistic view of the person is, at best, an exaggeration. John Cooper has provided a thorough review of the biblical data in his *Body,*

14. We owe this point to Robert Gundry. See his “Addendum.”

*Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate.*¹⁵ Cooper admits that the anthropological picture in the Old Testament is unclear, but even there the biblical writers are far from holding any form of materialism in the modern sense. When we get to the New Testament, the picture is more clearly dualistic. The crucial passages are those that deal with what happens after death.¹⁶ There are three main views about what happens that have been defended: (1) A gap theory: at death the believer temporarily ceases to exist until the resurrection (a future event) occurs. (2) Immediate resurrection in some other space-time upon death. (3) The traditional view: there will be a future resurrection, but the believer continues to exist “with Christ” between death and that resurrection.

Cooper admits that there are some Scriptural passages *consistent* with the “gap” theory, and some others that are *consistent* with the immediate resurrection theory. However, each is contradicted by the passages consistent with the other of these first two views, and no passages plainly *teach* either of those views.¹⁷ The third view, the traditional belief that the resurrection is a future event, with the deceased believer enjoying communion with Christ between death and that resurrection, is the only view that is consistent with all the Scriptural evidence, and that seems to be plainly taught in some passages. This third view presupposes a dualistic ontology, since the person must be distinct from his or her body to exist between the biological death of that body and the resurrection.

Dualism is not just important in making sense of this intermediate state. It is also at least arguable that without a dualistic ontology, the resurrection is not possible, since without a continuously existing soul it is not clear what makes my resurrected body to be my body. There are special difficulties here for the “immediate resurrection” view, since it is unclear how the new resurrected body can be identical to the body that died. Anyone who thinks that upon death I am immediately resurrected in a new body in some other dimension of space and time cannot believe that I am *identical* to the body that I had prior to my death, since that body will be decomposing while I am enjoying my new body. Advocates of immediate resurrection may hold that I cannot exist without some body, but this does not mean I am identical to my current body.

15. John Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); Cooper is a philosopher-theologian, but surveys the biblical scholarship fairly. For a biblical scholarly treatment that supports Cooper’s view, see Philip F. Esler, *New Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 239–51. We thank Robert Gundry for recommending Esler to us.

16. The remainder of this paragraph and the next paragraph draw heavily from C. Stephen Evans, “Separable Souls: Dualism, Selfhood, and the Possibility of Life After Death,” *Christian Scholars Review* 34 (2005): 327–40.

17. Cooper gives a concise summary of the arguments presented in his book on this point in his article, “Biblical Anthropology and the Soul,” in *Soul, Body, and Survival*, ed. Kevin Corcoran (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 222–6.

We conclude that biblical anthropology, taken as a whole, is far from supporting any form of monistic materialism in its view of the human person. It is true that the biblical writers emphasize the unity of the person and the importance and value of the body for the human self. These themes do distinguish the biblical view of the human self from Platonic forms of dualism, which see the body as unimportant or even bad. However, the biblical view seems quite consistent with other forms of dualism.

Scientific Objections to Dualism

Our own guess is that it is the scientific objections to dualism that are most influential. In fact, we believe that it is the desire to be consistent with scientific findings (or what are alleged to be scientific findings) that has motivated the philosophical and theological-biblical objections just considered. For example, theologian Michael Horton boldly declares, “Philosophical defenses of materialism seem increasingly substantiated by science. Over recent decades of advanced research in neurobiology and related fields, the fact that the mind is matter (i.e. the brain) has become firmly established.”¹⁸ Horton fails to reference any scientific literature. What exactly are the scientific findings that are alleged to support materialism?

The main claim is that contemporary neuroscience supports the total dependence of mental activity on neural activity. Contemporary neuroscience has successfully pursued a strategy of “localization,” in which particular mental functions are associated with particular regions of the brain.¹⁹ Contemporary brain-scanning research shows, for example, a correlation between neural activities in particular regions of the brain and particular kinds of mental activity. New techniques for brain-scanning even show, for example, that particular regions of the brain show increased electrical activity when humans pray or meditate. Malcolm Jeeves summarizes these findings very clearly: “the same take-home message emerged from all of these studies, whether human or animal, namely, the remarkable localization of function in the brain and the specificity of the neural substrate underlying mental events. As each advance occurred, mind and brain were seen to be ever more tightly linked together.”²⁰

18. Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 376.

19. For an excellent review of the scientific findings, discussed at a lay level, see Malcolm Jeeves and Warren S. Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology, and Religion: Illusions, Delusion and Realities about Human Nature* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation, 2009). Jeeves and Brown, while documenting the intimate relations between mind and brain, are careful not to claim that scientific research shows that mental activity is simply a result of what happens at the physical level.

20. Malcolm Jeeves, “Brain, Mind, and Behavior,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul: The Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancy Murphy,

But what exactly do these findings mean? Certainly they imply that the brain is profoundly important for our mental life. But is this really a new discovery? We think the answer is yes and no. We now have a vastly different picture of the particular ways our mental life depends on the brain than we had in the past, and this knowledge is valuable, both for medical science and for understanding the relation between particular kinds of mental functioning, such as emotion and cognition, and particular regions of the brain.

However, when we reflect on these findings, to some degree it is a matter of filling in the details. Those details are fascinating, but in a crucial respect they do not fundamentally alter our understanding of the relation between mind and brain. We have known for a long time that mental life can be drastically changed, even ended (as far as earthly life goes) by bashing in a person's skull. We know a lot more details about the degree and extent of the dependence of the mind on the brain than we did, but it is far from clear that these quantitative increases in our knowledge require a fundamental qualitative change in our understanding of the relation between mind and brain. Certainly the mind depends in some fundamental ways upon the brain. However, we have known for a long time that the mind depends upon the brain to some degree. We know now that this dependence is deep and extensive. But does this dependence imply that the two are identical? We shall argue that there are forms of dualism that are completely consistent with even the most extensive dependence of mental functioning on the brain.

We shall return to these neuroscientific findings, as well as some other important research that seems to support dualism, in due course. The first task, however, is to say more clearly what kind of dualism we have in mind. We want to sketch a dualistic kind of account that we think will do justice both to the biblical findings as well as the scientific research. The account we shall give is one that understands humans as embodied agents. To understand it we must think both about what it means to be an agent and what it means to be embodied.

Two Types of Dualism

There are obviously many different ways of classifying types of dualism. We want to focus on two importantly different types of views that may be labeled "mind-body dualism." One option is to think of the body and the soul as two distinct parts that together compose a human person. A second option is to think of the soul simply as the true person, or self. The first option can be found in Thomas Aquinas, who sees the human person as a unified being formed by body and soul, both of which are essential to

the person's identity.²¹ So important is the body to the person that Aquinas says that strictly speaking, the person does not exist between death and the resurrection; the person's soul exists but the soul alone does not a person make.²² On this kind of view, the soul is a part of a person, an entity that, together with another entity (the body), forms a person.

To be sure, a person on Aquinas's view is not a mere aggregate. Soul and body are naturally fitted to each other; the soul is the "form of the body." Without the soul the person's body is not strictly his or her body, but a mere corpse. Without the body, the soul, while it can continue to exist, cannot carry out some of its functions. Nevertheless, on this view, to refer to the soul is to refer to a part of me.

The other alternative can be found in Descartes, who identifies the person with the soul, understood as a "thinking thing."²³ (Descartes is not claiming that persons are simply intellectual; for him sensations and emotions are also forms of "thinking.") For Descartes, to refer to the soul is simply to refer to the self. I am my soul. Or, to put it differently, the term "soul" refers to what I am speaking of when I use the term "I." For Descartes, a person *has* a body, and indeed has a particularly intimate relation with that body. He says, for example, that the soul does not simply reside in the body "as a pilot resides in a ship," but rather forms a kind of natural unity with it.²⁴ However, the body is not an essential part of the self. Thus, for Descartes, it is possible, at least by God's omnipotence, for a person to continue to exist after death without a body.²⁵ So for Descartes, the soul is not a part of me, but me.

There is something attractive about both of these types of dualism for Christians. The Thomistic view clearly takes account of the biblical view that humans are bodily beings, and thus helps make sense of the importance of bodily resurrection for Christians. Initially it might appear that it is thus superior to the Cartesian view that identifies the self with the soul. However, we have become convinced that there is something fundamentally right about the Cartesian picture, and that, suitably modified, it can incorporate what is right about the Thomistic picture.

What is right about the Cartesian picture is this: To ask whether humans have souls is not to ask whether they have a peculiar kind of ghostly entity inside them. It is to ask what kind of thing a human person is. If we speak strictly we should not say that we have souls, but that we are souls. Or, if the

21. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.75, a.7, ad.3.

22. Ibid., I, q.75, a.4.

23. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 2, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 18.

24. Ibid., 81 (sixth meditation); also *Discourse on Method*, in *Descartes Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 141.

25. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 54.

language of “souls” has become impossibly confused and obscure, we can simply say that we are selves, which amounts to the same thing.

The biblical emphasis on the value of the body can be retained by borrowing from Aquinas the insight that we are the kinds of souls that require bodies. We are selves to be sure, but bodily selves that cannot function properly and be all that that they are intended to be without bodies. We might say that we are bodily souls, souls that exist in a bodily form or manner. Paradoxically, thinking of my soul as myself rather than a part of myself allows for a more intimate relation between body and soul than the alternative, for it allows me to think of the body not as a *part* of myself, but my actual manner of being as a whole. I am a soul, but I am not, like an angel, a pure spirit, but rather an incarnate or bodily self or soul.

On this account, the relation between soul (or self) and body can be as intimate as you like. One might believe that the self cannot exist at all without a body that is its form of being.²⁶ Or, perhaps more wisely, following Aquinas, we could hold that the self cannot exist in the fullest and richest sense without a body. The soul can exist between death and the resurrection but cannot carry out all its functions if it does not exist in a bodily form. Thus, human salvation without a resurrected body would be incomplete.

One might here ask why, if self and body are so intimately related, we should not simply identify a person with his or her body. Why not opt for monism, rather than some form of dualism? The answer is that a person as a self must be distinguished from his or her body because a person has some characteristics *qua* self that the person does not have *qua* body. Identity is a necessary relation. If I am identical to my body, then it is necessary that what is true of my body is also true of me and vice versa, just as it is necessarily the case that if the ugliest Irishman is identical to the prime minister of Ireland, then what is true of the prime minister of Ireland must be true of the ugliest Irishman.

Of course this does not mean that it is necessarily the case that the prime minister of Ireland is the ugliest Irishman. The prime minister might have plastic surgery to improve his looks, or some uglier Irishman might be born. Nevertheless, if it is true that the two descriptions designate the same entity, then it is necessarily true that if the ugliest Irishman is in New York, the prime minister of Ireland must be in New York. Similarly, if it were true that a person’s self were identical to the person’s body, then it would be necessarily true that if the person’s body is decomposing in a grave, the person would be decomposing in a grave. If it is even possible for me to exist

26. It is unfortunate, we think, that the Thomistic tradition, following Aristotle, has appropriated the term “form” for the soul, seen as the form of the body. On our view it would make more sense, in contemporary English, to say that the body is the form in which the soul exists. However, we fear that this language would be misunderstood because of the Thomistic usage.

when my current body has ceased to exist, then I cannot be identical to my current body.

Some Christian philosophers agree that a person is not identical to his or her body, but think that we should say that a person is composed of or constituted by his or her body.²⁷ On our view, this “constitution” view still counts as a form of dualism. The reason for this is that if I and my body have different persistence conditions, such that I can exist when my body no longer exists, then I and my body must be counted as two distinct entities. We could view the “constitution” view as the kind of dualism which sees having some body as essential to my existence. If this were the correct view, then we might suppose that God could give the self a kind of temporary body during the intermediate state between death and the resurrection. Even if this were the case, we would still have to distinguish the person from the person’s body. It would just be the case that “having a body” would then be an essential property of a human soul.

Soul and Body and Agency

If the body is the form in which the soul exists, then why talk about soul and body as if they were two distinct entities? Isn’t it misleading to talk of soul and body as if they were two different things? One answer to this question has already been given: If I can exist when my body does not, then I must be distinguished from my body, however closely identified with that body I may now be. Two things that are separable must be distinguished even if they are not currently separate in any way. However, there is more to be said here.

Even if the body is the form in which the soul currently exists, there is a reason why it is natural to speak of body and soul as if they were different entities, and that reason requires us to focus on the fact that the body can be and must be thought of in two different ways. Suppose some individual (such as C. Stephen Evans or Brandon Rickabaugh) uses the term “I” to refer to himself. (In the following passage we will imagine one of us is doing this, since we want to focus on a specific individual who is thinking from a first-person point of view.) When I use the term “I,” I mean to refer to myself as a conscious agent. We can hardly give a full account of what this means here, but at a minimum, it means that I am conscious of myself as an entity who has mental states of various kinds, including perceptions and memories. These mental states include desires and conceived goals, beliefs about how those desires and goals might be achieved (as well as beliefs about other

27. See Lynn Rudder Baker, *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Kevin Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

things), and acts of will directed toward the actualization of certain conceived possibilities in light of those desires and beliefs.

These beliefs include beliefs about the objective character of the world in which I act as a bodily agent. If I know that if I want to be at place *B* and I am currently at place *A*, I will have to move from *A* to *B* in some manner, and I know that this will take some time and some effort. If I want to achieve my goals I must take account of the way the world actually is. I might wish that point *B* were closer to point *A* than it is, but my wishing will not change the nature of the physical world. I thus learn very early to distinguish my conscious acting self from the material world in which I act, a world which shows a certain indifference to my desires and recalcitrance to my will.

The human body plays a dual role in this picture. On the kind of dualistic picture we are describing, the self is a bodily self, and thus the body is not simply another object in the world. It is rather the form in which I exercise my agency. If I move from point *A* to point *B*, I do so by walking or biking or otherwise moving my body. However, the body is also experienced as an object in the world. It can and does exhibit the same indifference and recalcitrance as the rest of the physical world. If my legs are trapped under a car I will not be able to move from point *A* to point *B*. If a brain tumor invades the region of my brain that controls my motor functions, I will similarly be unable to walk and move.

I thus find myself necessarily thinking of my body in two distinct ways: both as the locus of my agency, the form in which I exist as a conscious self, and as an object in the world, a physical entity that, like other physical entities, follows the laws of nature and does not always act as I want it to act. When we think of the body in this second way, we naturally think of it as something distinct from my self; we think of the body as if it were merely another object in the world, an entity whose characteristics I must take account of when I act. And when I think of my body as a material object in the world, it is natural and in fact valuable to objectify it, to study it scientifically as one might study any other object in the world.

When I think of my body as the form in which I exist as a self, it is not a mere object, but myself. When I think of my body in this second, objectified manner, however, it is natural to think of it, not as myself, but as something that the self must take into account in its agency, a part of the physical world. When I think of the body in this objectified way, it is natural to think of it as something distinct from the self. Hence, the language of body and soul as two distinct entities is not only appropriate because of the possibility of life after death; it is also appropriate insofar as we conceive of the body in this objectified manner.

It is, we believe, the close relation between self and body that makes materialism seem plausible. Since the body is the expression of myself, and

for some purposes I necessarily think of my body as an object in the world, it seems plausible to think of myself *simply* as an object in the world.

However plausible this may seem, however, it is a mistake. Because of the unity of the self and its body, and the legitimate ways I must objectify my body, it may be legitimate for some purposes to think of myself as an object. However, I should never think of myself as merely an object. There are two aspects of myself as a conscious agent that cannot be understood and explained when I think of myself simply as a physical object: consciousness and intentionality, that feature of mental states that allows them to have meaning.²⁸ We know what it is like to be conscious because we are conscious beings. No third person account of the brain and its workings can fully account for this, however important the brain may be in producing such conscious states. Similarly, we know what it is like for our thoughts to have meaning because we think them as meaningful.

Significant Minimal Dualism

We call “minimal dualism” the claim that the self and its body are distinct entities because of the possibility of one existing without the other.²⁹ Minimal dualism could be true even if during this life, a person’s mental life is completely a function of what happens in the brain and central nervous system, since all that it presupposes is that through God’s miraculous power a person’s conscious mental life could continue after death without the body. Even this minimal truth would justify me in thinking that I am not identical to my body.

However, when I think of myself as a conscious agent, I find it necessary to affirm what we call “significant minimal dualism.”³⁰ Significant minimal dualism says that I am not only a conscious self, but that when I think of myself as a conscious self I must think of myself as an agent with causal powers. The conscious self is not merely an object in the world, a by-product of neurochemical firings in the brain, but an initiator of actions. The perspective I take on myself when I think of myself as a self is not an illusion but a reality.³¹

Why should I think that significant minimal dualism is true? Part of the answer is that an understanding of oneself as a conscious agent is a product of what Thomas Reid called the faculty of “common sense.” What Reid

28. We realize that these claims here are merely claims, and that this stands in need of argument. The arguments would require another paper, however.

29. C. Stephen Evans, “Separable Souls: A Defense of ‘Minimal Dualism,’” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 19 (1981): 313–32.

30. Evans, “Separable Souls: Dualism, Selfhood, and the Possibility of Life after Death.”

31. For more on this and its relation to dualism, see J. P. Moreland, “Substance Dualism and the Argument from Self-Awareness,” *Philosophia Christi* 13 (2011): 21–34.

meant by this is quite complicated, but in part it means simply that the truth that we are conscious agents can be known with certainty, because it cannot be consistently denied by any sane person. Even the most reductionistic materialist when he or she is living must take a first person point of view which involves willing to act in certain ways. It is not possible to will a course of action and at the same time believe that one's act of willing is an illusion and makes no difference to what happens. Even science is a human activity, and cannot be pursued without agents who make choices. It is therefore irrational to hold on the basis of science that humans are not agents who make meaningful choices.

Is such a perspective undermined by contemporary scientific research that shows how dependent our mental life is on our brains? We would submit that the total body of evidence we currently have does not show this, but just the opposite. It is true that we have much evidence that suggests that our conscious life is powerfully shaped by our brains. But we have just as much evidence that points to the fact that our brains are powerfully shaped by our thinking. Of course our everyday experience seems constantly to confirm this. I think about walking to the soda shop for an ice cream. I decide to do it, and fifteen minutes later I am eating an ice cream. The materialist can of course assert that the mental states in this case are just "epiphenomenal" by-products of brain activity, but it is difficult to live in accordance with this belief.

Consider the placebo effect. When testing a new drug, scientists recognize the importance of double blind studies, in which some of the subjects in the study take a placebo. It is well known that those subjects taking the placebo often improve; for a new drug to be proven effective, it must not only help subjects improve, but help them improve more than the placebo does. The placebo effect can be very powerful, often accounting for one-third or more of the efficacy of a drug. This seems powerful evidence that what I believe can have a significant effect on my body.

Research psychiatrist Jeffrey Schwartz has spent many years studying obsessive-compulsive disorder. As in several other mental illnesses, there are strong correlations between certain mental aspects of this disorder and particular brain configurations; the brains of those with obsessive-compulsive disorder show characteristic patterns. However, Schwartz has provided powerful evidence that the connections do not run simply in one direction.³² In less than twelve weeks, through a program of cognitive training, Schwartz helps his patients overcome their obsessive patterns of behavior. The interesting thing is that brain scans show that the patients who do this

32. See Jeffrey Schwartz, "A Role for Volition and Attention in the Generation of New Brain Circuitry: Toward a Neurobiology of Mental Force," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6, nos. 8–9 (1999): 115–42. Also see chap. 2 of Jeffrey M. Schwartz and Sharon Begley, *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 54–95.

are at the same time systematically transforming the metabolic activity and probably the microstructure of their brains. This seems to suggest that these people are not simply the helpless victims of what happens in their brains: as conscious agents they have the power over time to change their brains. The same powerful brain-imaging tools that show a close connection between our brains and our mental lives provide evidence that we are not simply products of those brains.

It is no doubt partly for these kind of reasons that Christian materialists such as Nancey Murphy and Warren Brown are quick to argue that their materialism is “nonreductive.” As nonreductive materialists, they champion the claim that humans are not mere products of “bottom-up” causation, and affirm the possibility of “top-down” causation in which the conscious thoughts and willings of human persons have causal efficacy.³³ We would affirm that this shows that significant minimal dualism is true. However intimate the connection between self and body, the conscious self is not identical with the body when that body is viewed simply as a physical object. That body may be in this life the form in which that self’s life is lived. But the self and the body must be distinguished, and the truth of the first-person perspective on that self affirmed.

Conclusions and Consequences

Our conclusion is that Christians should continue to affirm the traditional Christian view that human persons are souls or selves, and that souls are not identical with any physical objects. However, we should not think of our souls as ghostly entities that live inside us. Strictly speaking we do not have souls; we are souls. However, on a Christian view this in no way diminishes the importance of the body, because we are embodied, incarnate souls. My body is not simply a part of myself either, but the manner or form of being of my self. I am at the same time wholly soul and yet fully bodily. Wittgenstein says that, “The human body is the best picture of the human soul.”³⁴ That seems right from a Christian perspective.

There are many important practical consequences of this biblical, holistic dualism. Our time will only allow us to list a few of them. All of these points obviously demand fuller thought and elaboration:

- (1) Christians should affirm the value and importance of the body for an understanding of the self, but this does not require us to become materialists.

33. For a reply to Murphy on nonreductive physicalism and top-down causation, see J. P. Moreland, “Mental vs. Top-Down Causation: *Sic et Non*: Why Top-Down Causation Does Not Support Mental Causation,” *Philosophia Christi* 15 (2013): 133–47.

34. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 178e.

- (2) The human body must be thought of in two distinct ways: as an object in the world but also as the form of being of myself as a conscious agent. The former perspective allows us to understand why human persons can be the victim of brain injuries and disorders; the latter perspective keeps us free of any reductionism that views humans purely as objects.
- (3) The soul or self currently exists in a bodily form, and is intended by God to exist in this manner. However, it is possible for the self to exist without its present body, by God's miraculous power.
- (4) Death should be understood in the traditional way as the separation of soul and body. Since the body is the form of existence of the soul, and the soul cannot fully carry out its functions without a body, death is a grievous loss and may properly be mourned. Grief counseling should acknowledge the reality of the loss, as the person who has died, in being separated from his body, is also separated from living loved ones. Yet we should not mourn as "those who have no hope." We should be confident that the believer who has passed away is even now with Christ, eagerly awaiting the final victory and consummation that the general resurrection will bring about.