

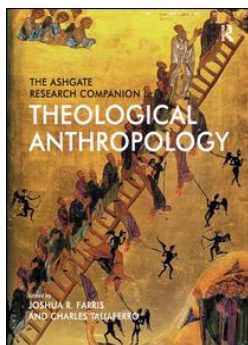
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Scripture and Philosophy on the Unity of Body and Soul: An Integrative Method for Theological Anthropology

John W. Cooper

Overview

The goal of Christian theological anthropology as an academic discipline is daunting: a comprehensive account of scripture's teaching about humanity in relation to God. In principle it addresses all the characteristics, capacities, relationships, and ends of human life as presented in the Bible, from our creation in God's image and fall into sin, through redemption in Jesus Christ, to our future in God's everlasting kingdom.

This chapter, like the others in this volume, does not address theological anthropology as a whole; its focus is on the body-soul relation as an essential part. My goal is to survey how philosophy can help to clarify, elaborate, and integrate what scripture teaches about the unity of body and soul into a comprehensive theological anthropology.

A major reason for this focus is the current debate among Christian scholars whether body-soul dualism or some kind of monism best represents the teaching of scripture.¹ Historically and existentially, the body-soul relation is primarily a religious issue that has to do with death and the afterlife. But it is also a perennial question in philosophy, where the problem is to explain the unity and diversity of human life—how single beings possess irreducibly different physical, mental, and spiritual properties and capacities—as well as the possibility of post-mortem existence. Dualists hold that humans consist of two basic parts or ingredients—soul and body, or spirit and matter—and many affirm the metaphysical possibility of the soul or person existing without the body after death. Monists counter that humans consist of only one basic ingredient which constitutes or generates the whole person—body and soul. But monists disagree about the basic ingredient—whether it is immaterial (idealist, spiritualist, and personalist monism), material (physicalism and emergentism), or neither purely immaterial nor material but generating both soul and body (neutral and psychophysical monism). With respect to the afterlife, immaterialism is the only kind of monism which can readily affirm disembodied existence. These kinds of dualism and monism are the main options in philosophical anthropology. Most of them

¹ Diverse positions are stated in *Faith and Philosophy* 12(4) (October 1995), on "Christian Philosophy and the Mind-Body Problem"; *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons*, ed. Kevin Corcoran (Cornell 2001); and *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. Joel Green and Stuart Palmer (InterVarsity 2005).

are currently endorsed by Christian academics, but versions of dualism, psychophysical monism, and non-reductive materialism are the main contenders.

Philosophical disagreement is not the only reason for the debate among Christians, however. Different views of scripture, its enduring truth-content, and its relation to philosophy and science are more basic. Philosophy cannot resolve these differences, but it can help clarify and elaborate biblical hermeneutics, doctrine, and the relation of revelation and reason. Its role in theological anthropology is extensive.

Given these issues, this chapter first summarizes the biblical presentation of the body–soul relation in this life and the life to come. It then presents the historical background of the current diversity of Christian views, contrasting the historic and modern views of scripture, the relation of revelation and reason, and the body–soul relation. The final section summarizes the strengths and challenges of the competing positions in Christian anthropology and eschatology. My primary intention is to describe the debate fairly rather than to promote a position. But it is clear why I affirm historic Christianity’s two-stage eschatology—that persons exist between death and resurrection—and the dualistic-holistic anthropology it entails.²

The Unity of Body and Soul in Scripture

Biblical Hermeneutics³

The historic Christian approach to interpreting scripture is the grammatical-historical-theological method. It consists of three interrelated phases or operations: exegesis, theological or canonical interpretation, and application. Exegesis aims to understand the meaning and purpose of the original text by considering its vocabulary, syntax, genre, literary devices, related biblical texts, and its extra-biblical, cultural-religious context. Theological or canonical interpretation collates and synthesizes the teaching of all texts to formulate the doctrine of scripture as a whole on specific topics and into a coherent synthesis of all doctrines. Application relates biblical doctrine to current issues of faith, life, and learning.

The genre of biblical doctrine is a key hermeneutical issue. Are scripture’s teachings about body, soul, life, death, and resurrection precise philosophical or scientific concepts? Or are they ancient near-eastern religious imagery that is irrelevant to science and philosophy? In my judgment the right view is between these extremes—ordinary-language realism. Scripture teaches universally intelligible truths expressed in historically-situated, common-

² John Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Eerdmans 1989; Eerdmans and Apollos, 2000); “Biblical Anthropology and the Body-Soul Problem,” *Soul, Body and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons*, ed. Kevin Corcoran (Cornell 2001), 218–28; “The Current Body-Soul Debate: A Case for Dualistic Holism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13/2 (2009): 32–50.

³ Mark Bowald, *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics* (Ashgate 2007), Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (Crossroad 1991); William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, Revised and Updated* (Thomas Nelson, 1993, 2004); Manfred Oeming, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans J. Vette (Ashgate 2006); Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (IVP Academic 1991, 2004); and Daniel Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Baker Academic 2008).

sense, ordinary (sometimes figurative) language.⁴ It is realistic but not always literal or precise in what it teaches about God, angels, miracles, body, soul, life, death, resurrection, and the world to come. Thus biblical anthropology (if it takes a position) is monistic or dualistic in a generic, religious worldview sense. Philosophical and scientific conclusions may or may not be consistent with the view of humanity presented in scripture, which raises the question of ultimate authority.

The following sections apply the grammatical-historical-theological method to ascertain what scripture teaches about the unity of body and soul in this life and the life to come. The number of relevant texts is massive, so we focus on three key issues: God's composition of human beings, the unity of human beings, and the disintegration and reintegration of death and resurrection. These are central issues in the narrative from Genesis to Revelation.

Philosophy can assist with the methodological and epistemological aspects of interpreting these texts, formulating doctrine from them, and applying the biblical view of human nature to contemporary scientific, philosophical, and practical discussions of persons, minds, and organisms. Thus it can be an important bridge between scripture and theological anthropology.

God's Composition of Human Beings

Two Old Testament texts depict God composing human beings. Genesis 2:7 narrates God's creation of the first man by forming his body from soil and breathing into it *neshama*, the breath or spirit of life, so that he becomes a *nephesh chayah*, a living being.⁵ (The King James translation, "living soul," understood dualistically, has caused much confusion.) Ezekiel 37:1–10 prophesies the future resurrection of God's people. The Spirit of God reassembles their bones and tissue into bodies and infuses them with *ruach*—breath or spirit—which brings them to life.

In both texts, God makes living humans by infusing spirit or life-breath into a formed body. One being is constituted of two different components. The body is a non-living entity derived from the earth. *Ruach* and *neshama* are synonyms in ancient near-eastern animism. They refer not only to wind and breath but to the whole range of animal powers—self-movement, sentience, emotions—as well as the powers of angels and gods and the distinctive abilities of humans, who interact with the gods and earthly creatures.⁶ Each kind of being has its own *ruach*. These powers are not derived from the earth but are bestowed and withdrawn by God (cf. Ps. 104:29–30).

It is currently popular to assert that *ruach* and *neshama* are not substances but non-subsistent physical or biological powers—wind and breath. But that claim is too hasty. Evidence suggests that powers imply spiritual entities. *Ruach* refers to God, the gods, angels, and evil spirits—spiritual beings, not mere powers. Further, animist worldviews typically hold that visible powers manifest unseen beings—wind is the breath of God; an epileptic fit is the work of an evil spirit. By that logic, human *ruach* is substantive in the Old Testament because humans have the ability to interact with God and spiritual beings, a power which animals lack even though they are animated by (their kinds of) *ruach*. Spiritual power must come from the (subsistent) spirit in humans. In the Old Testament worldview, humans are

⁴ Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. Carson and J. Woodbridge (Zondervan 1986).

⁵ John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Baker Academic 2006), Ch. 9.

⁶ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. M. Kohl (Fortress 1974), Ch. 4 on *ruach*.

unique creatures in that we are both earthly and spiritual beings—both rulers of nature and a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8)—and composed of both. But it is not clear that human *ruach* is a substance that survives death. Ecclesiastes 12:7 is traditionally regarded as proof that the spirit ascends and exists with God after death. But Ecclesiastes also expresses agnosticism about human destiny (3:19–20) and considers the dead in Sheol as unaware and inactive (9:1–10). Its anthropology is not clear. *Ruach* could simply be an impersonal component withdrawn by God, leaving the dead powerless. All things considered, whether human spirit is substantive or merely functional cannot be determined with certainty from these texts.

What is the doctrinal import of the composition texts, and what might they imply for philosophy? Throughout the history of Christianity, both texts are taken to support dualism: God created humans and will resurrect them by conjoining two irreducible elements—a material body and a spiritual entity, a soul. But monists claim that the texts depict God ending bodily beings with the whole range of human capacities.

Scoring this debate is a sobering exercise in the complexities of relating scripture and philosophy. A key issue, noted above in the introduction, is genre—how precise and realistic the components and divine actions are meant to be. Assuming contextualized ordinary-language realism as stated above, bones, flesh, life-breath, and divine inspiration in Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 37 are not scientific terms or metaphysical categories that stand for substances, ingredients, powers, or their combination. But they do express a realistic worldview using the terms of animistic Hebrew anthropology. They do claim that God constitutes living humans by animating their bodies with spirit. But doctrinal content is another matter—what does the text teach us or require us to believe? Perhaps it teaches that God fused two disparate ingredients. But perhaps the doctrinal point is only that God created human nature as a spiritual-physical duality-in-unity, which is a non-philosophical generalization that most philosophical models of the body–soul relation claim to represent.

As noted, sound biblical hermeneutics forbids drawing conclusions until these texts are related to others that are relevant. We consider two other kinds of texts: those that present humans as integral unities with diverse capacities; and those that envision what happens to humans after death. The same terms and themes expressed in Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 37 are present in these other texts. Taken all together, they present a much clearer picture of the anthropology and eschatology that emerge from the Old Testament and are affirmed in the New Testament.

The Unity of Body and Soul

There is virtual consensus among biblical scholars, theologians, and philosophers that scripture affirms the unity and integration of human life. Monists and dualists agree that body, soul, spirit, heart, mind, and will—whatever their metaphysical nature and relation—are diverse but interdependent, interactive, and integrated aspects or parts of living, active humans. No one in the monism-dualism debate thinks that body and soul are separate, independent, antithetical, or merely juxtaposed in human life, or that bodies are not essential to human life as God intends it. These are popular caricatures that do not fit historic Christian or philosophical substance dualism. Biblical anthropology assumes and confirms universal human experience and belief that our bodies, minds, emotions, relationships, values, hopes, fears, beliefs, choices, and actions are interrelated and affect each other in countless ways.

The most important feature of the biblical emphasis on the unity of human nature is spiritual—that all of life images God, is a gift from him, and should be lived for God

according to his will. All of life is religious or spiritual. No part is purely secular or religiously indifferent; natural life is not separate from spirituality or public life from private faith.

Two iterations of the love command exemplify the diversity and spiritual unity of human nature, Deuteronomy 6:5, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”; and Jesus’ quotation in Mark 12:30, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”⁷ Loving God [and neighbour] is the unifying meaning and purpose of human life.

Pre-modern commentators often understood these anthropological terms as separable parts, echoing Plato’s philosophy. But modern scholars largely agree instead that they pick out distinct but overlapping and interdependent aspects, powers, and functions that constitute an integral existential unity. *Nephesh*, for example, which is frequently rendered as soul in older translations, also refers to the throat and diaphragm, to living (and dead) humans and animals, and to life-breath, as well as to the person—the self or “I”—who know, acts, and relates to God and other humans. *Ruach* shares with *nephesh* the meanings of life-breath and the person as self, subject, or agent.⁸ The terms are synonyms in the Song of Mary: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour” (Lk. 1:46–7). But unlike *nephesh*, *ruach* does not refer to living organisms or parts of them. In both Testaments, the semantic ranges of *nephesh* and *ruach*, and their Greek equivalents, *psuche* and *pneuma*, are distinct but overlapping when referring to humans. The same is true of “heart”—*leb* or *kardia*. Both Testaments refer to the physical organ that beats in the chest, but they speak of it almost exclusively as the seat of emotions, thoughts, choices, actions, and responses to God. The terms for flesh (*basar*, *sarx*) and body or organism (*soma*) are likewise used in distinct but overlapping ways that have personal-spiritual as well as physical functions: “my heart and my flesh cry out” (Ps. 84:2, KJV).

The cumulative result of studying these words in hundreds of texts of various genres from Old and New Testament books is massive and consistent. Human life is a fundamental God-related unity of diverse aspects, capacities, and parts which may have distinct roles and functions but are not self-sufficient or isolated from other parts and aspects within life as a whole. Perhaps phrases like “diversity in God-related unity” or “parts of an integral God-related whole” are adequate. This conclusion is consistent with and enriches the picture of humans as created and resurrected by God in Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 37.

Does this outcome preference a particular philosophical anthropology? All contenders claim to express diversity-in-unity. Dualists hold that God has integrated metaphysically distinct ingredients. (Trichotomists view body, soul, and spirit as distinct components.) Monists counter that God has elicited the interconnected diversity from a single primordial ingredient. But neither group can declare victory or disqualify the other on the basis of the biblical data.

Dualists can account for the diversity more readily than basic unity. Monists can explain basic unity more easily than how diversity arises. Neither side is able to explain fully the interaction between body and soul/spirit. Dualists and psychophysical monists acknowledge the integrity of both the spiritual and physical dimensions better than materialists or idealists, who view one as more basic than the other.

The diversity of aspects or parts does not require dualism. Soul, spirit, and body could be dimensions of an irreducible whole, or parallel terms that refer to the whole person. Thus texts which conjoin the terms, such as Deuteronomy 6 and Mark 12, discussed above, and others like Paul’s expression “your whole spirit, soul, and body” in 1 Thessalonians 5:23,

⁷ Matthew and Luke repeat Deuteronomy 6. Mark uses a Septuagint version which adds mind.

⁸ Wolff, Chs. 2, 4, and 5 on *nephesh*, *ruach*, and *leb* (heart).

provide no basis for metaphysical dualism or trichotomy. Traditional commentaries which appeal to these texts as proofs are on shaky ground. But it is equally true that such texts do not exclude dualism or trichotomy. It is possible that the integrity of human life does consist of different ingredients or parts woven seamlessly together by God, and that texts about the afterlife provide the evidence that soul and spirit are separable.

In the same way, the unity and integrity of existence do not require monism—the view that all of human nature consists of or derives from one basic stuff. What unity and integrity do entail is holism—that human life involves an operational part-whole relation. Whatever its composition and decomposition at death, the divinely-designed state of humanity in this life and the life to come is integrally spiritual, mental, affective, and bodily. This point is crucial, because some monists fail to distinguish monism from holism and fallaciously argue that monism is the biblical position from the evidence for holism.⁹ Although Deuteronomy 6, Mark 12, and 1 Thessalonians 5 do not entail dualism, it does not follow that they imply monism. They are certainly not direct evidence of monism.

In sum, analysis of the biblical texts about human composition and the unity of human nature yields no definitive resolution to the monism-dualism debate. *Prima facie*, dualism and psychophysical monism are closer to the biblical view of diversity-in-unity because they accord spirit and body as parallel components whereas idealism and materialism derive one from the other. But psychophysical monism fits only if the texts do not imply that we are constituted of two components. Dualism is consistent with two components, but it remains unclear whether soul or spirit can exist disembodied until we consider death and resurrection.

Disintegration and Reintegration: Death and Resurrection

Failure to resolve the debate thus far brings us to biblical eschatology—death, resurrection, and everlasting life. This move is not due to a morbid attempt to define life in terms of death, but because it may be decisive for monism or dualism. If not, the issue may be irresolvable. Most monists who hold that embodiment is essential for personal existence propose two alternative eschatologies: immediate resurrection or non-existence between death and future resurrection (discussed below). Thus if scripture implies a division or split in the psychophysical unity of human nature—especially if souls, spirits, or persons are said to exist apart from their flesh or bodies—then generic dualism is established. Monism cannot be proven by eschatology because the unity of human nature merely entails holism, not monism, as argued above. Dualism could be true even if immediate resurrection or a gap in existence occurred—the soul immediately switches bodies, or both body and soul are annihilated and recreated instantly or after a temporal gap. But monism is a reasonable account of biblical anthropology if biblical eschatology involves no separation of body and soul.

So we consider what scripture says about death and what follows. In spite of claims that the Old Testament is monistic and does not envision an afterlife, there is much evidence that it does. Like the other religions around the Mediterranean from Egypt to Greece, the Israelites held that the dead descend into the Underworld—Sheol, Abaddon, or Hades (Septuagint).¹⁰

⁹ Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Baker Academic 2008), 34: “my analysis will demonstrate how the Bible can portray the human person as a single whole or unified being (some sort of monism)”; also Warren Brown and Brad Strawn, *The Physical Nature of the Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church* (Cambridge 2012), esp. Chs 1 and 2.

¹⁰ Alan Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Cornell 1996), Part Two, Ch. 5; Walton, Ch. 14, esp. 320–21; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress 2003), Ch. 2.

Existence there is apparently lethargic, ghost-like, perhaps even comatose—the allusions are figurative—but it pales in comparison with a good life on earth, blessed by God. Jacob hopes to be with his son, Joseph, in Sheol (Gen. 37:35). Isaiah 14 depicts the proud king of Babylon there, and the prophets warn against consorting with the dead. The clearest historical text is 1 Samuel 28, where Samuel returns from Sheol to prophesy the doom of Saul and his sons. The ultimate destiny of the faithful dead is not clear. The Psalmist hopes to “dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (23:6). Only Isaiah 26:19, Ezekiel 37, Daniel 12:2, and possibly Job 19:26 speak explicitly about resurrection. Almost all of these references involve figurative language, but there is ample evidence that the Israelites were realists about an afterlife for human individuals.

Post-mortem existence entails some sort of generic dualism in the Old Testament. The dead body is buried, and what is left of the person endures in the realm of the dead. It seems to be ghost-like—the person is in ethereal bodily form without the flesh, bones, and energy of living humans. *Ruach* departs—taken by God (Eccl.12:7), but not necessarily an enduring entity. *Nephesh* occasionally refers to the dead in Sheol (e.g. Ps. 16:10, 49:15) but *rephaim* (the cognate term for deified ancestors in Ugaritic) is more common. The Old Testament does not have a well-developed eschatology, but the combination of Sheol with future resurrection anticipates Second Temple and New Testament affirmations of two-stage eschatology. If monism precludes discarnate existence, it does not fit the Old Testament anthropology of death and resurrection.

It is important to consider Second Temple Judaism because it bridges the Old and New Testaments. The eschatological writings of the period are varied and diverse, but three important positions are relevant. The Sadducees held that Sheol symbolizes annihilation, appreciated Greek materialism, and did not believe in an afterlife. Philo of Alexandria used Plato to articulate the immortality of the soul and spiritual resurrection. The Pharisees and rabbis developed the Old Testament teachings about Sheol and future resurrection into a two-stage view—a conscious intermediate state until the resurrection and final judgment at the coming of the Messiah. A number of texts from this period refer to the dead awaiting resurrection as souls or spirits, an elaboration of their Old Testament meanings. Like the Old Testament, the anthropology of the Pharisees valued the body and emphasized resurrection. Its dualistic holism is a third option between Platonism and materialism.¹¹ There is no precedent for immediate bodily resurrection or non-existence until future resurrection, the two monist eschatologies.

The New Testament adapts the view of the Pharisees and rabbis.¹² In Acts 23:6–8, Paul identifies with the Pharisees against the Sadducees regarding the existence of angels, the spirits of the dead, and the resurrection. This is a key to understanding Paul’s letters. When all his assertions are combined into a coherent whole, they present a two-stage eschatology of fellowship with Christ until future resurrection. In 2 Corinthians 5:6–8 (Philippians 1:20–22 is parallel), remaining alive is “at home in the body and away from the Lord,” whereas death is “to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:52, he dates the resurrection at the future return of Christ. Together these texts envision continuing fellowship with Christ between bodily death and future bodily resurrection. There is no gap in fellowship with Christ and no immediate resurrection. With respect to anthropological terminology, Paul does not write that his soul or spirit will be with Christ but I—the first person pronoun—“I . . . in the body or apart from the body,” a meaning which soul and spirit sometimes share. He also uses the first person in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4,

¹¹ Wright, 190–200.

¹² Wright, 327, 424, 448, and 475–9.

where he wonders whether he left his body to visit Paradise in the Third Heaven while still alive. Surely Paul believed that persons can exist without their bodies.¹³

More fundamental than Paul is Jesus. Luke 23:43 makes clear that Jesus was with the thief in Paradise between his death and resurrection. Jesus is truly human as well as true God. He enacted a two-stage eschatology in which there is neither an existential gap nor an immediate resurrection. His disembodied human spirit existed between his death and resurrection, not just his divinity. His journey through death to resurrection blazes the trail for all who find salvation in him to follow (1 Cor. 15:20). Meanwhile, the gift of eternal life in him means that, although we die physically, we never die spiritually [cease to exist] as we await final resurrection (Jn. 11:25–6). Not even death can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:38–9). All these texts promise continuous existence in God’s plan of salvation.

With respect to terminology, the spirits of the existent dead are mentioned in Acts 23:8, Hebrews 12:26, and 1 Peter 3:19. The disciples thought that Jesus was a spirit—a ghost, a dead human—when they saw him walking on water (Matt. 14:26, Mk. 6:49). He assured them he was not a ghost when he appeared on Easter evening (Luke 24:37–9). Jesus warns his hearers to fear God, who can destroy body and soul (psyche) in hell, and not humans, who can kill the body but not the soul (Matt. 10:28).¹⁴ The souls of the martyrs in Revelation 6:9–11 await resurrection and final justice at the end of history, as well as the 144,000 saints of the church triumphant who surround God’s throne in Revelation 7. Soul and spirit do sometimes refer realistically to the not yet resurrected dead.

Given the texts and context, the most natural and reasonable conclusion is that the New Testament, like prominent strands of Second Temple Judaism, speaks of body, soul, and spirit dualistically in connection with death and the afterlife.

It is unnecessary to survey the numerous references to resurrection in the New Testament to establish it as the central teaching about life after death. Two issues are relevant to the current body-soul debate, however: the time of the resurrection and the nature of the resurrection.

With respect to timing, the resurrection occurs at the return of Christ, according to Paul, noted above. In Romans 8:18–23 he also correlates “the redemption of our bodies” with “the renewal of all things,” which Christ will bring about at the end of this age. John correlates the resurrection with the return of Christ and the final judgment in Revelation 20. John 6:54 and 11:24 place the resurrection “on the last day.” Every text that indicates when resurrection is to occur puts it at the end of the world.

The nature of the resurrection is most clearly described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:35–54. He states that the body raised is the same body that died. He also makes clear that our earthly bodies, which are like Adam’s “soulish” body (*soma psuchikos*), will be transformed into spiritual bodies (*soma pneumatikos*) like Jesus’ resurrected body. This does not mean that a material entity will become immaterial, but what was mortal, weak, and dishonorable will be made immortal, powerful, and glorious by God’s Spirit.

In sum, the most natural and coherent reading of the New Testament is a two-stage eschatology of discarnate existence and final resurrection. It affirms personal existence between death and resurrection but provides little description of it. Its major emphasis is bodily resurrection, which completes and perfects the salvation of humans as created by God. In God’s everlasting kingdom, humans will worship God, fellowship with him, and

¹³ Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 170–78, argues that Paul is a monist. George Van Kooten, *Paul’s Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Mohr Siebeck 2008), argues that Paul blends Jewish and Platonic anthropology.

¹⁴ It is possible to read Matthew 10:28 non-dualistically, but spirit is certainly dualistic in 14:26.

rule with Christ in the new creation as bodily beings, just as we were created to do. In teaching that persons, souls, or spirits temporarily exist apart from their bodies, scripture implies that human beings disintegrate or “come apart” at death—a dichotomy that entails a dualism of some sort. But the language of the New Testament is the vernacular of its Jewish and Greco-Roman context, not philosophy.

Conclusion: Body and Soul in Scripture

We have considered the composition, unity, and destiny of humans in scripture. Its presentation of the composition and unity of humans during life affirms duality within a basic unity but does not clearly imply monism or dualism. However, the most natural and coherent exegesis of the eschatological texts does require some sort of generic dualism to account for disembodied personal existence between death and future resurrection. Both monistic alternatives—immediate resurrection and temporary non-existence—conflict with some texts. The most coherent conclusion from all three topics is the following: God created body and soul/spirit as an existential-functional holistic unity. But they are sufficiently distinct that the soul and/or spirit—the individual person—by God’s power can exist and respond to God temporarily apart from the body. Thus biblical anthropology is a generic, non-philosophical holistic dualism or dualistic holism.

The Historical Development of the Christian Dualism-Monism Debate

This conclusion is the same one that the vast majority of Christians have reached for almost two millennia. Since earliest times the church and Christian scholars have interpreted the Bible as teaching body-soul dualism and two-stage eschatology. There was no real challenge to these doctrines until the seventeenth century, when some Christians re-ordered the relationship between revelation and reason and affirmed theistic naturalism. This reversal allowed for a variety of conclusions about the Christian doctrine of the life to come and the body-soul relation.

The Historic Ecumenical Position

The historic consensus and current doctrine of Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and confessional Protestant churches is that holy scripture is divinely inspired, true, and authoritative in all that it teaches. God is the primary author of the biblical canon, has meticulously superintended its formation and content through human authors and traditions, and continues to speak through it. Christian doctrine, formulated by the church as led by the Holy Spirit, summarizes the truth of God’s enduring revelation in scripture.¹⁵ Sometimes

¹⁵ Website of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of American, Our Faith, “The Basic Sources of the Teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church,” <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7064/>, accessed 7/3/13; Catechism of the Catholic Church, Pt I, Ch. 2, Art. 3, “Sacred Scripture”; *Belgic Confession*, Arts. 3, 5, and 7. Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant churches disagree over the relation of the church’s authority and the authority of scripture, but not over the nature, inspiration, and authority of scripture or the church’s responsibility for true interpretation.

extra-biblical knowledge properly challenges received interpretations of scripture. But ultimately, truth-claims about nature, history, morality, God, and the body–soul relation which are based on experience and reason should be compatible with and understood in terms of the truth taught in scripture.

Historic Christianity affirms God’s transcendence and supernatural action in the world, as well as his immanent action within the natural order. It holds that created reality consists of physical and spiritual dimensions, and that humans participate in both. By and large, historic Christianity has (sometimes reluctantly) incorporated modern scientific conclusions about the age, structure, processes, and development of the universe and life on earth into this theological-philosophical worldview.¹⁶ It remains the official doctrine of most churches and is embraced by respected scientists, philosophers, theologians, and thoughtful non-academics.

The anthropology of historic ecumenical Christianity is holistic in emphasizing the unity of body and soul as created for earthly life, redeemed by Christ, and consummated in everlasting life. It is dualistic in affirming that God created humans from material and immaterial ingredients and that souls or persons exist between death and resurrection.¹⁷ To elaborate these biblical doctrines, the church fathers reformulated Plato’s substance dualism—the view that soul and body are distinct entities or substances so conjoined that the body is “in” the soul and the soul permeates every part of the body. This position has been held by Christians ever since. It was revised as dualistic interactionism by Descartes in the seventeenth century. World-class Christian philosophers currently defend substance dualism (A. Plantinga, R. Swinburne). A recent addition is emergent dualism (W. Hasker, D. Zimmerman), which holds that persons develop from physical organisms but are sufficiently distinct beings that God can sustain them without their organisms after death.¹⁸

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas modified substance dualism with Aristotle’s metaphysics of form and matter. He taught that the soul is the form of the body. It not only thinks and wills but also organizes and animates matter to be a living, sensing body. Thus a human is one integral being or substance consisting of two basic ingredients, not two substances conjoined. Unlike Aristotle, Thomas considered the soul to be subsistent, so it can exist and function intellectually in the unnatural disembodied state between death and resurrection. His view is neither substance dualism nor standard monism but has features of both. It is a variation of the historic Christian position and is still widely held (John Paul II, E. Stump, J.P. Moreland).

The holistic-dualistic anthropology of historic Christianity remains the teaching of most churches and presumably is believed by most Christians, including some leading scholars.

¹⁶ For example, B.B. Warfield, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Creation,” *The Princeton Theological Review*, xiii (1915), 190–255; John Paul II, “Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: On Evolution” (1996), Catholic Information Network website, <http://www.cin.org/jp2evolu.html>; and Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (Free Press 2006).

¹⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), exposition of Articles 11 and 12 of the Apostles’ Creed; website of The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Our Faith: “Death: The Threshold to Everlasting Life” (<http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7076>), July 2013; *The Heidelberg Catechism*, Question/Answers 1 and 57 on the unity of body and soul in life, their separation at death, and their reunion at the resurrection.

¹⁸ Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul* (Wiley-Blackwell 2011) is an excellent overview of the various dualist and monist positions.

Modern Christianity

A significant change occurred during the Enlightenment, when Deists and Christian rationalists, tired of interdenominational bickering, progressively adopted the rules and conclusions of reason as basic criteria for determining the truth of scripture.¹⁹ Reversing the historic order of revelation and reason, they engaged in biblical interpretation and theological construction within the framework of the philosophy and science that developed after Galileo and Newton. Modern criteria of rationality trumped traditional doctrines when they conflicted. Rationalists agreed that the uniformity of nature—an operative assumption of science—is a universal principle. An implication for religion and theology is theistic naturalism, the view that all of God's action in nature and history is immanent in and in complete conformity to the order and states of nature.²⁰ Supernatural action is relegated beyond the universe to the afterlife.

Theistic naturalism has implications for the nature of scripture and what it teaches.²¹ First, revelation and inspiration are entirely natural and historical. The Bible is a divinely guided collection of human responses to historically situated experiences of God. Its doctrinal content is much less coherent and detailed than historic orthodoxy supposes. Second, theistic naturalism eliminates supernatural miracles and, when coupled with scientific materialism or psychophysical monism, it denies that human beings have a metaphysically distinct spiritual component. Theistic naturalism has been widely assumed in historical-critical biblical scholarship and mainstream theology since the Enlightenment. It has nurtured the development of theological anthropologies and eschatologies consistent with scientific naturalism and physicalism.

The first major departure from ecumenical Christian doctrine pertained to the afterlife, not body-soul dualism. Most Christian rationalists and Deists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were dualists who believed in personal immortality but, committed to naturalism, no longer affirmed the resurrection of the earthly body. In the nineteenth century, some liberal Christians—influenced by Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher—adopted idealism, which allows for personal existence beyond earthly life but considers the earthly body incidental. These dualist and idealist eschatologies have more in common with Socrates and Plato than with historic Christianity. They were the target of Cullmann's famous essay, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead."²²

Currently the main challenges to historic Christian anthropology and eschatology are from materialism and psychophysical monism. They have not been widely held until recently but also have roots in the seventeenth century. Thomas Hobbes was the first

¹⁹ James Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, Vol. 1 (Fortress 1997, 2006), Chs 1 and 2. Locke in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* still accepted biblical miracles as "beyond reason" but not "contrary to reason." But Hume's "On Miracles" argues that belief in supernatural miracles is always contrary to reason. Hume's contemporary, Hermann Reimarus, the father of modern biblical scholarship, interpreted scripture according to Hume's principle in his *Wolfenbuettel Fragments*, published posthumously by Lessing.

²⁰ Arthur Peacock, *All That Is: A Naturalistic Faith for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. P. Clayton (Fortress 2007), especially "Emergent Monism" and "Theistic Naturalism."

²¹ C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford 1996) for an elaboration and critique of the assumptions of critical biblical scholarship; also Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford 2000), Ch. 12, "Two (or More) Kinds of Scripture Scholarship."

²² Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?," *Theologische Zeitschrift* (1956), *Immortality and Resurrection* (London: Macmillan, reprint 1965). Cullman famously argued that the dominant teaching within the Christian scriptures is the physical resurrection of the body not the immortality of the soul, thus undermining dualist readings of scripture.

Christian to interpret scripture and explain the body–soul relation in terms of materialism. Not many Christians followed him until recently, because materialism was long regarded as antithetical to theism. Spinoza held that mind and body are two aspects of one substance. In his wake, nineteenth-century panpsychism regarded mind and body as distinct but correlative configurations of primordial vital or psychic energy. This perspective was adapted by William James, Teilhard de Chardin, and A.N. Whitehead early in the twentieth century. The synthesis of theology with Big Bang cosmology since the 1960s for the first time made materialism and psychophysical monism tenable and attractive to Christians from a range of theological outlooks. They could now propose that God has progressively generated everything in the universe, including human souls, from primordial (physical) energy by natural evolutionary processes. It is noteworthy that this synthesis of theology and the scientific worldview is embraced by adherents of traditional and evangelical Christianity (P. van Inwagen, J. Green, N. Murphy) as well as those in the theological mainstream (W. Pannenberg, J. Moltmann, A. Peacocke).

Most who adopt this theistic-naturalist perspective understand the body–soul relation in terms of materialism, emergentism, or psychophysical monism. All these alternatives to dualism attempt to avoid the reductionism and determinism of classical materialism and to defend human agency and spirituality. Non-reductive physicalism (N. Murphy) affirms that souls or persons are generated by organisms but not explainable by biological categories. They “supervene” on organisms and interact with them. Material constitution (L. Baker, K. Corcoran) is the view that persons are constituted by their bodies but are distinct beings with distinct capacities. Emergentism (A. Peacocke, P. Clayton, T. O’Connor) holds that souls are individual persons who possess ontologically distinct and irreducible properties and capacities generated by physical and biological processes of their bodies. Psychophysical monism holds that souls and bodies or persons and organisms are correlative aspects of human beings who are constituted of primal energy or events that are neither purely material nor immaterial but generate both (J. Polkinghorne, W. Pannenberg, D. Griffin). I refer to these views collectively as monism.

Christians who hold monism typically deny disembodied interim existence because they regard the soul as essentially embodied. They propose two alternative scenarios. One is immediate resurrection at the moment of death (J. Hick, W. Pannenberg). The other is non-existence until the final resurrection (J. Polkinghorne, J. Green, N. Murphy). Persons cease to exist until their bodies are resurrected—a gap in existence but not in experience.

A few monists have hypothesized a bodily intermediate state (L. Baker, K. Corcoran, T. O’Connor). At death God splits the matter of the earthly body into a corpse and a body that constitutes or generates the person until resurrection.²³ This scenario does account for interim existence and continuing personal identity.

Summary

The diversity of positions in the current Christian body-soul debate has developed since the seventeenth century from different beliefs about the Bible, different understandings of how it portrays human beings and the afterlife, and different ways of relating its perspective to science and philosophy. Currently, holistic dualism and two-stage eschatology remain the doctrines of most Christian churches and many Christian scholars. But theologically

²³ T. O’Connor and J. Jacobs, “Emergent Individuals and the Resurrection,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2 (2010), 69–88.

conservative and progressive Christians alike promote several kinds of non-reductive monism as well.

Scripture, Philosophy, and the Unity of Body and Soul

This historical survey of approaches to scripture, theology, and theological anthropology identifies three general positions in the current body-soul debate: historic Christian dualism, modern theistic naturalist monism, and historic Christian monism. This section summarizes the strengths and challenges of each position's philosophical mediation of scripture to theological anthropology.

Historic Christian Dualism-in-Unity

The historic position seems to be the most natural interpretation of the biblical text in its historical context. Scripture has been understood that way in ecumenical Christianity since the early church. It not only affirms the biblical emphasis on the unity of human life, but also accounts for its two-stage eschatology—personal existence between death and resurrection. It takes the biblical perspective as the framework for philosophical and scientific reflection on the human constitution. Its holistic dualism remains the doctrine of Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and most historic and evangelical Protestant churches, and thus it is likely the faith of a large majority of the world's Christians. In addition, this anthropology shares with most of the world's religions the belief that embodiment is not necessary for the soul or consciousness—Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, animism, and popular deism.

Dualism is also important for three other major topics in theological anthropology I can only mention—the image of God, freedom of the will, and the two natures of Christ.

Dualism provides a substantial and not merely functional view of the image of God. Because God is Spirit and does not have a body, traditional orthodoxy locates the image of God in the human spirit understood as a substance that expresses its God-imagining powers bodily.

Dualism supports libertarian free will (if humans possess it—an old Christian debate) because it holds that persons as agents transcend and can engage the causal chains of physical-organic processes upon which they also partially depend. Monisms which completely correlate mental events with bodily events have difficulty avoid determinism or compatibilism (of freedom and determinism).

Dualism supports Chalcedonian Christology, which asserts that the divine and human natures of Christ are neither mixed nor separated. If Jesus' human life depended on his embodiment, as monism holds, then he ceased to exist when he died, which would have separated his humanity and divinity. His resurrection would have been God the Son taking on flesh a second time. Dualism allows that the humanity of Jesus existed disembodied but united to his divinity until his resurrection on Easter.

These are some strengths of dualism-in-unity philosophies for theological anthropology. The main weakness of dualism is that it seems false and old-fashioned to people partial to scientific naturalism.

Theological anthropology requires sound philosophy as well as faithfulness to scripture. Space does not permit a summary of the philosophical strengths and criticisms of dualism

in relation to various monisms or the merits and challenges of different kinds of dualism.²⁴ Theologians who are convinced that scripture teaches dualistic anthropology must decide which kind of philosophical dualism is most compatible with the nuances of the biblical perspective, earns the highest score in philosophical debate, and best comports with the evidence of ordinary experience and the sciences that study humans.

Theistic Naturalism and Monism

Christians who accept theistic naturalism and the current scientific worldview are entirely consistent in adopting a monistic anthropology and reading scripture accordingly. They can take either of two approaches toward the biblical perspective on humanity. One is to acknowledge that the traditional interpretation is correct—a dualistic anthropology and two-stage eschatology—but not regard these beliefs as enduring doctrines, just as other pre-scientific views, such as a flat earth and a recent creation, are not counted as doctrines. The other conclusion is that the tradition is mistaken and scripture does present a monistic anthropology and embodied eschatology. They can point to the biblical emphasis on the unity of human life and bodily resurrection. They can reinterpret the relatively few texts that seem to support dualism as figurative references to embodied persons and embodied eschatology. They can even affirm two-stage eschatology and adopt a monistic account of embodied interim existence. In these ways monists can claim to agree with biblical doctrine.

Theistic naturalism and monistic anthropology may not be the doctrines of most churches, most Christians, or most world religions. But Christians who affirm them believe they will gain increasing acceptance as scientific research and education progress. They wish to show that the Christian faith is not tied to outdated philosophy and science.

Monists are eager to reformulate theological anthropology, including the image of God, freedom of the will, and even the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

The image of God in humans is functional—those abilities that embodied humans have which are analogous to God’s abilities to love, know, do justice, care for creation, and the like. The fact that God is Spirit and humans are physical is not important to God’s image in humans.

Most monists hold that human choice and action are not simply effects of brain functions but are irreducible and exercise “top-down” causality on brain functions. Even if this explanation implies compatibilism (freedom and determinism are compatible), it agrees with traditional theologians, such as Jonathan Edwards. Emergentism can allow for libertarian free will if emergent personal agency sufficiently transcends the causal nexus of its organism. The psychophysical monism of process theology does affirm libertarian free will because process metaphysics holds that all entities self-actualize from genuine options.

Jesus’ death and resurrection can be understood as an immediate resurrection followed by a series of appearances to his disciples, or as a temporary ethereal embodiment followed by resurrection. Only the non-existence/future resurrection view separates Christ’s divine and human nature.

These examples illustrate how monism can approach other topics of theological anthropology.

The monist eschatologies of immediate resurrection and non-existence/future resurrection face a philosophical problem, however: the identity of the person before and

²⁴ *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essay on the Metaphysics of Human Persons*, ed. Kevin Corcoran (Cornell 2001) and *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. Joel Green and Stuart Palmer (InterVarsity 2005) are anthologies of various dualisms and monisms.

after resurrection.²⁵ Immediate resurrection seems to imply two different persons because it posits two different bodies—a corpse and a resurrection body—and holds that persons are essentially tied to their bodies. Exact similarity is not numerical identity. Identity would be preserved if a soul switched bodies, but that requires dualism. If resurrection follows a gap in existence, then the identity of the person has no metaphysical basis, no continuity between embodiments. It is as possible that the resurrected person is a copy of the earthly person as that they are identical. Multiple copies of the earthly person are hypothetically possible, and all would have equally valid claims to being that person, which is impossible. Monists respond that personal identity is guaranteed if this is how God brings about everlasting life. But this view commits God to a weak and arbitrary ontology of identity.

The third monist eschatology—survival of an embodied person—does account for personal identity in immediate or future resurrection. God supernaturally causes an ontological dichotomy in which the person survives the dissolution of the whole. She is an ethereal bodily being—a ghost, a spirit. This scenario does account for two-stage eschatology and the souls and spirits of the dead. But it looks suspiciously like emergent dualism. It is most similar to a dualism which hold that persons, souls, or spirits are immaterial bodily beings—humans are always bodily beings but not always material.²⁶

Monist anthropologies, like dualisms, have philosophical assets and liabilities which are constantly debated. Non-reductive physicalism, material constitution, and emergent monism offer non-reductive, multi-dimensional, functionally integral accounts of the unity of body and soul. Psychophysical monism might be more appealing theologically because it accords the soul and body correlative status, as scripture does, whereas physicalism and emergentism view the body as basic and the soul as derivative.

Biblical Monism

Unless it can account for two-stage eschatology, biblical monism in my view is the most difficult position to hold in the body-soul debate because of the tension between its view of scripture and its anthropology. It affirms the historic ecumenical view of the nature and authority of scripture but holds that current monism is correct about body and soul. Its greatest challenge is to show that scripture teaches monism instead of dualism. Given their view that scripture is the ultimate authority, biblical monists may not evaluate the scripture's truth-claims and construe its doctrine in conformity with science and philosophy. They must interpret scripture on its own terms by the most reliable methods and then see how its doctrines comport with current science and philosophy. Unless they can demonstrate that the Bible teaches monism, or at least that it does not teach dualism, biblical monists hold an anthropology which is at odds with their professed view of scripture and which sides with scientific naturalism.

A sound case requires an alternative monistic exegesis of the texts about death and the life to come because, as argued above, the texts about the composition and unity of human life are not decisively dualist or monist. (Duality does not entail dualism; holism does not warrant monism.) Biblical monism must make its case using hermeneutics (exegesis and theological interpretation) consistent with the historic doctrine of the inspiration and

²⁵ K. Corcoran, ed., *Soul, Body, and Survival*, and Georg Gasser, *Personal Identity and Resurrection: How Do We Survive our Death?* (Ashgate 2010), are recent anthologies on this topic.

²⁶ Thomas Schaertel, "Bodily Resurrection: When Metaphysics Needs Phenomenology," in *Personal Identity and Resurrection*, ed. G. Gasser, 103–25, proposes something like this. Aquinas held that the soul is the subsistent form of the body.

authority of scripture, which regards all texts as parts that contribute to a coherent whole. It must re-exegete all the texts that refer to the souls or spirits of the dead, existence apart from the body, and most crucially the texts about Jesus' death and resurrection. It must show that all are figurative references to embodied persons—that historic Christian realism has misinterpreted them. It must show that monist exegeses of the texts in context are as strong as the best case for dualist exegeses. (Simply proposing an alternative interpretation does not justify it.) Further, biblical monism must present an alternative theological interpretation, which synthesizes all the particular texts into a coherent biblical monism with the same breadth and depth as the case for dualism.

In my judgment, biblical monism has not made this case.²⁷ Most monists only address a few selected texts. Granted that modern biblical studies have shown that some traditional interpretations of anthropological terms are not sufficiently nuanced and overly Platonic, they have not shown that the texts imply monism. In fact current scholarship strengthens the case for a two-stage view of the life to come and a non-Platonic dualistic-holistic anthropology.²⁸

It might be possible to develop a complete case for biblical monism. Two-stage monist eschatology might be a way. Monists have been at it only a few decades, whereas dualists have had two millennia. But if sufficient time and effort fail to produce an adequate case, it will be reasonable to conclude that scripture cannot be interpreted monistically using historic hermeneutics. Then biblical monists will have to choose between what follows from the historic doctrine of scripture and what follows from scientific naturalism. The choice will not be between revelation and reason, however, because generic holistic dualism will still be the most reasonable interpretation of scripture, and dualism will still be an ample metaphysical framework for physics, biology, and psychology.

Conclusion: Scripture, Philosophy, Theological Anthropology, and the Gospel

Philosophy has played an important historical role in interpreting scripture, relating it to extra-biblical knowledge, and elaborating theological anthropology. It continues to do so. Depending on their readings of scripture and its relation to extra-biblical knowledge, theologians employ philosophical dualism, idealism, psychophysical monism, emergentism, and non-reductive physicalism to formulate what they regard as the most faithful and reasonable articulations of the Bible's teaching about the unity of body and soul.

The debate remains vigorous, rigorous, and sometimes tedious. Important issues are at stake, but not the Gospel. All participants agree that God created us—body and soul—and that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he graciously gives us everlasting life—body and soul.

²⁷ Joel Green is the leading Bible scholar who is a biblical monist. See his *Body, Soul, and Human Life*; and "What about ...? Three Exegetical Forays into the Body-Soul Discussion," *Criswell Theological Review* 7 (2010), 3–18. I challenge his exegesis in "The Bible and Dualism Once Again: Reply to Joel B. Green and Nancey Murphy," *Philosophia Christi* 9/2 (2007), 459–69; and "Exaggerated Rumors of Dualism's Demise: A Review Essay on [Joel Green's] *Body, Soul and Human Life*," *Philosophia Christi* 11/2 (2009), 453–64.

²⁸ N.T. Wright, *Resurrection*, is the most extensive study to date.