

**Christian Physicalism is *Not* Crazy:  
A Survey of Contemporary Scholarship**

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**Introduction**

Physicalists, whether Christian or non-Christian, are sometimes quick to dismiss or disparage the idea of the immaterial soul. Some physicalists, particularly of the non-Christian variety, see dualism’s intuitiveness as a vice, pejoratively labelling it as “folk psychology;”<sup>1</sup> that is, a belief characteristic of the unenlightened and unsophisticated. More concrete examples include Joanna Collicut McGrath claiming that “Neither science, nor our own experience provides any support for the existence of disembodied human minds in this world,”<sup>2</sup> or Frances Young simply seeing the abandonment of dualism by “serious theological anthropology” as a foregone conclusion.<sup>3</sup> Examples can be multiplied, especially for Cartesian dualism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul M. Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness: A Contemporary Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2001), 7, 44–45; John R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1992), 5–6, 46, 91.

<sup>2</sup> Joanna Collicut McGrath, “Discernment and the Psychology of Perception,” in *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 81.

<sup>3</sup> Frances M. Young, *God’s Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity*, CIT (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 117.

<sup>4</sup> After a choice sampling of quotations, David Oderberg notes that “Cartesian dualism has clear and unassailable pride of place as the whipping post on which dualists are ritualistically flailed” (“Hylemorphic Dualism,” in *Personal Identity*, ed. Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul, *Social Philosophy and Policy* 22 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 70–71), while Sarah Coakley muses, “Indeed, after a survey of such recent secondary views, I am struck by the unanalyzed vehemence and passion with which Descartes is sometimes loaded with blame, especially by theologians. What is it, I wonder, about our current social and cultural circumstances, that makes Descartes such an easy target of scorn and loathing?” (*Powers*

Yet the converse of dualists dismissing physicalism can be equally as inappropriate. Although examples in print are scant, nonetheless I constantly encounter a pervasive attitude at conferences and seminars exemplified by an incredulous stare at the mere mention of Christian physicalism as though I said something paradoxical like “jumbo shrimp” or contradictory like “square circle.” It is not uncommon for me to have to defend the coherence of Christian physicalism after having mentioned that my dissertation is arguing against it (though I suspect many might still find my dissertation topic to be contrived). Maybe that is more of a commentary of the social and professional circles I navigate, but I fear my anecdotal evidence is symptomatic of a greater problem, and that is we Evangelicals think Christian physicalism is crazy.

Thus, in this paper I shall argue that the Christian physicalist anthropology is *not* crazy by first carefully defining what we mean by it; then surveying some key argumentative strategies justifying the position from three key disciplines—biblical studies, theology, and philosophy; and then finally drawing some conclusions on how to proceed with future academic exchange.

### **Defining Physicalism**

*Materialism*, also known as *physicalism*, is the view that human persons are strictly material or strictly physical substances.<sup>5</sup> This stands in direct contrast with *dualism*, the view that

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*and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender, Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 76).

<sup>5</sup> “Substance” will be featured throughout this paper despite it being notoriously difficult to define. Many define it ostensibly with organisms being the prime exemplar. Presently, I shall understand a substance to have (at least) two typical characteristics. First, it is the bearer or subject of properties, especially an essence or a nature (i.e. the sort of property or set of properties that qualify the bearer to be a member of a kind). For example, a carrot exemplifies the property of being orange, while orange-ness itself does not bear any properties (except, perhaps, genus-species properties like “being a color”). Second, it is its own object rather than a

the human person is both an immaterial soul and a physical body. Note carefully that this thesis pertains only to humans and should not to be confused for *global physicalism*, the belief that all of reality is exclusively physical.<sup>6</sup> Christian physicalists deny the larger claim since it is so characteristic of naturalistic atheism, and thus clearly incompatible with their religion.<sup>7</sup> I suspect the conflation of the global and local theses leads to both the incredulous stare and the casual dismissal: If we believe in an immaterial, incorporeal God (e.g., John 4:24), then it just seems obvious that all of reality cannot be exclusively physical.

Yet, being strictly physical in composition does not preclude some sort of immaterial reality for humans. No Christian scholar, as far as I know, subscribes to *reductive* or *eliminative physicalism*, the view that all mental phenomena are nothing but physical phenomena or are otherwise illusory and ought to be discarded.<sup>8</sup> Rather, many physicalists today, Christian or

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part of another object. So, while my dog is a substance, his leg is not. We will examine whether this conception of substance is adequate throughout, especially as persons are substances.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver D. Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 137–39; Dean W. Zimmerman, “Three Introductory Questions,” in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30; Kevin J. Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 13 n. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Peter van Inwagen, “A Materialist Ontology of the Human Person,” in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 206; Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, CIT (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1–2; Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature*, 13; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “‘Multidimensional Monism’: A Constructive Theological Proposal for the Nature of Human Nature,” in *Neuroscience and the Soul: The Human Person in Philosophy, Science, and Theology*, ed. Thomas M. Crisp, Steven L. Porter, and Gregg A. Ten Elshof (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 216–17; Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 161–62.

<sup>8</sup> As also observed by Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Guides for the Perplexed (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 70–71. Reductivism and eliminativism seem functionally equivalent, both amounting to an antirealism or nihilism

otherwise, affirm *mental realism*, the belief that mental properties and subjectivity are real and distinct from physical properties and phenomena. In so doing, physicalists also subscribe to *property dualism*: The human person possesses both physical and non-physical properties, mental properties being among the latter.<sup>9</sup> So, although a human may have some immaterial reality in so far as some of her properties are immaterial, she is not herself immaterial—not any more than gray having the property of being a color likewise grants my gray car the property of being a color.<sup>10</sup>

Except for a rejection of reductive/eliminative materialism, not all of the Christian physicalists featured in this investigation have made firm commitments to a specific variety of physicalism. Such a level of detail is of little importance for many of their arguments, and the disagreement over those details is intramural. However, one is broadly able to discern two major

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regarding the mental as an entity or phenomenon in its own right, though some disagree with that assessment (e.g., Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 4th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2015), 230). Though Oliver Crisp affirms the (possible?) existence of Christians holding this view in *God Incarnate*, 147–48, he provides no examples. Though waning in popularity, reductive/eliminative materialism is far from dead (see, e.g., Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*; Patricia Smith Churchland, *Touching a Nerve: The Self as Brain* (New York: Norton, 2013)).

<sup>9</sup> In addition to the constitutionalists discussed below, Trenton Merricks, “The Word Made Flesh: Dualism, Physicalism, and the Incarnation,” in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 294–95; Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, chp. 3; John C. Polkinghorne, “Towards an Integrated Anthropology,” in *The Depth of the Human Person: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 80–81; Warren S. Brown, “Cognitive Contributions to Soul,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 101–03; Kärkkäinen, ““Multidimensional Monism,”” 212–16. This is not a uniquely Christian physicalist trend (e.g., Jaegwon Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)). Other non-physical properties include moral properties.

<sup>10</sup> Some even think that physical properties are not themselves physical, even if they confer physicality (see van Inwagen, “A Materialist Ontology,” 201, 210–15).

subgroups among Christian physicalists. Crassly put, *animalism* is a hardware view of humanity, while *constitutionalism* is a software view of humanity. Animalism sees humans as the platform that runs the operating system that is mentality. Conversely constitutionalism sees humans as the operating system that is mentality, but operating systems cannot exist or function without a platform.

While physicalism's apparent prominence in the contemporary secular academy is unsurprising given the pervasiveness of the naturalistic worldview reinforced by modern natural sciences,<sup>11</sup> it may be surprising that the view is on the rise among Christian scholars in three key disciplines at the heart of explicating the Christian religion—biblical studies, systematic theology, and philosophy.<sup>12</sup> To those we now turn.

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<sup>11</sup> Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), esp. 152–53, 192–201; James Garvey, ed., *The Continuum Companion to Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 319–26.

<sup>12</sup> As similarly observed by Joel B. Green, “Soul,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian A. McFarland (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 481–82; Zimmerman, “Three Introductory Questions,” 13; Warren S. Brown, “The Emergence of Human Distinctiveness,” in *The Depth of the Human Person: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 122. Although many of the scholars featured here are Protestants, some Catholics have also observed the traditional body-soul eschatology to have fallen out of favor (e.g. Matthew Levering, *Jesus and the Demise of Death* (Baylor University Press, 2012), 1; Anthony J. Godzieba, “Bodies and Persons, Resurrected and Postmodern: Towards a Relational Eschatology,” in *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*, ed. Jacques Haers and Peter de Mey, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium 172 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 211–25; Stephen Yates, *Between Death and Resurrection: A Critical Response to Recent Catholic Debate Concerning the Intermediate State* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 9–21).

## The (Unconscionably Brief) Survey of Physicalist Arguments

### Biblical Studies

Much of the biblical argumentation for physicalism is the recalibration of our understanding of scriptural anthropological terms. Rather than reading such words as לֵב (“heart”), נֶפֶשׁ (“soul”), בָּשָׂר (“flesh”), רוּחַ (“spirit”), σάρξ (“flesh”), σῶμα (“body”), and ψυχή (“soul”) as immaterial or physical parts of the human person, recent biblical scholarship has discerned that these words more as moods of the one being. That is, someone is not made up of a body and a soul, but rather exists in bodily and soulish manners. As James D. G. Dunn aptly summarizes:

There is indeed a distinction in broad terms which has some merit and value. That is, in simplified terms, while Greek thought tended to regard the human being as made up of distinct parts, Hebrew thought saw the human being more as a whole person existing on different dimensions. As we might say, it was more characteristically Greek to conceive of the human person “partitively,” whereas it was more characteristically Hebrew to conceive of the human person “aspectively.” That is to say, we speak of a school *having* a gym (the gym is part of the school); but we say I *am* a Scot (my Scottishness is an aspect of my whole being).<sup>13</sup>

The previous paradigm that took the Bible to be straightforwardly dualist has now given way to an alleged near-consensus on physicalism.<sup>14</sup> Some, in fact, push this distinction of emphases to a stronger degree, claiming that dualism is a Greek import into, or corruption of, Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 54, emphasis original. See also Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 10–58; J. Gordon McConville, *Being Human in God’s World: An Old Testament Theology of Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 48.

<sup>14</sup> Green, “Soul,” 481–82; idem, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 5–6.

<sup>15</sup> Peter van Inwagen, “Dualism and Materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?,” *F&P* 12 (1995): 478–79, 486–87; Kärkkäinen, “Multidimensional Monism,” 203; idem, *Creation and Humanity*, vol. 3 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids:

Surprisingly for our modern ontological sensibilities, these biblical anthropological terms often overlap, even interchangeable.<sup>16</sup> One such example is that נֶפֶשׁ (“soul”) also refers to the throat (Ps 105:18; Jonah 2:5[6]), blood (Gen 9:4; possibly 35:18), and even corpses (e.g. Lev 19:28; Num 6:6), suggesting that the human person’s essential being is inseparable from that one’s physicality.<sup>17</sup> Consider also the all-too-physical portrayal of Adam’s coming to life in Gen 2:7—Adam was once a non-living נֶפֶשׁ (i.e. corpse) formed from the dirt, and then becomes a נִפְשׁ חַיָּה only when breathed into by God.<sup>18</sup> No mention of a soul here. In fact, humans share the designation of נִפְשׁ חַיָּה with animals (Gen 1:21, 24, 30; 2:19), along with being formed from dust and having the breath of life in common with the rest of creation (Gen 2:7, 19; 3:19; 7:15–22; Ps 90:3; 104:29; 146:4; Eccl 3:18–21), and so it is more accurate to take נִפְשׁ חַיָּה as “living creature”

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Eerdmans, 2015), esp. 310–15; Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 9; Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 11–22; Mark Harris, “When Jesus Lost His Soul: Fourth-Century Christology and Modern Neuroscience,” *SJT* 70 (2017): 75–77.

<sup>16</sup> Karen Gloy, “Leib/Leiblichkeit,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Gerhard Müller and Gerhard Krause (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 22:638–39; Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 199; John Goldingay, *Israel’s Faith*, vol. 2 of *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 548–50; McConville, *Being Human in God’s World*, chap. 3; Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 7–9; Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 2:109–208, but esp. 110; Robert A. Di Vito, “Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 221, 225–30.

<sup>17</sup> McConville, *Being Human in God’s World*, 50–51; Lawson G. Stone, “The Soul: Possession, Part, or Person?,” in *What About the Soul?*, ed. Joel B. Green (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 55–57; Di Vito, “Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity,” 228–29; Goldingay, *Israel’s Faith*, 550.

<sup>18</sup> Joel B. Green, “Why the *Imago Dei* Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” in *Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 180–81; Stone, “Possession, Part, or Person?,” 49, 53; John Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, vol. 1 of *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 99.

rather than “living soul.”<sup>19</sup> Commensurate with this dusty conception of humanity’s origin is the dusty conception of humanity’s demise. Sheol is not some ersatz Purgatory for disembodied souls, but rather is equated with burial in dust (Job 17:16; Ps 30:9; Dan 12:2–3; Isa 26:13–14, 19; Hos 13:14; and arguably Ezek 37).<sup>20</sup>

## Theology

Though physicalism remains, *theologically*, a minority position, still, physicalists argue that dualism conflicts with both the Bible and tradition’s overall anthropological portrait. Coinciding with the biblical studies shift in semantic understanding, physicalist theologians argue that the Bible portrays humanity as sharing a strong continuity with and dependence upon the rest of creation.<sup>21</sup> They further emphasize humanity’s radical dependence on God as our existence is a sheer gift,<sup>22</sup> especially evinced in the fragility of life and the horror of death—both

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<sup>19</sup> Green, “*Imago Dei* Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 181–83; Stone, “Possession, Part, or Person?,” 49–54.

<sup>20</sup> Stone, “Possession, Part, or Person?,” 50; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 109–21.

<sup>21</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man?: Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 47–48, 54–55; Young, *God’s Presence*, 93–123; David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 268–70, 282.

<sup>22</sup> Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 60, 67, 144, 175, 179–80; Young, *God’s Presence*, 106; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 450–54; Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 315–16, 347–48; Young, *God’s Presence*, 106; Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 36–38; cf. Patrick D. Miller, “What is a Human Being? The Anthropology of Scripture,” in *What About the Soul?*, ed. Joel B. Green (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 69–70; cf. Peter Neuner, “Seele (katholisch),” in *Handwörterbuch Theologische Anthropologie: Römisch-katholisch/Russisch-orthodox: Eine Gegenüberstellung*, ed. Bertram Stubenrauch et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 2013), 95–97. See also

of which are at odds with a dualism that depicts humans as naturally immortal souls who are freed from their mortal coils at death.<sup>23</sup>

Physicalism, then, makes better sense of the need for resurrection of the body. For if we are primarily or strictly our bodies, then clearly our bodies must be remade in order for us to be resurrected. But if we are immaterial souls, endowed with all that makes us personal such as cognition, emotion, and volition, then what need do we have for new bodies in the life after life after death? Despite the *prima facie* conceptual difficulties—such as gappy existence—physicalists have proposed a number of unique models demonstrating the logical compatibility of the doctrine of the resurrection with their anthropology.<sup>24</sup>

More seriously, however, physicalists object that dualism denigrates physicality and its various aspects, such as relationality and sexuality, which God had declared to be good at creation—especially borne out by the unsavory historical developments of slavery, patriarchy,

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Gen 3:19; Job 4:18–20, 8:19; Ps 103:14, 104:29; Eccl 3:20, 12:7 (Stone, “Possession, Part, or Person?,” 49–50; Goldingay, *Israel’s Faith*, 639–41, 689–92).

<sup>23</sup> van Inwagen, “Dualism and Materialism,” 485; Kevin J. Corcoran, “The Constitution View of Person,” in *In Search of the Soul: Perspectives on the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 161–64; Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 144–80.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Omar Fakhri, “Physicalism, Bodily Resurrection, and the Constitution Account,” in *Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 103–12; Peter van Inwagen, “The Possibility of Resurrection,” *IJPR* 9 (1978): 114–21; Lynne Rudder Baker, “Persons and the Metaphysics of Resurrection,” *RelS* 43 (2007): 333–48; Kevin J. Corcoran, “Persons and Bodies,” *F&P* 15 (1998): 324–40; Hud Hudson, *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 178–92; Trenton Merricks, “The Resurrection of the Body,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, Oxford Handbooks in Religion and Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 476–90; Timothy O’Connor and Jonathan D. Jacobs, “Emergent Individuals and the Resurrection,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2 (2010): 69–99).

and undue individualism.<sup>25</sup> For example, a slave may have the outward appearance of a human person of equal dignity and capability as a free person, yet if that slave lacks the beauty of soul equal to free persons, then that slave is a lesser, inferior being deserving of being ruled or requiring domination in order to be made civilized. So intertwined is physicality and concern for social justice that Stephen Post exclaims, “It should come as no surprise that as these ‘isms’ [sexism, racism, speciesism, etc.] are rejected, so is their dualistic underpinning.”<sup>26</sup>

### Philosophy

*Philosophically*, dualists have prided themselves as having the more intuitive or coherent position. But physicalists challenge their pride of place. First, against the dualist’s insistence that it is hard to imagine a chunk of meat thinking, it is no easier to imagine non-physical things like

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<sup>25</sup> Joel B. Green, “‘Bodies—That is, Human Lives’: A Re-Examination of Human Nature in the Bible,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 70, 138, 150–51; Young, *God’s Presence*, 106–09, 252–57; José Comblin, *Retrieving the Human: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Robert R. Barr, Theology and Liberation Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 44–95; Michele Saracino, *Christian Anthropology: An Introduction to the Human Person* (New York: Paulist, 2015), chp. 5; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 252–57; Gloy, “Leib/Leiblichkeit,” 641–42; Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 28–31, 39, 117, 277; Anne M. Clifford, “When Being Human Becomes Truly Earthly: An Ecofeminist Proposal for Solidarity,” in *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Ann Elizabeth O’Hara Graff (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 178–80, 185; Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 24–35; Stephen G. Post, “A Moral Case for Nonreductive Physicalism,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 205–10; James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), *passim*. Even some dualists agree, e.g., Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 328–30.

<sup>26</sup> Post, “A Moral Case for Nonreductive Physicalism,” 210.

propositions and numbers to have beliefs and fears.<sup>27</sup> And do dualism fares no better than physicalism in addressing this mystery.

Worse still, physicalism better captures our intuitions about mental causation.<sup>28</sup> The arguments are legion, but it does not take much to motivate the physicalist intuition. There is a seeming incoherence with the radically disparate ontologies of the immaterial and the material engaging in causal commerce.<sup>29</sup> Consider my plane ride here to Denver. No matter how fast the plane flew, my soul kept up with my body. But why should that be since the soul is immaterial and not subject to physical phenomena like gravity, inertia, and air pressure? What is it that glues my soul to my body so that the former goes where the latter is? Why should the immaterial soul be moved with the body as like water being moved when its container is moved?

Further, science either renders the soul seeming explanatorily superfluous (as per neurobiological discoveries)<sup>30</sup> or scientifically impossible (as per the law of conservation of mass

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<sup>27</sup> van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 233–40; idem, “A Materialist Ontology,” 206.

<sup>28</sup> Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 112–15; van Inwagen, “Dualism and Materialism,” 476; idem, *Metaphysics*, 260–61; Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 83–85; Joel B. Green, “Body and Soul, Mind and Brain: Critical Issues,” in *In Search of the Soul: Perspectives on the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 25; cf. Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 72–91. Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) and Merricks, *Objects and Persons* argue from grand-scale causal considerations.

<sup>29</sup> Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 259; Polkinghorne, “Towards an Integrated Anthropology,” 80; van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 229; Bruce R. Reichenbach and V. Elving Anderson, *On Behalf of God: A Christian Ethic for Biology*, Studies in a Christian World View (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 284. This objection can even be found as early as Princess Elisabeth to Descartes, The Hague, 06 May 1643, in *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, ed. Lisa Shapiro, trans. Lisa Shapiro, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 61–62.

<sup>30</sup> Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 56, 69, 116; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Becoming Human Together: The Pastoral Anthropology of St. Paul* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 126; Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 27, 88; idem, “*Imago Dei*

and energy).<sup>31</sup> For the former, all that the human person does—cognition, volition, emotion, relation, maybe even morality—can seemingly be accounted for by the person’s physicality in light of recent advances in neurobiology.<sup>32</sup> For the latter, some dualists argue that the soul is the unmoved mover for the body, that it creates *ex nihilo* the efficient cause necessary for the body to move.<sup>33</sup> But even if dualists claim that the amount of energy produced is infinitesimally small, nonetheless there are seven billion humans on the planet pouring energy into what otherwise seems to be a closed system.

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Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” 186; Brown, “The Emergence of Human Distinctiveness,” *passim*; Young, *God’s Presence*, 117–18; Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, 47–49; idem, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Bromiley, Geoffrey W. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 2:181–202; Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 37, 540–41; N. T. Wright, “Mind, Spirit, Soul and Body: All for One and One for All: Reflections on Paul’s Anthropology in his Complex Contexts,” sec. 1; Philip Hefner, “Imago Dei: The Possibility and Necessity of the Human Person,” in *The Human Person in Science and Theology*, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen, Willem B. Drees, and Ulf Görman, *Issues in Science and Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 74–75; Kevin J. Corcoran, “Human Persons are Material Only,” in *Debating Christian Theism*, ed. J. P. Moreland, Chad V. Meister, and Khaldoun A. Sweis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 272; Malcolm Jeeves, “Human Nature: An Integrated Picture,” in *What About the Soul?*, ed. Joel B. Green (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 175.

<sup>31</sup> van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 260; Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 259–60; Nancey Murphy, “Human Nature: Historical, Scientific, and Religious Issues,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, *Theology and the Sciences* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 7.

<sup>32</sup> Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 56; Murphy-O’Connor, *Becoming Human Together*, 126; Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 27, 88; idem, *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 28–31; Brown, “The Emergence of Human Distinctiveness”

<sup>33</sup> E.g., J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body and Soul: Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), chp. 4.

More troubling that soul-to-body causation is the inverse: How can the physical body produce effects in the immaterial soul?<sup>34</sup> When my finger is pricked by a needle, I the soul surely feel pain. But how would that mechanism look on a dualist account? On contact with the needle's point, nerves are being stimulated, sending electric signals up my arm, into my spine, up to my brain, and then... what? The familiar neurobiological and physical-chemical story ends here and can go no further. Do the electric signals become immaterial in order to affect the immaterial soul, seemingly violating the law of conservation of mass and energy? Where do the electric signals have to go in order to reach the soul? The oddity of physical-to-immaterial causal interaction is made all the starker when dualists rely upon the soul's autonomy from physical causal constraints in order to render the human person free in a libertarian sense.<sup>35</sup>

These intuitions do not preclude the possibility of interactionist dualism, but absent any mechanism, the neurobiological account makes dualism seem less likely and less coherent.<sup>36</sup> Physicalism—animalism, anyway—has no need for elaborate theories of how the person relates to her body; she simply *is* her body.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 260–61; Green, “Body and Soul, Mind and Brain,” 25.

<sup>35</sup> Moreland and Rae, *Body and Soul*, chp. 4; cf. Bruce R. Reichenbach, *Is Man the Phoenix?: A Study of Immortality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 111; Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 25, 87–88.

<sup>36</sup> Reichenbach and Anderson, *On Behalf of God*, 284.

<sup>37</sup> van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 229.

## The Way Forward

This unconscionably compressed survey does not do physicalism justice, for there are many other kinds of arguments in its favor. Hopefully, it ought to be sufficient to demonstrate that physicalism is far from being an oddity. How, then, shall we proceed forward? In addition to engaging with Christian physicalist scholarship with the utmost seriousness, I recommend the following steps for future discussion and debate.

First, we must disentangle what is an error and what is a heresy. One is hard-pressed to find an ecumenical creed that condemns physicalism as such. And though that may be a historical accident because there was no such thing as physicalism *per se* during the formulations of these creeds, nonetheless we should be careful in making too quick of a pronouncement that physicalism is non-compliant with orthodoxy. One would imagine the Definition of Chalcedon's inclusion of "rational soul" (ψυχῆς λογικῆς, *anima rationali*) in God the Son's human nature would preclude the possibility of physicalism, but an argument could be made that in historical context that locution meant whatever qualifies the Logos to have an authentic human mental life against the Apollinarian conception of the Logos lacking such a thing.<sup>38</sup> So if physicalism falls beyond the credal pale, it must be demonstrated with exegesis of the creeds. We ought not to conclude one is not a Christian simply because one is not a dualist until we can firmly establish that the creeds demand dualism.

Second, when arguing biblically against physicalists, dualists should point out the common conflation between holism and monism, as well as the overturning of the so-called

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<sup>38</sup> See esp. Crisp, *God Incarnate*, chp. 7; Glenn Andrew Peoples, "The Mortal God: Materialism and Christology," in *Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 336–37; Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 24–25.

Hellenization thesis. That is, simply because the Bible portrays humanity as functional unities, that does not then imply that we are homogenous in our construction.<sup>39</sup> Further, the binary of Hellenistic vs. Hebraic thought, upon which the physicalist hermeneutic is based, is highly disputed, as even admitted by some physicalists themselves.<sup>40</sup> Dualism simply is not a corruption of Judeo-Christian anthropology.

Third, when arguing theologically against physicalists, in addition to the default track of pointing to the intermediate state, dualists should actually agree that the body is valuable. Very little about the goodness of creation in general and our bodies in particular require a physicalist anthropology. My body is important to me even if I am not my body in a similar way that my arm is important to me even if I am not my arm. I might continue to exist without my arm, but I think it clear that the absence of my arm is harmful to me. *Mutatis mutandis*, the entire body.

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<sup>39</sup> As also noted by John W. Cooper, “Scripture and Philosophy on the Unity of Body and Soul: An Integrative Method for Theological Anthropology,” in *Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 31–32. Thus it is misleading for Wright to ask satirically why dualists propose two components as opposed to five or twenty different parts (“Mind, Spirit, Soul and Body,” sec. 1) since the same sort of satirical question can be applied to monists.

<sup>40</sup> Christoph Marksches, “Does It Make Sense to Speak about a ‘Hellenization of Christianity’ in Antiquity?,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 92 (2012): 5–34; Dale B. Martin, “Paul and the Judaism/Hellenism Dichotomy: Toward a Social History of the Question,” in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 29–61; Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), passim; E. L. Mascall, *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind?: Essays in Christian Orthodoxy* (London: SPCK, 1980), 29–30; Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune God*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90; George E. Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity*, Ancient Philosophies (New York: Routledge, 2014), passim; Lewis Ayres, “The Soul and the Reading of Scripture: A Note on Henri De Lubac,” *SJT* 61 (2008): 177–83; Jon Douglas Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); and (ironically) Wright, *NTPG*, 153, 253–55, 325–27, 342.

Fourth, I do not have much of a commentary for the philosophical debate, for it continues on with all of its sophistication and rigor. However, when arguing philosophically against physicalists, dualists should point out that there is not a consensus among scientists regarding the plausibility of immaterial phenomena,<sup>41</sup> particularly the fascinating proposal that quantum entanglement implies that so-called spooky action at a distance requires an immaterial mind.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, as this paper has been concerned with intra-Christian dialogue, we dualists and physicalists alike must work at accounting for Jesus. Somehow in the midst of our disagreeing over the nature of humankind, we have neglected the most important member of humanity.<sup>43</sup> Not only can we use the Incarnation as a Thomas-Morris-inspired heuristic for what is essential

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<sup>41</sup> The following are examples of scientists claiming the existence of the soul: Jeffrey Schwartz and Sharon Begley, *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002); Karl R. Popper and John C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain* (New York: Springer International, 1977); John C. Eccles, *Facing Reality: Philosophical Adventures by a Brain Scientist*, Heidelberg Science Library 13 (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1970); idem, *How the Self Controls Its Brain* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1994). My thanks to Melissa Cain Travis for her assistance with navigating the scientific literature.

<sup>42</sup> Anil Ananthaswamy, “A Classic Quantum Test Could Reveal the Limits of the Human Mind,” *New Scientist* 234 (May 27, 2017): 7; cf. Lucien Hardy, “Proposal to Use Humans to Switch Settings in a Bell Experiment,” *arXiv:1705.04620* (2017): esp. 20–21. Cited 7 June 2017. Online: <https://arxiv.org/abs/1705.04620>.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Stewart Goetz and William Hasker’s individual contributions in Joel B. Green, ed., *In Search of the Soul: Perspectives on the Mind-Body Problem*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010). Although both Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. VanArragon, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004) and J. P. Moreland, Chad V. Meister, and Khaldoun A. Sweis, eds., *Debating Christian Theism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) aim for wider audiences, Dean Zimmerman and Lynne Rudder Baker’s respective contributions in the former and Stewart Goetz and Kevin Corcoran’s respective essays in the latter are all written from Christian perspectives and none among them but Corcoran make any reference to the Incarnation.

versus what is common among humans,<sup>44</sup> but perhaps we should even view the Incarnate Son of God as the paradigm for what humanity consists of.<sup>45</sup> If it is the case that the central figure of the defining doctrine of our shared religion is not amiable for our anthropological theory, then we ought to revise or relinquish said theory. Unfortunately, neither dualist nor physicalist scholars have made much use of Christology as a point of arbitration.<sup>46</sup>

### Conclusion

Having carefully defined Christian physicalism, surveyed major argumentative strategies for its justification, and recommended ways to proceed with debate, I hope I have convinced the audience that Christian physicalism should be given a fair hearing. Ultimately, I think Christian

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 62–70.

<sup>45</sup> An argument made in Marc Cortez, *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies: An Exercise in Christological Anthropology and Its Significance for the Mind/Body Debate*, Studies in Systematic Theology (New York: T&T Clark, 2008); and in shorter form: “The Madness in Our Method: Christology as the Necessary Starting Point for Theological Anthropology,” in *Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 15–26.

<sup>46</sup> As also observed by Cortez, *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies*, esp. 5–7. For examples of intra-Christian anthropological debate being remiss for neglecting Christology, see the respective essays in Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. VanArragon, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); and J. P. Moreland, Chad V. Meister, and Khaldoun A. Sweis, eds., *Debating Christian Theism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Although both aim for wider audiences, Dean Zimmerman and Lynne Rudder Baker’s respective contributions in the former and Stewart Goetz and Kevin Corcoran’s respective essays in the latter are all written from Christian perspectives and none among them but Corcoran make any reference to the Incarnation.

physicalism is wrong. But I do not think it is *obviously* wrong. That is to say, Christian physicalism may be wrong, but it is *not* crazy.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> My thanks to Marc Cortez, Daniel Treier, Doug Moo, Ryan Clevenger, Wheaton College's spring 2016 Theology of Paul and spring 2014 Theological Anthropology seminars, as well as the participants of both the Society of Christian Philosophers (Midwest Division) and the annual graduate student colloquium at Mundelein Seminary for comments on portions of this paper. This paper is dedicated to Andrew Bailey who, though he thinks dualism is wrong, nonetheless does not think it is crazy.