

© 2008 Joel B. Green

Published in the US by Baker Academic  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
[www.bakeracademic.com](http://www.bakeracademic.com)

978-0-8010-3595-1

Published by an arrangement with Paternoster  
Paternoster is an imprint of Authentic Media  
9 Holdom Avenue, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks, MK1 1QR, UK  
[www.authenticmedia.co.uk](http://www.authenticmedia.co.uk)

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

---

# BODY, SOUL, AND HUMAN LIFE

---

The Nature of Humanity  
in the Bible

JOEL B. GREEN

**B**  
**BakerAcademic**  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

critique. Given the strength of Cartesian categories and the experience of many since the Enlightenment, it is perhaps not surprising to see the degree to which humanity has come to be understood "one person at a time," so to speak. This is not biblical faith, however. Although biblical faith would naturally resist any suggestion that our humanity can be reduced to our physicality, it also challenges those, past and present, who insist that the human person can ever be understood on individual terms. If we would articulate an account of the human person that takes with utmost seriousness the biblical record, we would have far less conversation about the existence or importance of "souls" and far more about the embodied human capacity and vocation for community with God, with the human family, and in relation to the cosmos. These are profoundly ecclesiological, soteriological, and missiological concerns.

*Chapter 5* allows me to take up those eschatological questions that have come often to dominate body-soul discussion. The two central problems are interrelated. Given the Christian belief in life-after-death, and given the manifest death and decay of the observable human body, how does the "person" cross the bridge from this life to the next; and how can we be sure that the "person" in the afterlife is in fact the same "person" who lived out his or her years in this life? Here I take up the argument put forward by John Cooper in his influential book, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, as well as other, related issues, in order to demonstrate why I find his rendering of the biblical evidence unconvincing. More importantly, my analysis will demonstrate how the Bible can portray the human person as a single whole or unified being (some form of monism); allow that death is really death, allowing no prisoners, whether people are parts of persons; and nonetheless affirm resurrection of the body and life-after-death. Though I make no promises that the biblical account I will narrate will be satisfying to contemporary philosophers, I will argue that the coherence of the biblical account of the human person as a unified whole extends to its eschatological vision.

---

## 2

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

[T]he soul clothes itself with a body as a man clothes himself with a garment. For the soul flows into the human mind, and through this into the body, bearing with it the life which it continually receives from the Lord, and transferring it thus indirectly into the body, where, by means of the closest union, it causes the body, as it were, to live. From this, and from a thousand testimonies of experience, it is evident that what is spiritual, united to what is material, as a living force with a dead force, causes a man to speak rationally and to act morally. (Emanuel Swedenborg)<sup>1</sup>

The more that breakthroughs like . . . brain-scanning open up the mind to scientific scrutiny, the more we may be pressed to give up comforting metaphysical ideas like interiority, subjectivity and the soul. Let's enjoy them while we can. (Jim Holt)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Interaction of the Soul and Body* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2005 [1769]), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Holt, "Of Two Minds," *The New York Times Magazine*, 8 May 2005, 11-13 (13).

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Gen 1:27-28)

Over the past two decades, widespread and long-held beliefs about the nature of the human person have come in for serious questioning. Notions about what makes humans "human" – that is, distinctive vis-à-vis non-human creatures – are under almost continuous negotiation. The slowly accumulating evidence from natural scientists is rewriting what and how we think about ourselves. And the ramifications of these studies increasingly find themselves in feature articles in national news magazines, newspapers, and internet reports, from whence they are bound to spark an increasingly public discussion about these issues.

For a long time and for many, it has been enough to identify the human person with his or her soul. This marker of humanness remains popular even in wider culture, though even here the ground is shifting. In a classic collection of short stories entitled *I, Robot* (1950), Isaac Asimov portrayed robots with traits that others might have reserved for humans. Robbie the robot, for example, wants to "hear a story," is "faithful and loving and kind," and is even called "my friend . . . not no machine" by his young companion, Gloria. Gloria's mother, however, is adamant in her assessment: Robbie is "nothing more than a mess of steel and copper in the form of sheets and wires with electricity." Because "it has no soul," Robbie should never be confused with a human being.<sup>3</sup> Almost forty years later, the best-selling novelist Dean Koontz introduced a genetically engineered golden retriever, Einstein, in *Watchers*, his first book (1987). In conversation with Nora, regarded by the non-initiated as Einstein's owner, the dog complains about the tattoo identification in his ear. It "marked him as

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Asimov, *I, Robot* (New York: Doubleday, 1950), 5, 9, 23.

mere property, a condition that was an affront to his dignity and a violation of his rights as an intelligent creature." Nora responds empathetically, "I do understand. You are a . . . a *person*, and a person with' – this was the first time she had thought of this aspect of the situation – 'a soul.'" She continues, "If you've got a soul – and I know you do – then you were born with free will and the right to self-determination."<sup>4</sup> Apparently, how to draw the line between humans and other animals, humans and machines, or whether there are such lines to be drawn, is on the minds of folks around us.

My aim in this chapter is twofold. First, I want to summarize some evidence from the biological sciences and neuropsychology that, taken together, presses the question: What separates us from non-human creatures? My concern here is not to collapse these categories, human and non-human, but to show the seriousness of the challenge to some more general ways of parsing human distinctiveness. It will be obvious that the evidence I will summarize actually exemplifies the close connection between humans and non-humans as creatures that we might have expected from the Genesis narrative. Second, I want to turn more specifically to the biblical materials in order to reflect on the significance of the theological affirmation of the creation of humanity in the divine image. In this way, I want to stake out a way of talking about human identity and the human construction of the self, grounded not in an ontologically distinctive entity known as the "soul," but rather in our genetically enabled, embodied capacity for ongoing formation as storied, relational beings. I will develop this portrait further in subsequent chapters.

Work in biblical and theological studies, together with insight from the neurosciences, I will demonstrate, encourages a way forward marked by an account of the human person that rejects the necessity of a separate, metaphysical entity such as a soul to account for human capacities and distinctives; that underscores the material location of the human person in relation to the created order; that refuses to reduce personal identity to our neural

<sup>4</sup> Dean Koontz, *Watchers* (New York: Berkley, 1987), 434.

equipment, emphasizing instead the personal contribution and relatedness of human beings to the human family and the cosmos; and thus that has as its primary point of beginning and orientation the human in a partnering relationship with God.

### Distinctively Human?

Among the range of possible evidences of the collapse of meaningful distinctions between humans and non-human creatures, let me mention three: genetic similarity; evidence I will collect under the loose heading of consciousness; and the more particular phenomenon known as "mind reading." I will discuss a fourth category, moral agency, in Chapter 3.

#### *The human genome*

In 2005, the American Association for the Advancement of Science published in its weekly journal, *Science*, a series of short essays entitled "125 Questions: What Don't We Know?" Appearing third in the list was the query, "Why do humans have so few genes?"<sup>5</sup> In actuality, the puzzle is not so much why humans have only about 25,000 genes, but why we anticipated we would have so many — upwards of 100,000, according to earlier conventional wisdom.<sup>6</sup> If common rice has some 50,000 genes and the worm *Caenorhabditis elegans* has about 20,000, must not the infinitely more complex *Homo sapiens* require a more expansive genome? The realization that mammalian genes are far more flexible than previously thought does not mask the impression that surprise over our limited number of genes rests significantly on the mistaken assumption that humans simply must be more complex, genetically unique, in comparison with non-human creatures.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Pennisi, "Why Do Humans Have So Few Genes?" *Science* 39, no. 5731 (2005): 80.

<sup>6</sup> Nancey Murphy helpfully discusses historical reasons why the idea of continuity from non-human animals to humans has been an embarrassing problem (*Bodies and Souls*, 49–51).

In fact, chimpanzees share practically all of our DNA, in spite of relative, observable differences like language or tree-climbing abilities. Earlier reports identified the degree of DNA overlap upwards of 98 percent, though more recent analysis has lowered that number by two or three points. More astonishing, perhaps, is that the variation in DNA among members of the human family is actually larger than the variation between humans and chimpanzees.

### *Consciousness*

In discussion of Christian anthropology generally, appeal is often made to a baseline human experience that I am more than my body — that is, to my experience of a subjective inner life, the perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and awareness of my experiences, including what it is like to be a cognitive agent. This subjective, first-hand quality of experience goes by the shorthand "consciousness,"<sup>7</sup> and, for most of us, it is difficult to believe that our first-person experiences of embarrassment or fulfillment, love or hate, and smells or colors are nothing more than brain states. However, in recent years a series of remarkable findings have begun to pull the rug out from under the notion that with consciousness we reach the threshold of human uniqueness. Of course, pet owners have long intuited the presence of human-like consciousness among their cats, dogs, or horses — and woe to the unbeliever who thinks differently. Now, however, scientists have begun to find evidence that fish might have a subjective awareness of pain,<sup>8</sup> and research on mammalian play supports the conclusion that animals are capable of a range of emotional feelings.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For the problem of defining consciousness, see David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> See James Gorman, "Fishing for Clarity in the Waters of Consciousness," *New York Times*, 13 May 2003 {<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9800E0D6133FF930A25756C0A9659C8B63&sec=&sp on=&partner=permalink&expod=permalink>}; accessed 6 June 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Jaak Panksepp, "Beyond a Joke: From Animal Laughter to Animal Joy?" *Science* 308, no. 5718 (2005): 62–63.

Of course, how to discern whether – and if so, what – an animal is thinking or feeling is a mystifying problem fraught with difficulties, and skeptics abound. But the line between human and non-human animals has had to be redrawn sufficiently often that denial of surmounting evidence on this point can appear to be little more than special pleading. Sixty years ago, anthropologists segregated humans and apes on the basis of tool-use, but in the 1960s primatologists found that chimpanzees are tool-users. Language was assumed to be a uniquely human characteristic, until the 1970s when primates were found to use symbolic representations for objects. If consciousness is a self-awareness and awareness of others that can be correlated with creativity, language, and empathy, then researchers have increasingly found that animals share this trait with humans. Most recently, this has been shown to be true in the case of problem-solving and future-planning, including the capacity to imagine hypothetical scenarios and their outcomes.<sup>10</sup> For example, an experiment reported in the January 2007 issue of *Psychological Science* utilized a video game to show the ability of monkeys to express their respective levels of confidence in their answers to multiple-choice questions and to request hints for problem-solving. That is, it put on display among monkeys metacognitive abilities – in other words, the ability to think about one's own thinking – long assumed to be exclusively human.<sup>11</sup>

### *Mind reading*

In 2005, neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran predicted that “mirror neurons will do for psychology what DNA did for biology: they will provide a unifying framework and help explain a host of mental abilities that have hitherto remained mysterious and

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Elizabeth Pennisi, “Are Our Primate Cousins ‘Conscious’?” *Science* 284, no. 5423 (1999): 2073–76; Thomas Suddendorf, “Foresight and Evolution of the Human Mind,” *Science* 312, no. 5776 (2006): 1006–7.

<sup>11</sup> Nate Kornell et al., “Transfer of Metacognitive Skills and Hint Seeking in Monkeys,” *Psychological Science* 18 (2007): 64–71.

inaccessible to experiments.”<sup>12</sup> These are the nerve cells that fire not only when a person is engaged in a certain activity but also, and remarkably, when that person observes another engaged in the same activity. Such neural activity mirrors the movements of others, as well as their intentions, sensitivities, and emotions. Mirror neurons thus provide the neural correlates for important social capacities and behaviors, like empathy or imitation. They are the basis for what is sometimes called “mind reading” or a “theory of mind.”<sup>13</sup>

Although a “theory of mind” (i.e., the cognitive ability to understand others as intentional agents with their own beliefs and desires) may suggest a uniquely human characteristic, mirror neurons were first discovered among monkeys when it was observed, for example, that certain cells fired whether a monkey broke open a peanut or heard someone else break a peanut. Now we know that such tasks as language acquisition and learning the violin have their basis in mirror neurons, just as these specialized nerve cells enable us to predict the actions of others or feel with others their surprise or anger or fear. Even if, on account of our more expansive working memory, humans are capable of more sophisticated imitations, not only primates but also dogs, dolphins, and elephants are capable of mind reading.<sup>14</sup>

Although we have barely scratched the surface with this brief sketch, we have seen enough to realize how unoriginal the human creature is. Cognitive scientist Warren Brown has urged that, even if “nearly every fundamental human mental ability or function exists in some form or to some degree in nonhuman species,”

<sup>12</sup> V.S. Ramachandran, “Mirror Neurons and Imitation Learning as the Driving Force behind ‘the Great Leap Forward’ in Human Evolution,” *Edge* 69 (1 June 2000) (<http://www.edge.org/documents/archive/edge69.html>); accessed 17 September 2007.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Greg Miller, “Reflecting on Another’s Mind,” *Science* 308, no. 5724 (2005): 945–47.

<sup>14</sup> See the useful report by Sandra Blakeslee, “Cells that Read Minds,” *New York Times*, 10 January 2006 ([http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/science/10mirr.html?\\_r=1&oref=login&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/science/10mirr.html?_r=1&oref=login&pagewanted=all)); accessed 10 January 2006.

humans are endowed "with notably enhanced mental powers." Those he identifies as critical to the human experience of personal relatedness – which he names as the *sine qua non* of human "soulfulness" – are:

- *language*: the capacity to communicate a potentially infinite number of propositions; to relate regarding complex, abstract ideas, as well as about the past and the future
- *a theory of mind*: an ability to consider the most likely thoughts and feelings of another person
- *episodic memory*: a conscious historical memory of events, persons, times, and places
- *conscious top-down agency*: conscious mental control of behavior
- *future orientation*: ability to run mental scenarios of the future implications of behaviors and events
- *emotional modulation* by complex social and contextual cognition that serves to guide ongoing behavior and decision-making.<sup>15</sup>

#### *What about the soul?*

Long ago, Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) claimed that animals must have souls since they apparently possess a memory, a capacity for reason, and other traits typically associated with the soul. But, if this is true, what distinguishes humanity from "the brutes"? One important, early contributor to this question was Thomas Willis, a seventeenth-century medic and celebrated founder of neurology. In his thinking we find recourse to a second soul, the presence of which allows for a material "soul," characteristic of both humans and non-human animals, alongside the immaterial and immortal soul, found alone in humans. Willis thus distinguishes between the

<sup>15</sup> Warren S. Brown, "Cognitive Contributions to Soul," in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancy Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, TSC, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 99–125 (103–4).

Corporeal Soul (common to humans and "brutes") and the Rational Soul (superior to the Corporeal Soul, found in humans only). Although Willis claims that "divers Authors both Ancient and Modern and both Philosophers and Theologists" have observed the difference between these souls,<sup>16</sup> in the highly politicized world of the century of Galileo this distinction between two souls served Willis as a ready means for avoiding a clash with ecclesiastical authority. Only rarely in his writings does Willis take up the role of the Rational Soul, and its chief *raison d'être* seems to be to supersede the Corporeal Soul. Instead, having acknowledged an immortal soul, he then devotes himself at length to the function and properties of the "animal soul," enabling him to include psychological issues within the competence of medicine and to present a coherent psycho-physiological approach to human capacities and behaviors. As Paul F. Cranefield summarizes, "The soul of brutes, in the hands of Willis, really seems to be simply a handy name for the assemblage of anatomical and physiological mechanisms which underlie psychological processes."<sup>17</sup>

Our difficulty in grasping what to make of the immaterial, Rational Soul is illustrated in Willis' description of the brain:

The Brain is accounted the chief seat of the Rational Soul in a man, and of the sensitive [soul] in brute beasts, and indeed as the chief mover in the animal machine, it is the origine and fountain of all motions and conceptions. But some Functions do chiefly and more immediately belong to the substance of this, and others depend as it were mediately and less necessarily upon it. Among these, which of the former sort are accounted the chief, are the Imagination, Memory, and Appetite. . . . The rest of the Faculties of this Soul, as Sense and Motion, also the Passions and Instincts merely natural, though

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Willis, *Two Discourses concerning the Soul of Brutes, which Is that of the Vital and Sensitive of Man* (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1971 [1683]), 38.

<sup>17</sup> Paul F. Cranefield, "A Seventeenth-century View of Mental Deficiency and Schizophrenia: Thomas Willis on 'Stupidity or Foolishness'," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 35 (1961): 291–316 (306).

they depend in some measure upon the Brain, yet they are properly performed in the oblong Marrow [i.e., spinal cord] and Cerebrum [cerebellum], or proceed from them.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Willis allows that the brain is the origin of all motions and conceptions, apparently of both Rational Soul and Corporeal (i.e., "sensitive") Soul. Moreover, as here, throughout his writings on the central nervous system, Willis locates in the brain or spinal column not only reflexes and sensory and motor centers, but also cognition, imagination, volition, and affect. Thought he assigned to the cerebrum, voluntary movement to the cerebral hemispheres, perception to the corpora striata, imagination to the corpus callosum, memory to the cerebral cortex, instinct to the midbrain, and involuntary regulation to the cerebellum. In effect, Willis adopted a metaphysical solution to the problem of personhood that allowed him to proceed along an empiricist path, with matters of an ethereal sort partitioned off, outside the realm of experimentation or even consideration.

This solution could only be short-lived. Galen was maligned for his ambiguity on the immortality of the soul, yet in the work of Willis "soul" was delimited in ways that left the doctrine shriveled and languishing. Indeed, Willis' heirs typically speak of human life almost exclusively in terms of embodiment as physical persons. Typically, they do this on account of the complex and subtle dependencies of our thought processes on the state and functioning of our brains. They might draw attention to any variety of research reports, including:

- experimental data demonstrating that the psychological pain of social loss, such as the loss of a loved one, has neural correlates in the prefrontal cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex, suggesting a "human sadness system" in the brain;<sup>19</sup>
- the use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to show that the orbital and medial prefrontal cortex and the

<sup>18</sup> Willis, *Anatomy of the Brain and Nerves*, 91.

<sup>19</sup> Naomi I. Eisenberger, et al., "Does Rejection Hurt? An fMRI Study of Social Exclusion," *Science* 302, no. 5643 (2003): 290-92.

superior temporal sulcus regions of the brain play a central role in moral appraisals in humans, demonstrating a neural substrate for the emotions by which we assign moral values to events, objects, and actions;<sup>20</sup>

- study establishing that the brain's anterior cingulate cortex is implicated in monitoring the consequence of one's actions;<sup>21</sup>
- a celebrated study among cloistered Carmelite nuns demonstrating that mystical experiences are mediated by several brain regions and systems otherwise implicated in such functions as consciousness, body representation, and emotion;<sup>22</sup> and
- the identification of neural responses in the caudate nucleus underlying the human capacity to trust.<sup>23</sup>

Such studies as these demonstrate again and again the thoroughly embodied character of an increasingly broad variety of human experiences. If the capacities traditionally allocated to the "soul" — for example, consistency of memory, consciousness, spiritual experience, the capacity to make decisions on the basis of self-deliberation, planning and action on the basis of that decision, and taking responsibility for these decisions and actions — have a neural basis, then the concept of "soul," as traditionally understood in theology as a person's "authentic self," seems redundant.

Given Willis' legacy as the "Father of Localization" (i.e., the science of locating particular capacities in terms of their neural correlates), it is easy to see that his work set neurobiology firmly on this path. Indeed, in one of the early histories of neurology, Walther Riese confidently assured his readers that philosophers and natural scientists had dispensed with the need for recourse to the idea of a

<sup>20</sup> Jorge Moll, et al., "The Neural Correlates of Moral Sensitivity: A Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Investigation of Basic and Moral Emotions," *Journal of Neuroscience* 22, no. 7 (2002): 2730-36.

<sup>21</sup> Shigehiko Ito, et al., "Performance Monitoring by the Anterior Cingulate Cortex during Saccade Countermanding," *Science* 302, no. 5642 (2003): 120-22.

<sup>22</sup> Mario Beauregard and Vincent Paquette, "Neural Correlates of a Mystical Experience in Carmelite Nuns," *Neuroscience Letters* 405 (2006): 186-90.

<sup>23</sup> Brooks King-Casas, et al., "Getting to Know You: Reputation and Trust in a Two-Person Economic Exchange," *Science* 308, no. 5718 (2005): 78-82.

human soul.<sup>24</sup> This does not mean that neuroscientists and neurophilosophers are unanimous in their reducing humanity to their brains or bodies; rather, many, in urging that humans are more than their physicality, simply refuse to identify that "something more" with an ontologically distinctive entity such as a "soul" or "spirit."<sup>25</sup>

How does this comport with the biblical materials?

### Clearing the Deck

What does it mean to be human? From the standpoint of the biblical materials, addressing this question is less easy than one might expect. The nature of the evidence presses us to address three issues of approach.

#### *Implicit evidence*

The first obstacle concerns the nature of the evidence: the books of the OT and NT only very rarely turn to anthropology *per se*. That the biblical materials have little to say explicitly regarding the nature of humanity does not render the Bible irrelevant to the discussion, however. The biblical writers do engage questions regarding the nature of humanity, but they do so implicitly. At times, they assume a view of the human person; at other times, they counter the views of others; and, at still other times, they project an anthropology in their portraits of renewed humanity.

To draw attention to one example of this sort of phenomenon we may turn to an otherwise unremarkable text in Revelation 18, in which John divulges the contents of the Rome-bound seafaring cargo in order to portray the center of the Roman Empire as a

<sup>24</sup> Riese, *History of Neurology*, 19–48.

<sup>25</sup> Cf., e.g., Murphy, *Bodies and Souls* – nonreductive physicalism; Peterson, *Minding God* – open-system emergence or deep physicalism; Clayton, *Mind and Emergence* – emergent monism; Malcolm A. Jeeves, *Human Nature at the Millennium: Reflections on the Integration of Psychology and Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1997) – two-aspect monism.

mistress-harlot who maintains a luxurious lifestyle at the expense of her lovers, the conquered peoples of the Roman Empire. The list itself is an abbreviated version of the bills of lading already known to us from Roman trade in the first century; for precedent John also had before him the text of Ezekiel 27:12–24.<sup>26</sup> According to the NRSV, this cargo record consists of "gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves – and human lives" (18:12–13). Including this catalogue here, John exposes a network of economic interests – including kings, merchants, and mariners, who have most to gain from Roman economic dominance; as well as common subjects, exploited but bedazzled by Roman opulence and propaganda. For our present purposes, what interest us about this inventory are the occupants of its climactic finale. Where the NRSV reads "slaves – and human lives," the Greek text reads σκλάβων, καὶ ψυχῶν ἀνθρώπων, *sōmatōn, kai psychas anthrōpōn*). Using σῶμα (*sōma*, "body") for "slave" was a commonplace in Roman antiquity.<sup>27</sup> Taking the *kai* as exegetical, as most commentators and translations do,<sup>28</sup> we depart from the NRSV by reading, "bodies – that is, human lives." This translation highlights the reductionism inherent in the habit of referring to slaves as mere bodies, and recognizes John's criticism of this debasement of human beings – and, indeed, the inhumane travesty on which the whole of Rome's prosperity depended. Even slaves are more than their physicality; they are

<sup>26</sup> See the discussion in Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 94–97.

<sup>27</sup> For evidence, cf. MM 621; David E. Aune, *Revelation* (vol. 3; WBC 52c; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1002.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 650; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 455–56; Richard Bauckham, "The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18," in *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 338–83 (370–71).



human beings wrongly catalogued by their materiality, like so many carcasses, alongside cattle and sheep. Here, then, we find on display testimony for the presence of body-soul dualism in the Greco-Roman world together with the distorted human portrait that might emanate from dualism, as well as evidence of how a NT author can stand against a distorted anthropology.

### *Presupposing the human person*

A second obstacle is the ease with which our contemporaries have read a Cartesian interest in "the mind" back into the Bible. This is an example of the problem of ethnocentrism – the erroneous assumption that all people everywhere think, believe, and act as we do – in biblical interpretation. For René Descartes the physician and philosopher, we may recall, to understand a human phenomenon we must ascertain whether to attribute it to the soul or body for these are characterized by an essential, a real distinction. Given the importance of the horizons of our own taken-for-granted assumptions in acts of reading and interpretation, and given the pervasive influence of the Cartesian idea of a disembodied mind even today, it is no surprise that many readers of the Bible have found body-soul dualism in its pages.

We can illustrate the problem with reference to Western medicine, where the Cartesian mind-body split is pervasive. Only with slight hyperbole can Trinh Xuan Thuan remark, "To this day, the brain and mind are regarded as two distinct entities in Western medicine. When we have a headache, we consult a neurologist; when we are depressed, we are told to see a psychiatrist."<sup>29</sup> Given this way of structuring reality, why would we not unreflectively segregate healing (biomedical) from salvation (spiritual)?<sup>30</sup> In the

<sup>29</sup> Trinh Xuan Thuan, *Chaos and Harmony: Perspectives on Scientific Revolutions of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 294.

<sup>30</sup> For a prominent example of this bifurcation, see John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Edinburgh: Handsel, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). For an antidote to this way of thinking, see Joel B. Green, *Salvation* (UBT; St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2003).

OT, however, the identity of God as "healer" is preeminently focused on salvation for the people of God; "I, Yahweh, am your healer," God's people are told, following the narration of the incredible lengths to which Yahweh has gone to liberate Israel from Egypt (Exod 15:26; see 2 Kgs 5:7). To cite another example, in Matthew 8–9 miraculous events are lined up, one after the other, depicting Jesus as one who makes available the presence and power of God's dominion to those dwelling on the periphery of Jewish society in Galilee – a leper, the slave of a Gentile army officer, an old woman, the demon-possessed, a paralytic, a collector of tolls, a young girl, and the blind. Intertwined with accounts of restoration to physical health are chronicles of the restoration of persons to status within their families and communities, the faith-full reordering of life around God, and the driving back of demonic forces. Note the mixing of categories whose distinctiveness we tend to take for granted. Cleansing a leper allows him new access to God and to the community of God's people (8:1–4), healing a paralytic is tantamount to forgiving his sins (9:2–8), extending the grace of God to toll collectors and sinners illustrates the work of a physician (9:9–13), and recovery of sight serves as a metaphor for the exercise of the insight of faith (9:27–31). Here we find no room for segregating the human person into discrete, constitutive "parts," whether "bodily" or "spiritual" or "communal."

A further consequence of Descartes' separation of the activity of thinking from the non-thinking body has been a perspective on human nature understood largely in terms of individual human beings, with the proper subject of individual human beings, the "I" or "self" to which one referred, identified as the ψυχή (*psychē*, "soul"). This view is alien to Scripture – and is generally acknowledged within biblical studies to be so, as we shall see shortly.

We can press further down this track by observing what portrait of the human person has emerged in the context of the pervasive dualism of the West. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor sketches the development of modern identity from Augustine through Descartes, Locke, and Kant, and on into the Romantics. He finds that personal identity has come to be shaped by

assumptions such as these: human dignity lies in self-sufficiency and self-determination; identity is grasped in self-referential terms: I am who I am; persons have an inner self, which is the authentic self; and basic to authentic personhood are self-autonomy and self-legislation.<sup>31</sup> Although he does not major on the notion of a metaphysical entity of the "soul," he does (along with others before him) identify the precondition for the modern emphasis on the human sense of the "authentic, inner person" in Plato's concept of the "soul" (*psychê*). However, even though Plato posited a radical distinction between body and soul, he nevertheless thought that "soul" was constructed from elements of the world, with the result that modern views of substance dualism are just that, modern, owing far more to Descartes even than to Hellenistic anthropology.

The point is that constructions of personal identity that pervade the world of the interpreter are easily read back into the texts under scrutiny, and yet, in the case of the human self discerned by Taylor, can stand at odds with biblical anthropology at almost every turn. As Di Viro has documented, an examination of OT anthropology unveils a relatively congruous list of characteristics that contrasts sharply with the "modern self" depicted by Taylor.<sup>32</sup> These include such emphases as the construction of the self as deeply embedded in social relationships and thus the importance of dependence/interdependence for human identity; a premium on the integrity of the community and thus the contribution of individuals to that integrity; the assumption that a person is one's behavior – that is, that one's dispositions are on display in one's practices; an emphasis on external authority – that is, the call to holiness is a call to a human vocation drawn from a vision of Yahweh's "difference"; and the reality of dualism vis-à-vis good/evil, resident in and manifest both outside and inside a person.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

<sup>32</sup> Di Viro has analyzed this material for the OT, but many of his observations are equally apropos such NT materials as Matthew, Luke-Acts, or James, to name only a few representatives ("OT Anthropology").

### Problems of method

In addition to concerns over interpretive assumptions, three issues of method deserve attention: Hebrew versus Greek thinking, word-study approaches to biblical anthropology, and an emphasis on eschatology.

#### Hebrew versus Greek thinking

Focusing at the level of presuppositions in method, we now recognize that the longstanding and pervasive view that posited a dichotomy between Hebrew thought (which affirmed some form of monism) and Greek thought (which affirmed some form of dualism) was a gross caricature. On the one hand, we refer to the complex relationship between Hellenism and Judaism that followed in the centuries after the military successes of Alexander the Great in the Near East in the last half of the fourth century BCE – relationships of acculturation, to be sure, but otherwise on a continuum between resistance and integration. On the other, Greek thought itself was more variegated on the nature of the soul than a reading focused on Plato (or on some first-century neo-Platonists) would allow. Consequently, the environment within which the NT was taking shape provided for the presence of a variety of views, both within Roman Hellenism and within Hellenistic Judaism. For both of these reasons, it is erroneous to allege that the NT authors lived in a milieu pervaded by body-soul dualism. Of these two claims, the first is universally acknowledged in biblical studies, even if scholars continue to assess how best to interpret Jewish responses to Hellenism;<sup>33</sup> whereas the second is less widely understood, thus requiring a few summary comments.

Others have sketched the history of ancient philosophical views of the human person, noting that, by and large, the Greeks never took the path Descartes would take – namely, juxtaposing

<sup>33</sup> Compare, e.g., Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (2 vols. in 1; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974); and Louis Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

corporeal and incorporeal as if this were the same thing as juxtaposing material and immaterial (or physical/spiritual).<sup>34</sup> Although belief in a form of body/soul duality was widespread in philosophical circles, most philosophers regarded the soul as composed of "stuff." Aristotle, for example, considered the soul, the basis of animate life, as part of nature, so that psychology and physics ("nature") could not be segregated. For him, "soul" was not immaterial; even if "soul" is not the same thing as body, neither is it not "nonmatter" but can still occupy "space." Even Plato thought that the soul was constructed from elements of the world, though he argued for a radical distinction between body and soul. Within Epicureanism, mind and spirit were understood to be corporeal because they act on the body, and all entities that act or are acted upon are bodies. Borrowing in part from Aristotle, Stoicism taught that everything that exists is corporeal; accordingly, only non-existent "somethings" (like imagined things) could be incorporeal.

Following the demise of the Platonic academy as an institution, neo-Platonism took many forms, especially as influenced by Stoicism. As Martin notes, "When we analyze the Platonism – or perhaps we should say the Platonisms – that were around [in the first century CE], we encounter self-styled Platonists whose ideas of body and soul look to us remarkably like the monisms of Aristotle and the Stoics."<sup>35</sup> When one departs the work of these philosophers and examines the views of ancient medical writers (who were, themselves, philosophers of a sort), one finds a keen emphasis on

<sup>34</sup> See esp. the opening chapters of John P. Wright and Paul Potter, eds., *Psyche and Soma*: "Soma and Psyche in Hippocratic Medicine," 13–35 (Beate Gundert); "The Defining Features of Mind-Body Dualism in the Writings of Plato," 37–55 (T.M. Robinson); "Aristotle's Psycho-physiological Account of the Soul-Body Relationship," 57–77 (Philip J. van der Eijk); a cluster of Hellenistic philosophers and physicians, from Epicurus to Galen (Heinrich von Staden), and Paul (Theo K. Heckel); in addition, e.g., Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 3–37; MacDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind*; Richard Sorabji, "Soul and Self in Ancient Philosophy," in *From Soul to Self* (ed. M. James C. Crabbe; London: Routledge, 1999), 8–32.

<sup>35</sup> Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 12.

the inseparability of the internal processes of the body ("psychology," in modern parlance) and its external aspects ("physiology"). This is not because of tendencies to think in terms of "psychosomatic conditions" (to use concepts that are quite anachronistic), but because any differentiation between inner and outer was fluid and permeable.

In short, although some may find it useful to speak of a body-soul duality in the Greco-Roman world as a lowest common denominator in educated circles, this hardly relates the whole story. The Hellenism that would have occupied a prominent place on the horizon of early Christians and the NT writers cannot be reduced so easily to a common denominator on questions of body and soul. This means that one cannot solve the problem of the relationship between body and soul in earliest Christianity merely by referring to parallels of thought or cultural settings. Such parallels and settings are themselves too complex for such decisions, and the ingredients available to those early Christian writers were more diverse than usually thought.<sup>36</sup>

Sharply put, there was no singular conception of the soul among the Greeks, and the body-soul relationship was variously assessed among philosophers and physicians in the Hellenistic period. Thus, Heinrich von Staden summarizes "the belief cluster" shared by philosophers and physicians of the Hellenistic period by noting, among other things, that the "soul" is corporeal; and that the "soul" is generated with the "body" and neither exists before the body nor is separable from it after the body's demise. That is, "the soul does not exist independently of the body in which it exists."<sup>37</sup> What happens after we die? It may be useful to refer to Cicero, who summarizes the two primary, competing views: either the body and soul are annihilated at death or the soul separates from the body.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> The ease with which decisions of this sort have been made in the twentieth century derives in part from our failure to perceive the depth of Descartes' innovations. The Cartesian view of humanity was understood to have embraced ancient ways of thinking, with the result that few seemed to notice when Plato (for example) was conscripted to support Cartesian categories.

<sup>37</sup> Heinrich von Staden, "Body, Soul, and Nerves: Epicurus, Herophilus, Erasistratus, the Stoics, and Galen," in *Psyche and Soma*, 79–116 (79).

<sup>38</sup> Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 1.11.23–24.

This is hardly the dualism widely assumed of "the Greeks" in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

#### *A word-study approach*

We must also account for advances in linguistics, following the work of Ferdinand de Saussure in the early twentieth century, that (should) disallow the confusion between words and concepts, and thus that, say, the Greek term *ψυχή* (*psychē*) means "soul" and therefore refers to (something like) an ontological entity separate from the *σῶμα* (*sōma*, "body"). Until recently, one of the mainstays in the conversation about biblical anthropology has been the contribution of Hebrew and Greek lexicography.<sup>39</sup> Certain words, vested with particular meanings, have been said to point to certain conclusions regarding the make-up of the human person. As in statistics, however, so in linguistics: the same evidence base, in different hands, can lead to sometimes opposing results. This is the case in the discussion of the human person, in which Hebrew terms (such as *nephesh*, *bāšār*, *lēb*, and *rūah*) and Greek terms (such as *sōma*, *psychē*, *pneuma*, and *sarx*) are investigated for their meaning. Unfortunately for this debate, these words are each polysemous, and are capable of a range of translations into English. Thus, depending on context, *nephesh*, though often identified with the idea of a "soul," might be translated into English as "life," "person," "breath," "inner person," "self," "desire," or even "throat." *Bāšār* might be translated with the English terms "flesh," "body," "meat," "skin," "humankind," or "(the) animal (kingdom)." Translations of *lēb* might include "heart," "mind," "conscience," and "inner life." Finally, *rūah* might be taken as a reference to "wind," "breath," "seat of cognition and/or volition," "disposition," "spirit," or "point on a compass."

In Israel's Scriptures, the Hebrew term *nephesh* is used with reference to the whole person as the seat of desires and emotions, not to the "inner soul" as though this were something separate from one's being. *Nephesh* can be translated in many places as "person," or

<sup>39</sup> For the continued appearance of such data in recent study, see, e.g., Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, 42-49; Jewett, *Who We Are*, 35-46.

even by the personal pronoun (e.g., Lev 2:1; 4:2; 7:20). It denotes the entire human being, but can also be used with reference to animals (e.g., Gen 1:12, 24; 2:7; 9:10). From time to time, the Hebrew term *bāšār* stands in parallel with, but not in contrast to, *nephesh* – the one referring to the external being of the person, the other to the internal (e.g., Isa 10:18). Indeed, although *bāšār* frequently refers to the fleshly aspect of a person (e.g., Ps 119:73; Isa 45:11-12), this term is also prominent as an expression of the spiritual. *Bāšār* and *nephesh* "are to be understood as different aspects of man's existence as a twofold unity."<sup>40</sup> The related term, *gwiyya*, refers to the human being in her wholeness, though usually in a weakened condition; typically, it is used to denote the body of a human only in its state as a corpse or cadaver.<sup>41</sup> The Scriptures of Israel employ other terms, too, to speak of humans from the perspective of their varying functions – for example, *lēb*, with reference to human existence, sometimes in its totality (e.g., Gen 18:5; Ezek 13:22), sometimes with reference to the center of human affect (e.g., Prov 14:30) or perception (Prov 16:9);<sup>42</sup> and *rūah*, used with reference to the human from the perspective of his being imbued with life (e.g., Gen 2:7; Job 12:10; Isa 42:5).

Similar polysemy is found among the relevant Greek terms: *sōma* is capable of translation into English as "body," "physical being," "church," "slave," and even "reality"; *psychē* as "inner self," "life," and "person"; *pneuma* as "spirit," "ghost," "inner self," "way of thinking," "wind," and "breath"; and *sarx* as "flesh," "body," "people," "human," "nation," "human nature," and, simply, "life."

Thus, although *psychē* could refer to "soul," understood within the framework of a body-soul dualism, this cannot be presumed on lexical grounds. Aristotle, for example, devotes an entire treatise to "the soul" (ΠΕΡΙ ΨΥΧΗΣ, "On the Soul"), and defines *psychē* in terms of what we today would designate a physicalist account of human nature, just as the Septuagint, a Greek translation of Israel's

<sup>40</sup> N.P. Bratsiotis, "נפש", TDOT 2:313-32 (326).

<sup>41</sup> See H.-J. Fabry, "רוח", TDOT 2:433-38 (esp. 435-36).

<sup>42</sup> See H.-J. Fabry, "לב", TDOT 7:399-437.

Scriptures dating from the Hellenistic period, typically translates the Hebrew *nepheš* ("vitality") with *psychē*, without thereby introducing anthropological dualism into the OT.

Actually, Aristotle presents us with an interesting test case, since his position is often misrepresented. To this day, neuroscientists can write, erroneously, of Aristotle's views of the nonmateriality of the soul and its location in the heart.<sup>43</sup> It is true that Aristotle privileged heart over head as the primary sense organ, and relegated the brain to service as a kind of radiator for the blood, but he was no dualist and any attempt to specify on Aristotle's behalf the "seat of the soul" is misguided. Having devoted an entire treatise to the subject, he sketches a view of "soul" (*psychē*) as that in virtue of which an organism is alive (*On the Soul* 2.1 §§412a-413a10), the form or essence of the living body that a plant or animal or human being is. Accordingly, "soul" is no "it" with an independent existence, nor a quality characteristic of humankind in contradistinction to other forms of life. Plants are alive and are therefore "soulful" because they have and perform certain vital functions (such as grow and reproduce), yet they perform no functions that we might call cognitive or psychological. Not only is Aristotle a monist, then, but his position disallows reductionism of a living organism to the matter out of which it is made. Moreover, on the positive side of the ledger, Aristotle's conception urges a unified view of the human person, highlights the importance of human capacities, underscores the essential relatedness of humanity with other living beings, and emphasizes, in the case of the human, especially social activity. For this reason, philosophers and psychologists at the turn of the twenty-first century might find themselves drawn to Aristotle's psychology for its potential in shaping present-day accounts of the human person. But for many moderns, Aristotle's position has been transformed, by Descartes, from

<sup>43</sup> E.g., Andrew Peacock, "The Relationship between the Soul and the Brain," in *Historical Aspects of the Neurosciences: A Festschrift for Macdonald Critchley* (ed. F. Clifford Rose and W.F. Bynum; New York: Raven, 1982), 83-98 (83); Bryan Kolb and Ian Q. Whishaw, *An Introduction to Brain and Behavior* (New York: Worth, 2001), 8.

theoretical psychology into epistemology, and thus from talk of "soul" to the category of "mind,"<sup>44</sup> and it is often through Cartesian categories that Aristotle has been accessed.

As for the Hebrew Bible, *nepheš* occurs almost 800 times, with the primary meaning of "throat" or "gullet" (very much a physical referent!), and with the extended sense of "vitality" or "the impulse of life over against death." When used anthropologically, its typical reference is to the entire human being, and not to some portion of the person. Persons in the OT "do not think of themselves in a subject-object relationship (spirit and soul); the subject in particular is not thematic. On the basis of being alive, of individuation within life, of perceiving life as an in-and-out rhythm (breathing?), they find themselves to be living quanta with respect to *ayyīm*, life."<sup>45</sup>

Given this polysemy, we would be mistaken to assume that the word *psychē*, which someone might wish to translate as "soul," actually means "soul" (or requires an identification with the concept of "soul"), defined as the spiritual part of a human distinct from the physical or as an ontologically separate entity constitutive of the human "self." Nor should we imagine that in any given utterance *psychē* refers to "inner life," "life," and "person" – or to even one of these possible referents. (In the same way, we would not expect native speakers of English to confuse a "light blue" with a "blue mood" or a "light switch.") In the end, studies of the human person oriented toward the semantics of biblical Hebrew or Greek are capable of only limited and primarily negative results. We can show, for example, that words like *nepheš* or *psychē* do not necessarily refer to ontologically separate (or separable) parts of

<sup>44</sup> For discussion, see Stephen Everson, "Psychology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* (ed. Jonathan Barnes; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 168-94; Michael Frede, "On Aristotle's Conception of the Soul," in *Essays on Aristotle's De anima* (ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty; Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 93-107; K.V. Wilkes, "Psyche versus the Mind," in *Essays on Aristotle's De anima* (ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty; Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 109-27.

<sup>45</sup> H. Seebass, "נְפֶשׁ," *JDOT* 9:497-519 (503-4); see Seebass' excursus, "The Translation 'Soul'" (508-10).

the human person. On the other hand, neither can such study show that, in individual texts, the opposite is necessarily the case.<sup>46</sup>

By way of more specific illustration, let us examine the anthropological language of 1 Peter – a suitable test case precisely because its terminology might invite a dualist reading.<sup>47</sup> By the time of the writing of 1 Peter, three hundred years of admixture of Greco-Roman and Hebrew perspectives on the nature of humanity had yielded a range of positions. Some would be more clearly dualistic (e.g., the writings of Josephus and Philo), others monist, though with most Jewish writers rejecting body-soul dualism in favor of a more “integrated” anthropology.<sup>48</sup> The question before us is how Peter portrayed the human person, and the significance this has for his theology. Did he lean in a more dualist perspective, or did he situate himself more fully in continuity with the monism of the Scriptures and of parts of the Greco-Roman tradition?

Peter deploys the expected range of terms associated with the nature of the human person. He uses *sōma* (“body”) only once, in 2:24, with reference to Christ’s having borne “our sins in his body on the tree.” Since this is the very Christ who was present in times past to inspire the prophets (1:11) and who will be revealed in glory (e.g., 1:13; 4:13) – that is, since Christ is also portrayed as a transcendent figure who shares in the identity of God – then this is

<sup>46</sup> This précis is enough to suggest with what lack of precision the anthropological vocabulary of the Scriptures of Israel is utilized. Some scholars go further, to suggest that, although the Scriptures of Israel provide no particularly “scriptural” vocabulary for anthropological analysis, they do draw on the common terminology of the ancient Near East in order to depict the human person as an integrated whole. See, e.g., Fabry, “27,” 412–13; Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 566, 571–72; Eduard Schweizer, “Body,” *ABD* 1:767–72 (esp. 768).

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, see Reinhard Feldmeier, “Seelenheil: Überlegungen zur Soteriologie und Anthropologie des 1. Petrusbriefes,” in *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition* (ed. J. Schlosser; BETL 176; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 291–306. I am borrowing this analysis from Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (THNTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 27.

<sup>48</sup> So, e.g., N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 254–55; more fully, see Warne, *Hebrew Perspectives*.

a profound affirmation of bodily existence and of the significance of embodied, human suffering. *Sarx* (“flesh, body”) refers to “humanity” in 1:24, and otherwise refers to life as a human in 3:18, 21; 4:1 (2x), 2, 6. *Psychē* (“life, vitality,” sometimes translated as “soul”) appears in 1:9, 22; 2:11, 25; 3:20; 4:19. In 2:11, *psychē* is set in contrast to *σάρκα* (*sarkikos*, “belonging to this world”), but it never appears in relation to *sarx*. (*Sarx* is juxtaposed with *pneuma* [“spirit”] in 3:18; 4:6, however.) Christ is the guardian of the Christian’s *psychē* in 2:25, just as God is guarding “you” for a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time. Those who suffer entrust their *psychai* (plural) to God (4:19). In 3:20, *psychē* refers to “persons,” Noah and his kin, rescued through the flood. For Peter, *sarx* concerns “life as it reflects and/or pertains to this world” and *psychē* connotes “life as it reflects and/or pertains to the world to come.” The dualism with which Peter operates, then, is eschatological and not anthropological.

In this way, Peter proves himself to be more the heir of the Scriptures of Israel than of Plato in his understanding of the human person. This allows him to take with the utmost seriousness the dire situation in which his audience finds itself; after all, it is not the case for him that they could retreat from physical pain into their genuine selves, their souls, untouched by calamity suffering, as though their suffering were purely physical. Nor does he offer the related “hope” that, even though they are suffering in their bodies, this does not matter since God is really concerned with and will rescue their souls. His emphasis on embodied existence provides life in this world its fullest significance and it serves as the basis for his emphasis on a faithful “manner of living” in the material world. Human physicality also ties Peter’s audience to the rest of creation, thus pressing the question how their suffering participates in the situation of the cosmos and, perhaps more to the point, how their liberation is tied to the fate of the cosmos. Importantly, the work of Christ in death and exaltation has repercussions for humans and for the cosmos.

Consequently, the idea that one could simply pile up all of the references in Scripture to “body” or “soul,” and from this deduce

"the biblical understanding of the human person" is misguided on linguistic grounds. We must face the reality that neither the Old nor the New Testament writers developed a specialized or technical, denotative vocabulary for theoretical discussion of the human person. And if this is so, then contemporary interpreters ought to exercise care when reading the biblical materials in light of specialized language that has developed subsequently.

### *Eschatology*

In the absence of word-study approaches, some studies have focused primarily on the question, What happens when we die? That is, eschatology has determined semantics and anthropology. This is particularly the case among those who have correlated Christian dogmas like "general resurrection" or "eternal life" with the need for a personal "essence" that outlives the decaying corpse. This approach is problematic on three grounds. First, anxiety regarding "what happens when we die" was not rampant in Greco-Roman antiquity, and viewpoints ranged from skepticism or agnosticism about any form of afterlife to suggestions of continuing embodied existence, to a belief in the soul's immortality.<sup>49</sup> Second, within contemporary Judaism one finds a diversity of expectations about what might follow death – for example, some Jewish texts speak of the immortality of the soul, others fail to speak of any afterlife or reject outright such an existence, while still others anticipate some form of embodied or re-embodied resurrection.<sup>50</sup> Third, evidence of this nature is necessarily analogical and speculative, since discussion of the afterlife in our texts is carried on by those who have no firsthand knowledge on which to draw.

<sup>49</sup> See Ramsey MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 53–57; Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 108–17.

<sup>50</sup> See Kevin L. Anderson, "But God Raised Him from the Dead": *The Theology of Jesus Resurrection in Luke-Acts* (PBM); Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006), 48–91; N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 85–206; C.D. Elledge, *Life after Death in Early Judaism: The Evidence of Josephus* (WUNT 2:208; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 5–44.

Hence, for our purposes here it is better to ask, Given the biblical evidence regarding the nature of the human person on this side of the eschaton, what can we say about human nature on the other? than to ask, Given our theories about eschatology, what must we say about the nature of the human person in the present? Of course, this does not mean that we can escape altogether the questions posed by eschatology since it is incumbent on any biblical anthropology to address the question of continuity between present life and the promise of eschatological existence. It does raise questions against our looking to eschatology as our point of departure, however.<sup>51</sup>

### "In the Image of God He Created Them" (Gen 1:27)

Not least on account of its prominent location at the beginning of the biblical canon, the Genesis creation account is a critical point of departure for constructing a biblical portrait of humanity. Two immediate affirmations derive from the perspective on humanity provided in Genesis 1:27–31 and 2:4–25 – namely, continuity and difference: the continuity of humanity with all other animals and, indeed, with the rest of creation; and the difference between humanity and other animals.

Humans are like other living things in their being created by God and thus in their relation to God. Moreover, like them, humanity is formed from the stuff of the earth. "Humans are wholly embedded in creation," LeRon Shults rightly observes, "and no special part of humanity, not even the mind, escapes this creaturely continuity."<sup>52</sup> Vegetation is for both humans and animals (Gen 1:30). Animals share with humans the command to reproduce, increase, and fill the seas and the earth (Gen 1:22). The additional vocation given humanity, "to subdue" and "to have dominion" over the earth (Gen 1:26, 28), does not call for the

<sup>51</sup> See further below, ch. 5.

<sup>52</sup> F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 164.

human exploitation of nature, but must be understood in the context of the order set forth in the creation account. True, the creation account imbues humanity with royal identity and task, but this is a nobility granted without conquest; its essence is realized in coexistence with all of life in the land, and in the cultivation of life. Similarly, Psalm 8:7 portrays humanity in a stance of dominion over creation, as though standing over its defeated enemies, but with no hint of military action. Stewardship of creation, management and care without conquest or domination – the human family has this responsibility in relation to God's creation because this is how God has made us.

Humans are unlike other creatures in that only humanity is created after God's own likeness, in God's own image (*imago Dei*). Only to humanity does God speak directly. Humanity alone receives from God this divine vocation. The *imago Dei* tradition has been the focus of diverse interpretations among Jews and Christians – ranging widely from some physical characteristic of humans (such as standing upright) to a way of knowing (especially the human capacity to know God), and so on. What is obvious is that humanity is thus defined in relation to God in terms of both similarity and difference: humanity is in some sense "like" God, but is itself not divine. Humanity thus stands in an ambivalent position – living in solidarity with the rest of the created order and yet distinct from it on account of humankind's unique role as the bearer of the divine image, called to a particular and crucial relationship with Yahweh and yet not divine.<sup>53</sup>

Taken within its immediate setting in Genesis 1, "the image of God" in which humanity is made is set in relation to the exercise of

<sup>53</sup> See McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, 197. On the interpretation of the *imago Dei* in Gen 1, see esp. J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Imago: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005); for a complementary perspective, see W. Sibley Towner, "Clones of God: Genesis 1:26–28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible," *Int* 59 (2005): 341–56. For further, theological assessment, see Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (The Matrix of Christian Theology; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

dominion over the earth on God's behalf. This observation does not take us far, however, since we must then ascertain what it means to exercise dominion in this way – that is, in a way that reflects God's own ways of interaction with his creatures. Additionally, this way of putting the issue does not grapple with the profound word spoken over humanity and about humanity, that human beings in themselves (and not merely in what they do) reflect the divine image. What is this quality that distinguishes humanity? God's words affirm the creation of the human family in its relation to himself, as his counterpart, so that the nature of humanity derives from the human family's relatedness to God. The concept of the *imago Dei*, then, is fundamentally relational, or covenantal, and takes as its ground and focus the graciousness of God's own covenantal relations with humanity and the rest of creation. The distinguishing mark of *human* existence when compared with other creatures is thus the whole of human existence (and not some "part" of the individual). As the Genesis story unfolds, the vocation given humanity entails individuality within community and the human capacity for self-transcendence and morality – that is, the capacity to make decisions on the basis of self-deliberation, planning and action on the basis of that decision, and responsibility for those decisions and actions. The skeleton of what evolutionary biologist Francisco Ayala refers to as "ethical consciousness" (that is, the capacity to judge human actions as right or wrong),<sup>54</sup> is filled out in Scripture with reference to God's own character, God's "difference" (or holiness) in relation to the cosmos. In a signal text, for example, Leviticus 19 indices holy behavior in terms of family and community respect (vv. 3, 32), religious loyalty (vv. 3b, 4–8, 12, 26–31), economic relationships (vv. 9–10), workers' rights (v. 13), social compassion (v. 14), judicial integrity (v. 15), neighborly attitudes and conduct (vv. 11, 16–18), distinctiveness (v. 19), sexual integrity (vv. 20–22, 29), exclusion of the idolatrous and occult (vv. 4, 26–31), racial

<sup>54</sup> Francisco J. Ayala, "Biological Evolution and Human Nature," in *Human Nature* (ed. Malcolm Jeeves; Edinburgh: The Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2006), 46–64.



equality (vv. 33–34), and commercial honesty (vv. 35–36).<sup>55</sup> Echoing Leviticus 19, Peter writes, “As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves *in all your conduct*; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’ (1:15–16).”

Genesis 1–2 does not locate the singularity of humanity in the human possession of a “soul,” but rather in the human capacity to relate to Yahweh as covenant partner, and to join in companionship within the human family and in relation to the whole cosmos in ways that reflect the covenant love of God. Indeed, as noted above, within the OT, “soul” (*nepheš*) refers to life and vitality – not life in general, but as instantiated in human persons and animals; not a thing to have but a way to be.<sup>56</sup> To speak of loving God with all of one’s “soul” (e.g., Deut 6:5), then, is to elevate the intensity of involvement of the entirety of one’s being. What, then, of Genesis 2:7 (“the Lord God formed the human being of the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human being became a living soul [*nepheš*]” [my translation])? The term in question, *nepheš*, is used only a few verses earlier with reference to “every beast of the earth,” “every bird of the air,” and “everything that creeps on the earth” – that is, to everything “in which there is life (*nepheš*)” (1:30 [my translation]). This demonstrates that “soul” is not for the Genesis story a unique characteristic of the human person; humans are not distinctively *human* on account of their purported possession of a “soul.” Indeed, one might better translate Genesis 2:7 with reference to the divine gift of *life*: “the human being became fully alive” (my translation). Thus, we find here a witness to the nature of human life that is at once naive and profound. It is naive not in the sense of gullibility or primitiveness, but because it has not worked out in what we may regard as a philosophically satisfying way the nature of physical existence in life, death, and afterlife. It is profound in its presentation of the human person fundamentally in relational terms, and its

<sup>55</sup> This way of construing holiness is borrowed from Christopher J.H. Wright, “Old Testament Ethics: A Missiological Perspective,” *Catalyst* 26, no. 2 (2000): 5–8.

<sup>56</sup> For extended discussion, see Stone, “The Soul.”

assessment of the human being as genuinely human and alive only within the family of humans brought into being by Yahweh and in relation to the God who gives life-giving breath. That is, Genesis does not define humanity in essentialist terms but in relational, as Yahweh’s partner, and with emphasis on the communal, intersexual character of personhood, the quality of care the human family is to exercise with regard to creation as God’s representative, the importance of the human modeling of the personal character of God, and the unassailable vocation of humans to reflect among themselves God’s own character.<sup>57</sup>

### “To the Measure of the Full Stature of Christ” (Eph 4:13)

Outside of Genesis 1–2 the phrase “image of God” plays little role in the OT, though it is found in Jewish literature from the Second Temple period (e.g., Wis 2:23–24; Sir 17:1–13), including the letters of Paul. By way of preparing for a brief consideration of that evidence, however, it will be instructive to review those related texts where the question is raised, What is a human being? There are four such texts, and they have been helpfully explored by Patrick Miller.<sup>58</sup>

The first, Psalm 8, extols human dignity in the context of divine glory:

You have made them a little lower than God,<sup>59</sup> and crowned them with glory and honor.

<sup>57</sup> See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 451–52; Colin E. Gunton, “Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the *Imago Dei*,” in *Persons Divine and Human: King’s College Essays on Theological Anthropology* (ed. Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 47–61.

<sup>58</sup> Patrick D. Miller, “What Is a Human Being? The Anthropology of Scripture,” in *What about the Soul? Neuroscience and Christian Anthropology* (ed. Joel B. Green; Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 63–73.

<sup>59</sup> Some English translations read “a little lower than the angels,” on account of how the early versions (Greek, Latin, Aramaic) interpreted the Hebrew *‘olām* (literally, “God, gods”). Other early versions translated the Hebrew term as “God,” however, and this rendering is favored by the context.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
(vv. 5-9)

On the one hand, this psalm, which functions within the Scriptures as a kind of commentary on Genesis 1, sharply contrasts God's majesty with human insignificance. The psalmist appears baffled that Yahweh's splendor does not completely overshadow the possibility of his attending to mere earthlings: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?" (v. 4). On the other hand, the psalmist recognizes that the human family finds its true identity only in relation to God. Moreover, in a world that marked differences between royalty and common folk on the basis of family lineage (the accidents of birth, so to speak), Psalm 8 disallows any concern with inherited status. Instead, it attributes nobility to every person. Here the prominent place of humankind in relation to the rest of creation is accentuated, at the same time that human beings are positioned clearly in relation to God and the heavenly counsel. Even the nobility of humanity is cause for glorifying God.

In the second, Psalm 144, the psalmist as king addresses God, "O LORD, what are human beings that you regard them, or mortals that you think of them?" (v. 3). The reply in this instance is not a celebration of human dignity but a recognition of human transience: "They are like a breath; their days are like a passing shadow" (v. 4). After this comes a plea for liberation and blessing. Psalms 8 and 144 both recognize human insignificance, but here, as Miller notes, emphasis falls on human limitation, mortality, impermanence. Human limitations do not diminish God's attentiveness, however, and the psalmist ends by pronouncing a state of blessedness on those for whom "God is the LORD" (v. 15).

The presence of the God who attends to humanity is underscored in a third OT text, Job 7: "What are human beings, that you

make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, visit them every morning, test them every moment? Will you not look away from me for a while, let me alone until I swallow my spittle?" (vv. 17-19). Unlike the perspective of Psalm 144, though, Job's experience identifies this aspect of human reality as unwanted: "Will you not look away from me for a while?" As Miller puts it, "The one who is crowned with glory in Psalm 8 is also a creature of suffering; the one who is *astonished* by God's attention as making us kings and queens is also one who is *undone* by God's attention, an attention experienced as testing and undoing."<sup>60</sup> Either way, the human reality is finitude, transience, and suffering, and the significance of human life is tied to dependence upon God.

We turn finally to Hebrews 2:6-9, with its citation of Psalm 8:

But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Among Miller's observations, the most telling is how the Hebrew text, *ben 'adam* (Greek: υἱός ἀνθρώπου, *huios anthrōpou*), traditionally translated as "son of man" but in the NRSV as "mortal," has led naturally to a christological, and not simply an anthropological, reading of this text. Miller also draws attention to the phrase, "who for a little while was made lower than the angels," which signifies the earthly sojourn of Christ. This highlights in titular terms the incarnational reality of the status of Jesus Christ as truly human and representatively human. Anthropology

<sup>60</sup> Miller, "What Is a Human Being?" 71.

is thus christologically understood, since the human under whom all things have been made subject (Ps 8) is the one born in human likeness (Heb 2). "The writer to the Hebrews hears in the Psalms the word that whatever we say about the human reality must take into account the face of Jesus Christ."<sup>61</sup>

This final emphasis on the incarnation provides a useful point of re-entry into the image of God tradition as this is developed by Paul. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul refers to "the glory of Christ, who is the image of God," and in Colossians 1:15 he says of Christ, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." This christology lies at the confluence of two streams of thought: 1) portraits of humanity in Genesis 1:26-27 as created in God's image and in Psalm 8:5 as "crowned . . . with glory and honor"; and 2) Jewish speculation regarding Wisdom, described in Wisdom 7:25-26 as "a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty . . . a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness." The apostle's thought in both contexts is similar, for in 2 Corinthians 4 the gospel unveils the very thing that Satan would hide from unbelievers - namely, "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6); whereas in Colossians the work of Christ is manifest in the renewal of humanity in the image of the creator (3:10).

Not surprisingly, then, the terms "image" and "glory" figure importantly, too, in Paul's depiction of humanity in its need of transformation. In the exodus journey, God's people "exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea" (Ps 106:20-22). Expanding this portrait, Paul writes of the whole of humankind, "Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles" (Rom 1:22-23). What is more, the psalmist observes, human beings become like the object of their worship: "Their idols are

<sup>61</sup> Miller, "What Is a Human Being?" 72.

silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they make no sound in their throats. *Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them*" (Ps 115:4-8; emphasis added). So, too, for Paul, humanity has profaned God's glory - indeed, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

What, then, does it mean to speak of Christ as the image of God? Colin Gunton aptly summarized: "First, that Jesus represents God to the creation in the way that the first human beings were called, but failed, to do; and second that he enables other human beings to achieve the directedness to God of which their fallenness had deprived them."<sup>62</sup> Not surprisingly, then, Paul can elsewhere develop this affirmation of Christ as God's image in terms of its corollary, the conformation of human beings into the "image of Christ" (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18).

The renewal of the human being in the divine image is profoundly personal, and embraces the human person in his or her totality. This means that (trans)formation is fully embodied within a nest of relationships, a community. From Scripture we receive an all-encompassing perspective on human health in the cosmos and in relation to God, but also well-developed ways of identifying the sickness that spreads like a cancer throughout the human family, even eating away at the world that humans call home. The term generally given this sickness in the Christian tradition is "sin," a multivalent term that points to the myriad ways in which humans - individually, collectively, and systemically - neglect, deny, and refuse simply to be human - that is, to embrace and live out their vocation as creatures made in the image of God. Accordingly, a Christian conception of human transformation does not allow the categorization of either the person or his or her salvation into "parts," as though inner and outer life could be separated. Angst

<sup>62</sup> Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 100.

among Christians in recent decades over how to prioritize ministries of "evangelism" and "social witness" is simply wrongheaded, therefore, since the gospel, the "evangel" of "evangelism," cannot but concern itself with *human need in all its aspects*. Only an erroneous body-soul dualism could allow — indeed, require — "ministry" to become segregated by its relative concern for "spiritual" versus "material" matters. Nor does a Christian conception of human transformation allow us to think of the restoration of individuals, as it were, one at a time, but pushes our categories always to account for the human community and, beyond humanity, the cosmos. Persons are not saved in isolation from the world around them. Restoration to the likeness of God is the work of the Spirit within the community of God's people, the fellowship of Christ-followers set on maturation in Christ. From this vantage point, "image of God" points ultimately to the transformation of believers in resurrection, a transformation already at work in the creation of a new humanity through the dissolution of barriers dividing human beings from one another along gender, social, or ethnic lines (Col 3:10-11; 1 Cor 12:12-13; Gal 3:28).

### Conclusion

Some might regard the natural sciences as a challenge to biblical theology on account of two of its conclusions — namely, the high degree of their identification of humanity with non-human animals and their questioning of body-soul dualism as a necessary or defensible portrait of the human. In fact, except in their more reductionistic forms (humans are "nothing but . . ."), these conclusions are not at all antagonist nor even alien to a biblical account of humanity. Indeed, a close reading of the Genesis narrative ought to lead us toward an affirmation of the close connection between humans and non-human animals. Moreover, the Genesis account of human creation provides no basis for the human possession of an ontologically distinctive entity known as the "soul," much less for the identification of a person's true "self" with such an entity.

This is not necessarily to suggest, however, that the biblical materials and the natural sciences paint entirely with the same brush in their portraits of the human person. Both highlight the character of humans in their embodiedness and relationality. The biblical materials push further, however. First, in presenting the physical embeddedness of the human family, they highlight the vocation of humanity in relation to the created order — not only in relation to other humans but also in relation to the cosmos. Second, the biblical materials urge the view that a biblical theology of humanity must have as its primary point of beginning and orientation the human in a partnering relationship with God.