

Warren S. Brown, Fuller Integration Lectures

**Lecture 1: “Numinous or Carnal Persons?
The Practical Costs of Inner Souls and Selves”**

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I. The Nature of Human Nature

How many essential substances am I composed of? Am I a body; a body and a soul; a body and a mind; a body, a mind, and a soul; or what about a body, a mind, a soul, and a spirit? These questions highlight the issue of dualism (or tri-part-ism or four-part-ism) vs wholism (or monism).

Another way to ask this question would be the following: Am I essentially numinous (i.e., a non-material spirit) or am I essentially carnal (i.e., a physical body). The answer one gives to this question is fundamental to almost every aspect of our understanding of human nature, implying answers to other questions such as: What and where is the real person? What is the source of human thoughts, feelings, and intentions? What does it mean to say that humans are spiritual beings?

From my perspective, as a neuropsychologist, it would be necessary for the answers to these questions and any theory of human nature to account for what we know of the impact of brain disorder on our behavior, thoughts, emotions, and spiritual experiences.

As inheritors of modern Western thought patterns, we tend to believe (explicitly or implicitly) that each person possess an inner, non-material part (a soul or spirit or mind or self – or all-of-the-above) that defines us as human and that, in some sense, represents our *real selves*. For Christians, this non-material part is a soul, and it is the status of this inner part that defines spiritual well-being. For the secular world, soul language may get replaced by a mind or a self. The psychotherapeutic influence on

popular thinking causes us to focus attention on the well-being of the inner self. We all need to “understand our inner selves”, “express the true inner self”, or “experience deep inner healing.” Thus, in both Christian and secular thought, there is a privileged inner non-physical part that defines our humanness.

Whether or not ontological dualism is true, it is a very fundamental and deeply rooted metaphor with which we Western persons (and certainly we Christians) view ourselves and others. In the parlance of psychologist Jerome Bruner, it is a “preemptive metaphor”¹ that co-opts our thinking about humankind.

To critique dualism is, in many academic circles, to “beat a dead horse.” Within my field of neuropsychology and neuroscience, it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid the conclusion that the powers and experiences of the soul and mind are in reality functions of the body and brain. The various other sciences of human nature would not admit for explicit consideration a non-material inner agent, although what is explicitly barred is sometimes implicitly endorsed. Much of modern philosophy has rejected dualism. Many theologians and Biblical scholars are finding dualism unnecessary for a robust and thoroughly Biblical anthropology.

However, in most of evangelical thinking (and certainly here at Fuller), and in the thinking of the vast majority of Western persons, whether religious or secular, body-soul or body-mind dualism is still a preemptive metaphor.

II. Overview of Lectures

These lectures are about human nature. My concern with this issue stems from questions raised by my own work in neuropsychology. As theologian Wolfart Pannenberg has asked, “When the life of the soul is conditioned in every detail by bodily

¹ Jerome S. Bruner, *Toward a Theory of Instruction*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990)

organs and processes, how can it be detached from the body and survive it?"²

Throughout these lectures I will be contrasting *dualism* (primarily body-soul dualism) with *physicalism*, the form of wholism or monism that presumes humans to be thoroughly embodied physical beings.

In my 3 lectures I will deal with the following issues:

1. *Is dualism a necessary part of a Christian view of humankind?* [Lecture 1] To introduce this topic (and to give myself some theological elbow room), I will give a very sketchy historical summary to suggest that body-soul dualism has extra-Christian roots and is not a necessary presupposition for understanding persons in ways that are consistent with the Bible.
2. *What are the practical consequences of dualism for Christian praxis and for psychological theories and interventions?* [Lecture 1] Here I will critique both practical Christian theology and psychological formulations of the person with respect to the impact of a dualist understanding of persons.
3. *Is dualism tenable within the context of modern neuroscience and neuropsychology?* [Lecture 2] Out of recent research in neuroscience, neurology, and neuropsychology, I will show why it is increasingly difficult to maintain the dualist idea that the spiritual and soulish aspects of personhood are outside of the preview of the functioning of our brains. [Here is where I get to wow you all with colorful pictures from high-tech functional brain imaging. You won't want to miss all these sexy brain pictures.]
4. *What might a monist (or physicalist) Christian theological anthropology be like?* [Lecture 2] I will venture my suggestions [regarding the possibilities for a robust

² Wolfart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1944), p. 182. As quoted by Joel Green, What does it mean to be human? In Malcolm A. Jeeves, *From Cells to Souls – and Beyond*. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004), p. 180.

evangelical theological anthropology. [...unencumbered as I am by anything more than the most paltry dose of formal theological training.]

5. *How is it possible to avoid reductionism and biological determinism, and give a reasonable account of free will, within a physicalist understanding of human nature?*

[Lecture 3] I will try to defend the position that physicalism can be understood in a non-reductive way – that is, in a way that does not presume that all humanness can be reduced to nothing but neurophysiology or to the laws of physics. [Here I will do the heroic work of summarizing in less than 1 hour nearly 300 pages of text that Nancey Murphy and I have produced in over 6 years of work on our new book. You won't want to miss the futility of my efforts.]

One additional introductory comment: Most lecturers speak first out of their primary academic area of expertise. Then, toward the end and having established with the audience their authoritative presence, they allow themselves the freedom to speculate about the broader implications of what they have presented. Ever the fool, I am going to reverse the usual order and be more broadly speculative in this first lecture -- for 2 reasons: First, Wednesday is typically the largest audience at these lectures and, also, the group with the broadest range of psychological and theological interests. Second, this is our chapel hour and I feel that, since I am a member of this community rather than an outsider here to lecture, this Wednesday hour might be the best context in which to comment on the implications of views of human nature for worship, the church, the nature of ministry, and perhaps also the question "What is (and to whom is) the gospel?" Whether or not you agree with me, I very much want to engage you, my Fuller colleagues, in thinking about these issues.

III. Definition of Dualism

First, let me attempt to make it clear what sort of dualism we are going to be talking about. New Testament Theologian N.T. Wright, in his book entitled *The New Testament and the People of God*, does a nice job of clarifying the various meanings of the term “dualism” within Christian thought and Biblical discourse. He provides a useful list of forms of dualism and their level of acceptance in 1st century Judaism. In introducing this typology of dualisms, Wright writes:

The problem...is that the word ‘dualism’ is used in several quite different senses, by no means always differentiated. Furthermore, the word ‘dualism’ is heavily loaded in some circles, often indicating disapproval; but several of the things which are asserted to be ‘dualistic’ are perfectly normal features of most if not all biblical theology, and we must make a careful distinction between that which the great majority of Jews accepted as normal and that with which some, exceptionally, flirted. I propose therefore that, to begin with, we refer to ‘dualities’, rather than ‘dualism’, and save the latter term for certain specific dualities.³

Wright proceeds to give us the following typology of dualities⁴:

1. Theological/ontological duality. The postulate of heavenly beings other than the one god.
2. Theological/cosmological duality. Differentiation between the creator god and the created order.
3. Moral duality. The distinction between good and evil.
4. Eschatological duality. The distinction between the present age and the age to come.

³ N.T.Wright. *The New Testament and the People of God*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). pp..252-253.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 253-254,

5. Theological/moral duality. There are two ultimate sources of all that is: a good god and a bad god (Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism).
6. Cosmological duality. The world of material things is a shadow of the 'real' world of the Forms (as proposed by Plato). The modern version is the view that what we observe in the physical world is secondary and shabby compared with that which can be experienced by the mind or spirit.
7. Anthropological duality. The human-centered version of cosmological dualism of humans as bipartite creatures composed of a body and a soul that are arranged in a hierarchy – soul ahead of body.
8. Epistemological duality. The differentiation between that which can be known by human observation and reason, and that which can be known by revelation (e.g., science vs. religion).
9. Sectarian duality. The differentiation between those who belong to one cultural group and those who belong to others (in-groups and out-groups, Jews vs. Gentiles).
10. Psychological duality. Humans have two inclinations, one good and one bad; these are locked in combat.

Without going into all of Wright's arguments, he would divide these forms of duality into those that were "more or less normal to all mainline Judaism" (types 1-4); those that were "definitely marginal" (types 5-7); and those "held by some, but not all" (types 8-10). Wright would reserve the term "dualism" for types 5 – 7 (theological/moral; cosmological; and anthropological). In another context, Wright lumps the body-soul form of anthropological dualism with paganism. By this he means to indicate its origin in Greek thought rather than in the biblical narrative.

I present all of this not only for your edification, but to make it clear both what I am talking about and what I am not talking about. When I talk of “dualism” I am referring only to Wright’s anthropological and cosmological dualities. That is, I am referring first to the duality that understands human being to be “bipartite creatures composed of a body and a soul which are arranged in a hierarchy – soul ahead of body.” By implication, I am also speaking of mind-body dualism that understands mind to be a nonmaterial entity, distinct from and hierarchically ahead of the body. Second, I include in my use of “dualism” cosmological duality, and particularly its modern form that implies that “the physical world that we observe is secondary and shabby compared with that which can be experience by the mind or spirit.” It is these 2 forms of duality that Wright considers “definitely marginal” with respect to our understanding of the New Testament, that he lumps together with paganism, and that he considers it appropriate to refer to using the pejorative term, “*dualism*”.

IV. Origins of Dualism

I do not intend to present an analysis of the origins of dualism in Western Philosophy or Christian thought. However, the following very sketchy history and simplistic statements will serve my purposes in this lecture. The earliest forms of dualism appear in pre-New Testament times in ancient Iranian Zoroastrianism and in the philosophy of Plato. With respect to dualism in Scripture, I think the following statements can be defended:

- The Old Testament views persons as psychophysical wholes. Even a staunch proponent of New Testament dualism like Biblical scholar Robert Gundry states that in the Old Testament “...body and soul do not contrast. Man is an animated

body rather than an incarnated soul.”⁵

- The New Testament is more ambiguous with respect to this issue, leading to controversy among scholars as to the anthropology of the New Testament (presuming there is a single, unified anthropology that can be detected in the New Testament).
- Most of the presumed support for body-soul dualism comes from interpretations of New Testament texts that refer to life after death.
- Most importantly, the primary focus of scripture is a narrative of God’s redemptive acts in history, not an explication of human nature. Therefore, the issue of dualism or monism is never directly addressed.

Supported by N. T. Wight⁶ and New Testament scholar Joel Green⁷ (among many others) I believe that there is little New Testament support for a Cartesian form of body-soul dualism. Dualist language in the Bible is best understood as what Biblical scholar James Dunn calls “aspective”, rather than “partative” – “aspective” meaning descriptions of the many complex ways we function, rather than “partative” meaning an identification of distinct and separable parts.⁸

A strong version of body-soul dualism entered Christian thought as late as the 4th Century in the teachings of St. Augustine, which became somewhat canonical for the Roman Catholic Church for many centuries thereafter. Augustine was particularly

⁵ Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 1987), 119.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Joel B. Green has written about this issue in several places, including: “‘Bodies – That is, human lives’: A re-examination of human nature in the Bible. In Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony. *Whatever Happened to the Soul: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998) pp. 149-174; and “What does it mean to be human? Another chapter in the ongoing interaction of science and Scripture.” In Malcolm A. Jeeves, *From Cells to Souls – and Beyond: Changing Portraits of Human Nature*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 179-198.

⁸ James G.C. Dunn, *The Theology of the Gospel of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 54.

responsible for linking body-soul dualism with a reformulation of spirituality that turned one's attention inward toward the soul. I will be referring to this self- or soul-focused position as "innerness" – that is, the idea that the real me is an inner part, my soul, and that my body is merely a temporary vessel for this more essential and hierarchically more important non-material "me". For Augustine, and much of the Church since his time, spirituality and been inner and introspective, with the body is to be given lesser regard when considered in relation to the really essential and important part of the person – the inner, non-material soul.⁹

During the Enlightenment, philosopher Rene' Descartes is credited with solidifying the sharp distinction between the soul (or mind) and the body. However, surprisingly (to me, at least), Descartes was primarily a physicalist – or at least more of a physicalist than the majority of his contemporaries. He did NOT believe that the body was inhabited by many souls, as specified in both the philosophy of Aristotle and the medical physiology of Galen – views that were dominant in Descartes' time and had been dominant for centuries. In this earlier anthropology, there were many souls – one for the heart, and one for the brain, and one for the liver, and souls that made muscles contract. Descartes contradicted this earlier view by arguing that all of these basic bodily functions were aspects of a physiological "machine", and that the functioning of animals did not transcend these mechanisms.

The problem for Descartes was imagining how such a biological mechanism could result in human consciousness, will, and rationality. So, Descartes solved this problem by retaining *one* soul. Thus, humans were considered to be unique in having a non-mechanistic immaterial soul (but only one). This soul (or mind) interacted with the

⁹ See the introduction to Augustine's *On the Trinity: Books 8-15* in Gareth B. Matthews, ed., *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

physical body through the pineal gland.¹⁰

This history you already know, I am sure. What I would like to suggest is that Descartes found it necessary to hypothesize this one immaterial part of humankind because he had no information to enrich his imagination regarding the possibilities for embodied consciousness, will, and rationality. Animal and human physiology (particularly neurophysiology) is vastly different than the mechanisms Descartes knew (and, by the way, vastly different than the computers we are so familiar with). *What might Descartes have concluded had he had before him the current body of neuroscience research and theory.* For example, what if Descartes had seen the fMRI results (that I will review in my next lecture) that show colorful anatomical pictures of the specific patterns of brain functioning related to language processing, spatial thinking, both practical and moral decision making, and religious experiences (these being but a few examples)? In the early 17th Century, Descartes' imagination regarding the possibilities for physicalism was limited by a lack of sophisticated neuroscience. He could not have concluded otherwise.

Our imaginations are now challenged by new information. What are we to think? The expanding understanding of human neurology and neuropsychology has made it increasingly difficult to maintain a Cartesian view of humankind that considers the mind or soul to be a non-material substance. (This neuroscience challenge to the Cartesian view will be a major part of tomorrow's lecture.)

In our very brief historical progression, it is interesting to note that even in the late 18th century John Wesley, because he was so very much aware of the rapidly developing medical science of his day, struggled with the inadequacies of a Cartesian

¹⁰ This perspective on Descartes taken from Carl Zimmer, *Soul Made Flesh : The Discovery of the Brain--and How it Changed the World* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

view. In a sermon entitled "What is Man?", Wesley speculates about the location of the "thinking principle":

...it seems to be situated in some part of the head; but whether in the pineal gland, or in any part of the brain, I am not able to determine. But further: This inward principle, wherever it is lodged, is capable, not only of thinking, but likewise of love, hatred, joy, sorrow, desire, fear, hope, and a whole train of other inward emotions, which are commonly called passions or affections. They are styled, by a general appellation, the will; and are mixed and diversified a thousand ways. And they seem to be the only spring of action in that inward principle I call the soul.¹¹

Here the brain is already seen to be the location for all the functions of the soul that Wesley could imagine. In fact, the last sentence of this quote suggests that "the soul" and this embodied "inward principle" are equivalent. Cartesian dualism cannot quite be fit in to what Wesley already knows about the brain and cognition by the late 18th century.

To bring this up to the 20th Century, I indicated that many (perhaps most) modern philosophers working in this area are attempting to deconstruct and undo the Cartesian worldview. Among these was Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's project can be understood as a critique of the inner-outer distinction in philosophy of mind, psychology, and theology. As Owen Thomas puts it, the main purpose of Wittgenstein's philosophy was overcoming the *theological* idea that "looks upon the self or soul as an autonomous, rational, invisible, inner reality essentially independent of the body, the community, and the culture."¹²

¹¹ Wesley, J. (1872b). *Sermon 109: What is Man?* as found at <http://www.ccel.org/w/wesley/sermons/sermons-html/serm-109.html>

¹² Owen C. Thomas, "Interiority and Christian Spirituality". *Journal of Religion*. 2000, 80: 41-60.

V. The Legacy of a Numinous Theology of the Person

Thus far, my main point is that it is OK theologically NOT to be a body-soul dualist. In the remainder of this lecture, I wish to deal with what I feel to be the negative side effects of dualism – some of the unseen costs. In my second lecture, I will deal with brain function and brain disorder with respect to critical aspects of our humanness, including our spirituality. I will also speculate, in a more positive and constructive manner, about better theological and psychological formulations. I will propose how we might reconstruct a robust psychological and theological view of human nature from a physicalist – that is, non-dualist – perspective.

Body-soul dualism considers the most important part of the person to be the inner, nonmaterial part, while the body is presumed to be less important. The body is distanced from, and subordinated to, the soul. The soul, mind, or inner self is presumed to be the *real* self or person. Consequently, we psychologically and theologically separate our “real selves” from our behavior and from our relationships. As an inevitable by-product of our long history of dualism, we have also inherited a commitment to “inner-ness” and, thus, to individuality. All of the important events, and all that is essential about me, are inside. Therefore, my obligation is inward. Since my inner self is private and hierarchically privileged, I am an isolated individual, essentially independent, and entirely the pilot of my own ship.

Owen Thomas has provided an important critique of the emphasis on innerness in the literature on Christian spirituality. He first makes clear the nature of the inner-outer distinction he wishes to criticize. Thomas writes, “So by interiority we mean not physically inner but psychologically and spiritually inner such that the self or soul is inner and the facial expression is outer; such that the mind is inner and the brain is outer; such

that the will or intention is inner and the bodily action and speech are outer.”¹³

In the final analysis, the inwardness of dualist anthropology creates a strong magnet drawing our perspectives almost inevitably toward *gnosticism*. Raymond Brown, in his *Introduction to the New Testament*, describes the major tenants of Gnosticism as follows: “...human souls and spiritual principles do not belong in this material world (which is often described as evil or ignorant), and they can be saved only by receiving the revelation that they belong in a heavenly realm of light ... Ascent to this realm is sometimes through baptism, sometimes through elaborate cultic rituals (often involving anointing), sometimes more through philosophical reflections.”¹⁴ Thus, Gnosticism emphasizes the special status of the individual, non-material soul, and distances that soul from relationships with the body or the physical world.

The alternative to this inner-outer, or body-soul, dichotomy is some form of monism or *physicalism* where persons are understood to be unitary but complex physical beings. As complex beings, we function in ways that we would correctly label as “mental”, “emotional”, “willful”, or “spiritual”. Within a *non-reductive* form of physicalism, these mental and spiritual properties are considered *emergent* – that is, they cannot be reduced to “nothing but” neurophysiology, biochemistry, or physics. Thus, there is no implication that there is anything other than the entire person doing the doing. What I do IS me! I am what I do! There is no privileged inner me (such as a soul or self) that can be distanced from my embodied enmeshment with the physical and social world.

Unfortunately, the costs (i.e., the practical negative side effects) of this commitment to the centrality and superior status of an inner numinous soul (or self) have

¹³ Owen C. Thomas, “The Self as Interior in Christian Spirituality”. Paper given at the Pacific Coast Theological Society, 2001.

¹⁴ Ramond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. (New York: Doubleday, 1997) p. 92.

been substantial. In terms of practical theology, the “innerness” and individuality fostered by dualism have had a major impact on our understanding of worship, spiritual formation, community, the church, and the nature of the gospel (all topics of current concern and conversation around Fuller).

Dualism has also affected our understanding of psychological disorders and interventions, such that the real problems are often (but not always) attached to internal parts or agents, and most of the therapeutic work gets focused inward. In such forms of psychological theory and practice, the person is atomized, individualized, and distanced from the real source of their personhood – the outer-ness of their social relationships and (as psychology is understood here at Fuller) their relationship to God. The physicality and social embeddedness of the client is often of lesser importance, compared to constructs presumed to be entirely within the individual.

Relegating the body to a lesser status in the hierarchy of what is important, and elevating the inner soul or self to a position of prominence, also creates greater difficulty in thinking adequately about health, physical illness, disability, brain damage, the impact of genetics on individual traits, medical therapies like stem cells, evolution and creation, interpersonal behavior, sex, gender identity, marriage, families, the importance networks of close friends, social responsibility, the qualities of neighborhoods and cities, and the environment. All of these issues are difficult to work through when the non-material soul or self is hierarchically privileged, while the body is relegated to a distant second place.

The following is a more explicit list of what are, *in my opinion*, some of the consequences of a dualist view of human nature, and the psychological and spiritual “innerness” that it engenders:

- Focus on individuality rather than community and relatedness.
- Focus on the spiritual status of the soul, rather than on moral action in the world.

- Affect-oriented and individual-centered worship.
- A tendency within the church not to treat physical illness, disability, and psychological distress as “spiritually” significant, and therefore our primary response is sentimental rather than embodied.
- A tendency not to take as seriously as we should our redemptive role in fostering and cultivating interpersonal relatedness and reconciliation.
- A tendency for the presumptions of innerness and individuality to bolster psychological theories and interventions that tend to ignore the physicality and social embeddedness of persons.
- A tendency to think of the physical creation and nature to be outside of God’s concern, and therefore not of any specific importance for Christians.

VI. Examples of the Impact of Dualism

Perhaps it would be helpful at this point to flesh out several specific examples of the negative impact of the innerness, individuality, and gnosticism fostered by dualism. In the first example I will highlight the writings of Wendell Berry regarding the impact on communities and relationships of what he refers to as “distancing the body from the soul.” I will then offer a more extensive example regarding disability, relying heavily in this case on the work of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, followed by a brief discussion of dualism and ethics. Next, I will focus on current trends in our understanding of spirituality and its impact on worship styles. Finally, I will suggest what tendencies are created by a commitment to “innerness” in our understandings of psychological constructs, disorders, and interventions.

Communities and Interpersonal Relatedness

The first illustration comes from the writings of Wendell Berry, an agrarian philosopher, essayist, novelist, poet, and Kentucky farmer. Generally, Berry's concern is for the small town, the life of the local community, and survival of the small family farm. He obviously has much to be concerned about since all of these have suffered considerably in the last 100 years.

In his essay entitled "The Body and the Earth"¹⁵, Berry describes clearly the prevalence and negative impact of what he refers to as a "separation of the body from the soul" (which is the basic definition of gnosticism). As Berry describes it, we consider our bodies to be mere shopping carts for bussing around our souls, and this attitude affects our understanding of our lives as Christians and as persons within communities. The following is a paragraph in which Berry makes this point fairly sharply:

For many of the churchly, the life of the spirit is reduced to a dull preoccupation with getting to Heaven. At best, the world is no more than an embarrassment and a trial to the spirit which is otherwise radically separated from it. The true lover of God must not be burdened with any care or respect for His works. While the body goes about its business of destroying the earth, the soul is supposed to wait for Sunday, keeping itself free of earthly contaminants. While the body exploits other bodies, the soul stands aloof, free from sin, crying to the gawking bystanders: "I am not enjoying it!" As far as this sort of "religion" is concerned, the body is no more than the lusterless container of the soul, a mere "package" that will nevertheless light up in eternity, forever cool and shiny as a neon cross. This separation of the soul from the body and from the world is no disease of the fringe, no aberration, but a fracture that runs through the mentality of institutionalized religion like a geologic fault. And this rift in the mentality of religion continues to characterize the modern mind, no matter how secular or worldly it becomes...And yet, what is the burden of the Bible if not a sense of the

¹⁵ Wendell Berry, "The Body and the Earth", *Recollected Essays* (San Francisco: Northpoint Press, 1981).

mutuality of influence, rising out of an essential unity, among soul and body and community and world?¹⁶

In the remainder of his essay, Berry makes a strong case for a chain of negative impact of this separation of the life of the body from the more important status of the soul. “Contempt for the body”, he says, “is invariably manifested in contempt for other bodies – the bodies of slaves, laborers, women, animals, plants, the earth itself.” Berry links our contempt for the body to a romanticizing and instrumentalizing of sex, to a weakening of marriages and households, to a breakdown of communities, and finally to a disrespect for God’s physical creation and the environment. Berry’s case for the roots of these problems in Gnostic disregard for the body is compelling, at least it is so for me.

Disability

To consider more specifically the impact of dualism on Christian community, let us next turn to the problem of physical or cognitive disability. This topic is particularly important for me because of 2 contexts in which I continually encounter disability.

First, my wife, Janet, is quadriplegic due to an automobile accident some 9 years ago. She can use her arms normally, and her hands in a limited manner, but she is completely or partially paralyzed over the rest of her lower body. She does well in continuing her life as a professional author, teacher, and consultant in healthcare quality improvement, as an important member of our network of friends, and as a mother, a wife, and a critical contributor to our household economy. However, the limitations of the disability on her life, the additional overhead related to most aspects of her daily life, and the impact of her continual neurogenic pain, are considerable. Janet’s disability has

¹⁶ Ibid, pp 283-284 .

become a very embodied part of my own life as well (but, of course, to a much lesser degree).

I am also continually in contact with disability in the form of the cognitive disabilities of the individuals that my students and I study in our research. For some 10 years, we have been studying individuals with agenesis of the corpus callosum, a rare congenital brain disorder in which the large structure connecting the right and left cerebral hemispheres (called the corpus callosum) is entirely absent. A pathway involving over 200 million neurons simply failed to develop.

In the process of the research in my laboratory, we bring individuals with ACC (as it is called), or families with a child or adolescent with ACC, to Pasadena for 2 to 3 days of neurocognitive testing. During these testing days, we get well acquainted with both the person with ACC and their families. We witness much and hear many stories about their lives coping with this brain disorder and the accompanying cognitive disability. While the cognitive disability associated with ACC is subtle (at least among those whom we have chosen to study), there is nevertheless a consistently reported and tragic part of their stories that is fraught with frustrations and discouragement. The impact of ACC on cognitive abilities is little understood within the medical community, among educators, and within social service systems. Thus, when their IQ is within normal limits, they receive no help, no services, no considerations, and little compassion despite a significant cognitive disability. What is particularly difficult is that the disability shows up most prominently in their social functioning, which is largely ignored by most systems that might provide help. Parents are at their wits' end, needing a clear description of their child's disorder, some indication of the prognosis, and some form of effective intervention. Little of this exists in the current medical or neuropsychological literature.

So, in the last 10 years disability has become a major factor in my thinking. When I consider disability in the light of the prominent dualism of modern Christian thought, I wonder how our understanding and our relationship to disability might be different if we had a more robust understanding of our physical embodiment. Might we, the apparently “non-disabled”, have a better basis for understanding and helping if we were able to set aside our radical dualism?

In considering these issues, I would like to shift our attention to the work of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his book entitled, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why human beings need the virtues*.¹⁷ This title, *Dependent Rational Animals*, is quite explicit regarding MacIntyre’s views. “Animals” refers to MacIntyre’s physicalist view of humankind – our continuity with the animal world, as well the embodiment of our essential humanness. “Rational” expresses MacIntyre’s understanding of the critical role of practical reasoning in fostering human flourishing. This form of rationality is not limited to the conscious, problem-solving rationality of classical philosophy – such as in the writings of Descartes (for example). Rather, the rationality referred to here is more like common everyday wisdom. The goal of human development for MacIntyre is to become an “independent practical reasoner.” However, the critical step in becoming an independent practical reasoner is development of the virtue of “acknowledged dependence.” Only those persons who are continually able to acknowledge, and function within, their dependence on others are successful in becoming truly effective independent practical reasoners (thus, the designation of humans as “dependent rational animals”).

At this point in his argument MacIntyre begins to talk about disability. He makes two points about disability that are important for us to consider. First, MacIntyre points

¹⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why human beings need the virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

out that we are *all always* somewhere on a continuum of disability. He writes, "...there is a scale of disability on which we all find ourselves. Disability is a matter of more or less, both in respect to degree of disability and in respect of the time periods in which we are disabled."¹⁸ There is no such thing as a dichotomy between "disabled" and "non-disabled". We all simply reside for the moment at some place on a continuous scale of disability. Throughout our lives, from infancy to old age, we move back and forth along this scale. Thus, becoming an independent practical reasoner is possible, at least in part, by being clear about our personal involvement in disability. Identifying ourselves as a part of the disability scene is an important part of acknowledging our dependence.

Second, MacIntyre argues that the flourishing of persons with disability (which includes us all) is dependent on the imaginative and creative involvement of the surrounding community. Here MacIntyre writes,

For it is and perhaps always has been a common assumption that blindness, deafness, deformed or injured limbs, and the like exclude the sufferer from more than a very, very limited set of possibilities. And this has often been treated as if it were a fact of nature. What is thereby obscured is the extent to which whether and how far the obstacles presented by those afflictions can be overcome or circumvented depends not only on the resources of the disabled – and these will vary a great deal from individual to individual – but also on what others contribute, others whose failures may be failures of imagination with respect to future possibilities. What disability amounts to, that is, depends not just on the disabled individual, but on the groups of which that individual is a member.¹⁹

Thus, MacIntyre believes that the ultimate outcome of a situation of disability – the degree to which the disabled person can yet flourish – is critically involved with the ability

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 73.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 75.

of the immediate community to imagine future possibilities, and to put that imaginative thinking into operation on behalf of the disabled person.

Brooke Ellington was recently the focus of a film on disability directed by Christopher Reeve. Brook is the quadriplegic girl who graduated *magna cum laude* from Harvard University (majoring in cognitive neuroscience, by the way). Regarding embodied miracles, Brooke Ellington has said, “Many people think of miracles in a fantastical and mystical sense. My mother and I have a very concrete, down-to-earth concept of miracles...miracles are manifested through people – people who come into our lives at the right time to help us through a difficult situation. People who depend on each other are the miracles.”²⁰

I first made this argument regarding disability in a paper I gave at a symposium on “Suffering and Spiritual Transformation.”²¹ I concluded by asking what “spiritual transformation” means for those who suffer disability? Is it primarily related to inner numinous experiences or deep inner healing, or does their flourishing mostly depend upon imaginative actions and interactions by the communities in which disabled persons find themselves? Is it a *spiritual* transformation that is called forth by disability or suffering, or is it an *embodied* transformation within those who immediately surround the disabled person that needs to occur – a transformation toward the acknowledgement of their own dependence, and a transformation evidenced in the engagement of the practical reasoning of the members of the community in a process of imagining solutions to the limitations of disability?

²⁰ Brooke Ellison as quoted in Laura Kraminker, “Brooke Ellison: None of Us Gets Through the Life Alone.” *New Mobility*. 2004, 15 (135), 43-47.

²¹ Warren S. Brown, “Understanding Disability without Escaping to Dualism.” Paper given at the conference on The Gifts of Suffering: Spiritual Transformation, Science and Medicine. Vancouver, B.C. July, 2004.

It is too easy in our gnosticism to relegate solutions to disability (or suffering) to the sentimental realm of the inner subjective experiences of the self or the soul of the sufferer, and to ignore the embodied realities of disability and what might be done to minimize these limitations. We easily relegate the needed transformation to realms of the immaterial at the expense of the acknowledgement of our own dependent animality and the implications of this for what we might be able to imagine and to do for those who suffer disability.

Religiousness and Ethics

A number of modern writers have critiqued 20th Century Christianity as essentially Gnostic. We have already encountered a critique of American Christianity in the passage I quoted earlier from Wendell Berry. With regard to such American religiousness, Harold Bloom echoes Berry when he writes in his book entitled *The American Religion*, "...the real American religion is and has always been in fact...gnosticism." "It is a knowing, by and of an uncreated self... and [this] knowledge leads to freedom...from nature, time, history, community, and other selves..."²²

Our own Glen Stassen and his collaborator David Gushee have written (in their book, *Kingdom Ethics*) about the negative impact on Christian ethics of dualism and its emphasis on innerness. Not mincing words, they write, "To the extent that Christians adopt any kind of body/soul, earth/heaven dualism we simply do not understand the message of Scripture – or of Jesus."²³ Later in the book, Stassen and Gushee specify

²² Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 49. As quoted in Nancey Murphy, *Human Nature at the Intersection: Theology, Science, and Philosophy*. Manuscript in press.

²³ Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee. *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. (Downers Grove, Ill., Intervarsity Press, 2003), p.28-29.

clearly what they mean by this statement, and what they believe are the consequences of dualism for ethics.

One classic tendency in Christian thought has been the development of a thoroughgoing *dualism* in which sharp dichotomies are drawn between body and spirit/soul, world and church, law and gospel, and so on. The tendency of this kind of theology has been to identify God with the former (spirit, church, gospel) and expel or radically alter the nature of God's presence in the latter (body, world, law). The goal of the church is to rescue souls from bodies, rescue the church from the world, and transport its passengers safely to the heavenly realms. The implication for ethics has tended to be a lack of emphasis on obeying the teachings of Jesus in real physical, this-worldly life...²⁴

As I indicated earlier, Owen Thomas has written what I feel to be a very important critique of the innerness of our understanding of Christian spirituality. Thomas writes, "In the tradition of writing about the Christian life or spirituality, commonly known as ascetical theology, down to the present burgeoning of this literature, a pervasive emphasis and focus has been on the inner or interior life as distinct from the outer, bodily, and communal life." He goes on to say, "My thesis...is that this emphasis is mistaken philosophically, theologically, and ethically."

Owen Thomas is particularly helpful in offering 3 forms of redress to this inappropriate emphasis on innerness in Christian spirituality: (1) "A renewed emphasis on the body and the material, social, political and historical world rather than an exclusive focus on the soul or interior life." (2) "The theme of the reign of God must

²⁴ Ibid, p. 115.

become central again in Christian spirituality.” and (3) “There must be a primary emphasis on practice in Christian formation.”²⁵

Worship

To continue these thoughts, let me be so bold as to comment on current trends in worship styles. I believe that emphasis on the innerness of spirituality has been a major factor in the recent predominance within evangelicalism of a highly affective worship style. While there is lots of lip service given to praise to God and the corporateness of worship, I believe that the primary focus of these events is inward. The spotlight of attention of most participants in worship is focused on their inner self or soul as an isolated individual. Worship is experienced as an individual matter, with little direct reference of this experience to other persons, or to embodied, behavioral living outside of the worship event. If our primary Christian responsibility is to the status of our souls, and if the only accessible index we have to the status of our souls is the innerness of our feelings, then the measure of a good worship service is the degree to which we come away with the kind of affective experiences that confirm to each of us individually that our soul is OK. I may be wrong here, or overstating the case, but I suspect that current trends in worship preferences are mostly driven by a strong commitment to a gnostic view of human spirituality.

I should clarify that I am not denigrating the value of emotions in human functioning. Antonio Damasio recently made clear from studies of individuals with frontal lobe brain damage the critical role that emotions play in human *rationality*.²⁶ Emotions have a particular job to do, and that job is to code for us the significance of external

²⁵ Owen C. Thomas, op. cit., pp. 58-60.

²⁶ Antonio Damasio. *Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. (New York: Putnam Books, 1994)

events and information. They also provide us with important evaluative information regarding potential behaviors we might contemplate. However, they are always a secondary evaluative response to the content of specific environmental or social information (real or imagined). However, in gnosticism, emotions and feelings become a thing unto themselves – a marker of the well-being of the inner, more real self or soul. Thus, it becomes acceptable in worship to manipulate emotions as the primary outcome, rather than allowing emotions to signal the significance of propositional content or active community relatedness. Comprehension of the work of God in history and within the context of our lives will at times elicit profound emotion, but this emotion highlights the significance of external events, not the status of the inner self or soul.

Here at Fuller, we have recently been considering the question, “What is the gospel?” This has been an effort to focus our attention on what is, and is not, the essential message of the gospel. With regard to this critique of dualism and its impact on religiousness, ethics, and worship, perhaps we ought also to consider the question, “To whom is the gospel?” That is, how does our understanding of humankind condition our perspective on the evangelical call to participate in and spread the gospel? Would we have a better grasp on the gospel if we shed the innerness of ascetical Christian spirituality and seriously considered the recommendations of Owen Thomas regarding redress of our gnostic tendencies? Is the gospel about “saving souls”, or is it about redeeming whole, embodied persons and communities

VII. Cartesian Psychology:

Historically, there has always been a tension in the field of Psychology between two poles: theories and practices focused on intrapsychic entities; and those that attend exclusively to manifest behaviors. Does Psychology study the mind or human behavior? This tension has been expressed most dramatically over the last century in the

predominance of Freudian psychology (with lots of inner entities) during the early part of the century, the dominance of behaviorism during the middle decades (with exclusive attention to behavior), followed by a “cognitive revolution” in the last decades of the century (where inner properties such as consciousness and information processing became the focus).

Outside of behaviorism, the field of Psychology has been influenced by an implicit (and sometimes explicit) Cartesian Psychology in which the “self” (or the “ego”, a “central executive processor”, the frontal lobes, or some other internal entity) replaces the soul in Cartesian philosophy. That is, the world is presumed to be experienced by, and behavior controlled by, some form of inner agent. Since the psychological properties of human functioning are manifestations of the inner “self”, rather than identified with whole persons, the person (understood as the inner agent) becomes dissociated from his or her behavior. To find the source of psychological problems brought to therapy, or resources for their resolution, attention must be turned inward toward the self that is the *real person*, rather than outward to the whole embodied person in her social environment. Thus, this focus on the self and its resources can lead to a reduced awareness of the social embeddedness of the person, as well as an instrumental view of other persons and communities. In a Cartesian-influenced psychology, the underlying source of a psychological problem is not to be found in how the person functions in the social world as an embodied agent, but is related to inadequacy the inner, more essential self (whether understood psychodynamically or cognitively).

One example of the distinction I am trying to make comes from my own field of human cognition and cognitive neuroscience. The issue is most clear in recent critiques of the concept of a Theory of Mind (ToM). The idea behind ToM is that, in social interactions, we impute mental states to other individuals. We use these imputations to

predict the likely behavior of other persons. Emergence of the concept of a ToM has spawned a plethora of research, particularly in Developmental Psychology. It has been estimated that 1 percent of the academic publications in 2003 that refer to infants or children also refer to a ToM.²⁷ Much of this research has involved study of individuals with autism whose deficits in social interactions many believe stem from an inadequate ToM.²⁸

The theory of a ToM (sometimes referred to as the “theory theory”) has been critiqued by a number of writers as essentially Cartesian. That is, the child is viewed as an inner agent that constructs theories about other persons during social interactions. These theories are about mental phenomena of other persons that are presumed to be hidden from view and that involve their knowledge, desires, beliefs, intentions, etc. In the case of either the theorizer or the person who is the subject of the theorizing, it is presumed that an agent exists within the person whose dealing are private and only vaguely reflected in expressed behavior. The inner agent of one person must construct adequate theories about the hidden activity of another inner agent in order to behave appropriately.

Pressed by such criticisms of the Cartesian nature of this “theory theory”, the term “mentalizing” has been increasingly used as a substitute. “Mentalizing” has the advantage of allowing for the possibility that mapping knowledge, beliefs, intentions, etc. of other persons is a *process* done by whole persons. The difference is captured by the title of one critique of the theory of a ToM, “Participants don’t need theories.”²⁹ Human beings do not have separate agents somewhere in the head, but are themselves very

²⁷ Vasudevi Reddy and Paul Morris, Participants don’t need theories: Knowing minds in engagement. *Theory and Psychology*, 2004, 14, 647-665.

²⁸ S. Baron-Cohen, A. Leslie, and Uta Frith. Does the autistic child have a ‘theory of mind’? *Cognition*. 1985, 21, 37-46.

²⁹ Reddy and Morris, op cit.

complex agents that have various skills for mapping, remembering, and interacting with the social environment. The distinction is subtle, but critically important for our understanding of humankind within the field of psychology.

It is not that there is nothing going on “inside” worth considering. A person’s behavior is regulated and modified by action-related maps of the world that are interior in some sense, and that include a representation of one’s own self in space and time. These maps are formed by past experiences, and they are not simply “factual”, but are emotively and emotionally weighted. Since a person’s behavior (decisions, reactions, feelings, etc.) emerges from these maps, there are reasons to explore with a client how they map the world.

There is another sense in which we experience a subjective inner mental life. Humans have the ability to run off-line action simulations or behavioral scenarios, that is, simulations of potential actions that do not get released into bodily behavior. Often these off-line processes involve simulated speech in the form of self-talk, or imaged conversations.

The main point to be made is that these maps, although they contain a representation of the self, do not constitute a Cartesian self in that they do not constitute a separate inner person or agent. Nor is the subjective experience of running of an off-line behavioral scenario evidence for an inner agent. Only the person as a whole is an agent, and the maps and simulations come into play in order to regulate whole-person action (real or imagined). In addition, changes in the way a person maps the world can only occur by action and consequent feedback. Thus, the mechanism for therapeutic change is some form of interaction with the physical and social world (that is, action and feedback; again, real or simulated). Consistent with this formulation is the recent emphasis in both developmental neuroscience and cognition that “doing comes before knowing.”

Thus, human persons do have a subjectively available conscious inner life. Unfortunately, this off-line mode of functioning, coupled with the cultural conditioning of a Cartesian view of human nature, has given us the illusion of an inner agent. To make the point as clearly as possible, the critical issue with regard to a Cartesian view of persons is whether these *processes* begin to be treated as a separate inner *person or agent* that expresses itself through behavior, rather than the processes being attributes or descriptions of the functioning of the person as a whole.

In my view, the fundamental problem is the same in Christian evangelism and in psychology. The desired outcome and the endpoint of the process becomes the fixing of an inner part of the person – the sinful soul or the inadequate self. Whether this translates into the actions of the person within their relationships and communities is of much lesser importance. As the philosopher Wittgenstein has expressed it, “If we want to know if [a man] can play chess, we aren’t interested in anything that goes on inside him.”

VIII. Summary and Prospect

In this lecture I have tried to indicate that within Christian theology it is reasonable and permissible NOT to be dualist. What reading I have done has convinced me that dualism has crept into Christian thinking through largely non-Biblical sources. I have also tried to signal what I believe are the negative by-products of a dualist view of humankind for practical theology, Christian living, ethics, and our understanding of our spirituality. I have also suggested how implicit dualism might impact our formulations within psychology.

Tomorrow, I will start from the beginning (or at least what is the beginning for me) – the evidence from neuropsychology that makes it difficult to maintain the idea of a separate inner agent such as a soul, spirit, or self that is distinct from the brain and body.

I will then reveal my epistemology as a scientist and a Christian. Finally, I will try to suggest how this information might be used to point a different direction for theological anthropology. To give you a clue regarding where I will be going, I will argue that human distinctiveness and spirituality arise out of our relationality, and not in the possession of a unique, non-material part.