

**"Do we have a soul after all?"**

A review of Nancey Murphy's book by Dr Noel Hickson  
presented at an ISCAST (NSW) meeting  
in the School of Physics at the University of NSW  
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**BODIES AND SOULS  
OR  
SPIRITED BODIES**

**PROFESSOR  
NANCEY MURPHY**

**CORE CONCEPTS**

- Human beings do not have a soul.
- Soul is a Greek concept intruding into the biblical account.
- The historic and biblical ideas of soul are too internally inconsistent to use in modern discussions.
- Modern science makes the most current notions of soul untenable.
- Theology is being reshaped by the now Physicalist concept of Soul.
- We need a non-reductionist Physicalism.

## THE BOOK

- BODIES AND SOULS OR SPIRITED BODIES
- CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
- ISBN 0-521-67676-2
- 147 PAGES      2006

## NANCYE MURPHY

- Professor of Philosophical Theology
- Fuller Theological Seminary
- Internationally known Author
- Speaks on Christianity and Science
- Writes widely in Theology
- Co-authors with Bob Russell

## NANCEY'S PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

- “Why do I care about writing this book and doing it well? Part of the answer is that I recognized some years ago that I had a call from God to use my philosophical education for the sake of the Church”.

## THE PLACE OF THE BOOK

- Theology Students and young graduates
- Christian Teachers and Church Professionals
- Series – Current Issues in Theology
- Focused Studies on Key issues in Theology
- State of the Art !

## PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE AND PREJUDICE

- Senior Citizen (70+)!
- Early Training and Work in Physics
- Theological Training
- Entry to Medicine in my 30s
- 30 Years Clinical Experience
- Much to Learn About Humanness

## BOOK OUTLINE

- 4 CHAPTERS
  1. Theological and Biblical perspectives on Human Nature
  2. What does Science say about Human Nature? Physics, evolutionary biology, neuroscience.
  3. Did my neurons make me do it? Reductionism, mortality and the problem of free will.
  4. What are the philosophical challenges of Physicalism? Human distinctiveness, divine action and personal Identity.

## THE CENTRAL ISSUE

- HOW SHOULD WE THINK ABOUT A HUMAN BEING? WHAT KIND OF DESCRIPTIVE MODEL SHOULD WE USE.
  - Monism
  - Dualism
  - Trichotism.

## CHAPTER ONE – HISTORY THEOLOGY AND BIBLE

- Ancient Philosophy – Early Christian
- Plato
- Aristotle
- The Fathers
- Thomas Aquinas
- The Reformers
- The Bible

## PLATO

- A human being is an immortal soul imprisoned in a mortal body
- The soul is itself a 3 tiered entity.
- Each tier contains less matter than the tier below

## ARISTOTLE

- Talks about a soul
- Not a separate entity but a “life principle”
- Reflects the view of the time  
Things are a blend of  
**matter** (earth, air, fire, water)  
and  
**form** – a kind of pervading principal  
giving things their real character.

## THE FATHERS AND HUMANITY

- Wrote extensively
- The following had significantly different accounts of the soul
  - Origen
  - Tertullian (more based on Plato)
  - Jerome
  - Augustine – very influential –  
Another three-part soul  
Different to Plato

## THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-74)

- Soul Based on Aristotle
- Much More Complex
  - » Hierarchies of capacities
  - » Lower Capacities called vegetative, include growth and reproduction.
  - » These we share with animal “soul”
- Aquinas’s soul includes a lot we would call mind – and specifically cognition

## THE REFORMERS

- Mostly tangle with the issue of what happens to the soul between death and the next step.
- Purgatory is a problem for the reformers

## THE BIBLE AND HUMANITY

- Murphy is difficult to understand
  - Old Testament
  - New Testament

## OLD TESTAMENT

- Little about life after death
- Hebrew “Nephesh” has a wide spectrum of meanings (See Barry Newman’s superb paper).
- Murphy says “current scholars” affirm the view that the Old Testament’s view is more “Physicalist” than otherwise
- She acknowledges a collection of Psalms which are clearly dualist.
- She lists other Psalms where a dualist interpretation won’t do. (Ps. 7: 1-2)

## NEW TESTAMENT

- Written in Greek .
- Therefore influenced by Greek thought ??
- Contradictory notions of the soul in the NT
- Therefore there is no obviously unified view of the of the soul in the bible.
- Contradictory views and absent Dictionary entries.
- Again “modern scholars” “point to a physicalist view of humanity”

## THE IMPACT OF SCIENCE ON VIEWS ABOUT HUMANITY CRITICAL EVENTS

- The Triumph of Atomism –
- The Darwinian Revolution
- Modern Neuroscience

## THE TRIUMPH OF ATOMISM

- An old embattled idea
- Enormously successful in modern science (even though it's wrong!)
- Displaces the old ideas of “form” vs “substance” (hylomorphism)
- Challenges the idea of soul as a “form”
- Geocentricity ends Hylomorphism. (p 40)
- A dense argument involving theories of motion

## THE DARWINIAN REVOLUTION

- We have a much more intimate connection with animals than we had previously thought, so do they also have a soul.
- The concept of “animal souls” had been rejected.
- Therefore humans too are purely material.
- Modern Genetics strengthens and adds detail to our connection with animals.

## SOCIAL DARWINISM

- The idea that we are changing towards a communal or social perfection
- Rev. Mr. Paley’s view was that the natural world, with its conflict and competition reflected the mind of God. Competition even aggression was good.
- Malthus (also a clergyman) “Evil produces exertion, exertion produces mind, and mind produces progress”.
- The Idea that animals are those nasty competitive things not to be confused with is not principally down to Darwin’s Evolution.

## MODERN NEUROSCIENCE

- “All of the human capacities once attributed to soul are now being fruitfully studied as processes involving the brain”. P56
- Modern accounts of the soul are incoherent,so go back to Aquinas.  
e.g. the soul as “life principle”  
Vitalism vs emergentism ( P57)
- Physicalist Thesis. ....All the other capacities once attributed to the soul will also turn out to be products of complex organizations, rather than properties of a non-material entity.
- There is lengthy discussion about consciousness and self-reflection. Consciousness has as yet no clear description in Neuroscience (P60).
- Brain regional location of some higher mind functions (e.g. Inhibition and control – frontal lobes or emotional appreciation – temporal lobes), keeps the debate well and truly alive!

## CONCLUSIONS FROM SCIENCE

- Physicalism is the only tenable current model

**BUT**

- Must have a non-reductionist Physicalism that leaves room for God’s Spirit to act