

**Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Pp. x +154. £33.25 Hbk, £12.99 Pbk. ISBN 0521676762.**

Nancey Murphy argues that Christians have nothing to fear from physicalism. We can reject dualism without contradicting biblical accounts of our nature, abandoning belief in our distinctiveness, denying that we are free and responsible, or giving up the hope for an afterlife. The benefits are less mystery, more scientific respectability, a spirituality less absorbed with inwardness and otherworldliness, and a greater concern for community. As a Christian physicalist I hope that she is right; however, I am not as confident as she that soul theories are in such bad shape or that her favored physicalist account of embodiment, identity across time, and resurrection is free of major problems.

Murphy claims that we are neither identical to a soul nor have one as a part. We are physical bodies, though very complex organic ones. Since this complexity enables us to be free, moral and related to God she describes us as spirited bodies. She recommends that many Biblical passages mentioning 'soul' or 'spirit' should be read in an aspective rather than partive manner. 'Spirit' stands for the whole person in relation to God, not a part of his nature. Murphy insists that the Bible actually doesn't tell us otherwise. Much of the dualistic language of the Bible she blames on translations and interpretations influenced by Greek philosophy or the metaphysical biases of later generations. In response to Christian dualists who present certain scriptural passages as obstacles for physicalists, she offers Psalms declaring 'lest he tear my soul like a lion' or 'deliver my soul from the sword' that suggest the Hebrew word 'nephresh' should be translated not as 'soul' but as referring to the whole living person. Murphy's conclusion is that 'New Testament authors are not intending to teach us *anything* about human's metaphysical composition. If they were, surely they could have done so much more clearly.'(21) She suggests that we are free to formulate accounts of human nature that are in keeping with current intellectual developments in the sciences.

Murphy demonstrates considerable erudition when showing how the historical powers ascribed to the soul have been increasingly explained by physical properties. She surveys how first life was demystified by biology and then more recently thought and feeling have been illuminated by neuroscience. She claims not only that dualism isn't needed to explain our mental life but that it brings new problems. Mind/body interaction would appear to violate

conservation of energy laws in this world and bring us an additional mystery about the next in which disembodied souls somehow communicate prior to resurrection. (140-41) Murphy doesn't consider that the mind might influence the distribution of energy without changing its quantity. She also offers an account of God's intervention at the quantum level that doesn't violate statistical laws of physics which left me wondering why the dualist couldn't borrow something akin to it. (131) And since Murphy must believe with her fellow Christians that an immaterial God communicates with immaterial angels and they with each other, the communication of souls between death and resurrection should present no new difficulties.

Murphy responds to worries that physicalism robs us of free will and moral responsibility with an account of downward causation. Drawing upon neuroscience and philosophy, she provides an impressive and wide ranging defense of emergent properties of the whole entity that can determine which of the lower level properties make a causal contribution. She points out how this happens in natural selection as well as an analogue in an individual's mental life in which higher level properties determine which neurons are causally effective. Her book here will be especially useful for its intended audience: upper undergraduate and graduate students in theology, as well as Christian teachers and Church professionals.

Murphy also argues that our biology primes us for freedom, providing us with an innate neurological basis for the concept of self, the ability to mentally simulate behavioral scenarios and consider possible actions, a language in which to describe our world and ourselves, and the capacity to evaluate one's reasons for action in accordance with an abstract concept of the good. She claims the freedom that we want is just the freedom to act for reasons. We can transcend instinctual and cultural influences by making reasons our motives for action. Any more freedom of the libertarian bent she thinks is untenable and perhaps even incoherent.

So far Murphy's claims are controversial but plausible. It is in the last chapter on personal identity and resurrection that internal problems arise that threaten her project. It is also here where she seems least familiar with the relevant literature. She discusses 1959-1973 works by Strawson, Williams and Wiggins but little of the personal identity literature after that. She fails to offer a clear account of identity. She doesn't want to choose between bodily and psychological accounts that stress the role of memory for 'continuity of memory depends upon brain continuity (the physicalist thesis) and thus on some form of bodily continuity.' (135) But

even that combination she deems insufficient for ‘memory and continuity of consciousness together do not capture all of what we need in order to secure personal identity. Given the moral and social character of God, we need to add some “same moral character” to our criterion.’ (137) On the face of it this is an unstable mix. If psychology is needed for our identity over time then none of us were ever mindless embryos or infants without our memory ties or character. And this gives rise to the problem of what happens to the mindless human animal when its brain develops to the point that a thinking thing with memory and character comes into existence. The account also implies we couldn’t survive severe amnesia or strokes that render our brains infant-like and in need of retraining. It also seems that if memory and character are necessary conditions then one couldn’t have lived a very different life than one did. Imagine that soon after we came into existence we were put up for adoption by Western Christian parents and ended up raised in revolutionary Iran as Muslims. Our memories and character would be very different. So in the actual world we are identical to the very young child but in a possible world that child is identical to a person that we are not and that violates the transitivity of identity. So it is a very problematic to build as much as Murphy does into our identity over time. We are supposed to be living animals but we end up with persistence conditions quite unlike them since we can’t survive the loss of substantial amounts of our psychology.

Matters get worse when Murphy tells us that come resurrection we could acquire a different body. She puts forth a view that sounds more like reincarnation than resurrection since the same body, contrary to the Apostles’ Creed, isn’t restored. She writes that:

while spatio-temporal continuity is a necessary part of the concept of material object, I suggest that it is only a contingent part of commonly accepted concepts of a person. That is, all of the personal characteristics as we know them in this life are supported by bodily characteristics and capacities and these bodily capacities happen to belong to a spatio-temporal continuous material object. But there is no reason in principle why a body that is numerically distinct but similar in all relevant respects could not support the same personal characteristics. This recognition allows us to avoid torturous attempts as in the early Church to reconcile resurrection with material continuity. (141).

This claim of numerically distinct resurrected bodies seems to contradict that with which she began her book: ‘My central thesis is that we are our bodies...we are, at best, complex organisms.’(ix) Assuming that she can finesse the apparent contradiction, we still need an explanation of what type of physical beings are we that enables us to switch bodies. No organism, no living being that is essentially alive, can acquire a new body.

I can think of two possible construals of the relationship between persons and their animal bodies that might make sense of Murphy’s claims. The first is that we are persons constituted by bodies. That is, there are two objects in the reader’s chair that are spatially coincident. This would allow there to be a preexisting organism without memories and character. The person would be, as Lynne Baker claims, derivatively and contingently an animal for it is *now* constituted by an organic body though it might not be so in the future. This might shed some light on Murphy’s distinction between material objects and persons – though I don’t think the illumination will be sufficient since persons are supposed to be a kind of material object and thus should be subsumed under the latter’s nature. It would also fit her claims about our possibly not being alive in the next world with a numerically distinct, transformed body where the laws of nature will not hold and thus ‘we cannot answer in advance questions about digestion, metabolizing and so forth.’(145) And body/person coincidence would enable her to claim we persons persist as long as our memory and character does which is obviously not true of animal persistence. Unfortunately, there is then a new physicalist dualism and a need to explain the relationship between one’s physical person and one’s preexisting physical ‘body (that) provides the substrate for all the personal attributes discussed above.’(141) It is not easy to make sense of this relationship. Many physicalists think it is impossible for there to be two material bodies in the same place, physically indistinguishable but with different properties. For instance, why should they both not be able to think since they share a brain and nervous system? Murphy seems not just unconcerned but unaware of the problem if the body (the human animal) is not identical to the person.

Maybe Murphy isn’t concerned because she identifies the body and the person but maintains that the body is only contingently alive. That is, we persons are not constituted by a body but are identical to our body, though that body need not always be alive. We can survive

the loss of all of our organic matter in the next life as we acquire a glorified body that isn't biologically alive. There are two ways to interpret Murphy's identification of the person and the body. One way is to ascribe to her a belief in the notion of contingent identity and allow that at one time we are identical to a living body and then at another time identical to a numerically different body that is not alive. A second interpretation maintains a belief in the necessity of identity and claims that numerically the same body is at one time alive and later exists without being so. On this second construal having an *organic* body is like being an adolescent, it is a phase that one can pass through without going out of existence. The first interpretation would fit with Murphy's claim 'that a replica... of my body could be me...' (138) Both the first and second interpretations would cohere with her claim that 'a transformed version of my body could be me' (138) and that we might not digest or metabolize in the next life. However, if either is her view, she will have to abandon her stated criterion of personal identity since the animal body once existed without any memories or character. She must put forth disjunctive persistence conditions that allow people to exist as long as there is a living body or psychological continuity. So the dualism of persons and bodies is avoided but at the cost of having us accept contingent identity or rendering us a very odd sort of animal, the only animal that isn't essentially alive.

Even if we are contingently living animals, another worry is that Murphy may be making an unwarranted leap from our ability to survive the replacement of matter to the claim that we could be resurrected with a different body, a 'replica' which is 'then essentially the recreation of a new body out a different "stuff."' (142) It is commonly thought, not as a matter of physical law but metaphysical necessity, that property instantiations (modes or tropes) can't switch substances. It is also held that too large or too quick a replacement results in a duplicate rather than the same substance composed of different matter. Thus new matter must be gradually assimilated to preserve continuity of substance and person preserving property instantiations. My concern is that Murphy's suddenly appearing resurrected replica made of different stuff would be a case of duplication rather than the same body transformed.

I don't think Murphy should choose either of the above construals of the body/person relationship. Neither physicalism nor Christian resurrection demands it. She should instead drop her claims about any psychological traits being necessary to our persistence. We can exist

in this world without any of our memories and character traits in comas, after strokes, and earlier as mindless fetuses. We should just trust God to resurrect us in a manner that restores our mind to the manner it was last in when in working order. Or if we had died in utero, which seems to have been a possibility, trust that God would resurrect us and allow us to develop into conscious, moral and loving human beings and introduce us to our family. Murphy should also abandon the claim that we are contingently alive. We don't have to transform our notion of being an animal in order to make sense of how we could possess a body that will serve us without end in the afterlife. All that is needed is for God to 'mask' those dispositions of our organic makeup that would otherwise lead to our eventual decay. Homeostatic and metabolic functions could be perfectly maintained by the 'divine doctor.' Surely this can happen for resurrection is a miracle and eternal life may indeed mean the many of our laws of our world don't hold. Murphy herself recognizes a distinction between metaphysical necessity and lawful necessity for she claims we must be embodied even in an afterlife where the same physical laws don't hold. My suggestion is that she also consider that we are essentially living animals. This seems to me to be what it is to take embodiment seriously and avoids problems of co-location and too many thinkers, contingent identity, human animals with bizarre disjunctive persistence conditions, and property modes switching bodies. Such an approach takes our biological nature seriously but doesn't deny that we are distinct from the rest of the animal kingdom in being free, rational and moral creatures that can know God. It understands us to be spirited animals, *essentially* alive.

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