

A Narrative Account of the Soul

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*Abstract*

A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT OF THE SOUL

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The question of the soul in modern debates about anthropology betrays the determinative narrative of the age and its correlative metaphysics. The metaphysical commitments of much of modern science and philosophy have not only provided the foundation for the debates between physicalism and dualism, but they have set the discussion within the bounds of that debate. Theology, for its part, has largely allowed the resulting narrative to shape its own reflections on anthropology but with the addition of “God” as a character or “the spiritual” as a kind of plot device that the secular versions of the story have overlooked. For this reason, talk about *the soul* has become problematic for some Christian philosophers and theologians who think they recognize *the-writing-on-the-wall* as dualism seems to lose more and more ground to physicalism by way of advances in neuroscience.

This thesis reveals the metaphysical commitments of modern science and reductionist philosophy by exploring the work of one its most prolific and well-known spokesmen, Daniel Dennett. After that, the thesis turns to the past, to see how theology

has out-narrated past philosophical rivals by incorporating their best insights without abandoning Christian metaphysical claims. Accounts of the soul in Tertullian, the Cappadocians, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas provide the case study from Christian history that reveals this process. In light of this history, the thesis then turns a critical eye toward the modern Christian philosophical anthropologies of Lynne Rudder Baker and Nancey Murphy, which have intentionally rejected the soul as a result of the dialogue with science and modern philosophy of mind.

This thesis argues that a truly nonreductive physicalism demands metaphysical commitments that become intelligible in a narrative such as that of the Christian tradition, a tradition that is not essentially dualistic in its anthropology but gives an account of creation that provides for the reality of such things as bodies, persons, words, and stories as gifts whose being is contingent on God given through the Incarnation, the narrative of which provides not only being but meaning. And such a realist account of these things is, therefore, necessary for any meaningful discussion of consciousness as an aspect of human physicality and the formative narrative of that physicality, its soul.

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## Introduction

In the fourth century, the Cappadocian bishop and saint-to-be, Gregory of Nyssa wrote a theological treatise in which he asked his venerated sister, as she lay on her death bed, “What . . . is the soul, if its nature can be described in some definition, so that we may gain some understanding of the subject through the description?”<sup>1</sup> The rest of the book set about the task of answering that question. And yet the question has not remained answered. It has returned again and again as human knowledge – particularly knowledge of the body and brain – has advanced, been revised, and advanced again further. From the perspective of some, this is because the soul is a superfluous hypothesis that does no explanatory work and should, therefore, be jettisoned. But I will argue that this is only an attractive option for those formed exclusively by the narrative of Natural Philosophy and the *episteme* of science – such as Daniel Dennett and Nicholas Humphrey.

After following this narrative through several iterations in modern theology and philosophy, I will suggest that a truly nonreductive physicalism demands metaphysical commitments that become intelligible in a narrative such as that of the Christian tradition, a tradition that is not essentially dualistic in its anthropology but gives an account of creation that provides for the reality of such things as bodies, persons, words, and stories. To do this I will draw on the work of Christian philosophers Lynne Rudder Baker and Nancey Murphy. Such a realist account is necessary, I will contend, for any meaningful

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<sup>1</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 37.

discussion of consciousness as an aspect of human physicality and the formative narrative of that physicality, its soul.

This way of speaking of the soul as formative of a person's physicality intentionally echoes Thomas Aquinas' view of the soul as *the act and form of the living body*. By drawing on Aristotle, Thomas began to overcome the divide between Christian thinkers like Tertullian who insisted on a corporeal view of the soul and those Fathers like Origen, Augustine, and the Cappadocians who favored Neo-Platonic conceptions of an entirely incorporeal soul. However, with the ascendancy of physicalism in modern philosophy and social science, the debate has been revived. My argument for the soul as formative narrative will – I hope – be in the vein of Thomas' work and, therefore, will draw upon his work, particularly as it is understood by the Wittgensteinian-Thomist, Herbert McCabe and the theologians of Radical Orthodoxy, in conversation with the reductive physicalism of Daniel Dennett.

Finally, I will briefly explore how this understanding of the soul as formative narrative relates to Incarnation and Gospel and Scripture and Tradition. So, in this section that I will draw especially on the work of John Dominic Crossan, Stanley Hauerwas, Herbert McCabe, and James K. A. Smith. Having already argued that souls are not isolated, autonomous and self-sufficient narratives, this final part of the thesis will attempt to take the wider view to see how the embodied narratives of human beings exist within larger, determinative narratives. And, in fact, how ultimately humans can only truly come to know the souls that form them when those souls subsist within the truthful story witnessed to in Scripture and embodied in Christian Tradition.

# 1

## Who Gets to Narrate?<sup>2</sup> *Science, Philosophy, Theology*

In the Gospel according to Mark, chapter eight, verse thirty-six, Jesus asks, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”<sup>3</sup> In the end, it did not take the promise of gaining the whole world to convince us to forfeit our souls; it just took a transformation of our minds by a reorientation of our hearts to a new story.<sup>4</sup> Of course, some of the defenders and tellers of the new tale at times bemoan the vestiges of the old that still possess our language and thoughts, trapping the unenlightened in a demon-haunted world of make-believe.<sup>5</sup> Among the concepts, tropes, phrases, and words that many of the heralds of the new age wish to sweep away like late day cobwebs obstinately clinging to the corners of modernity is the “soul.”<sup>6</sup> And, indeed, the question of the soul in modern debates about anthropology betrays this determinative narrative of

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<sup>2</sup> The title of this chapter is a nod to Robert Webber’s final book, *Who Gets to Narrate the World: Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> New Revised Standard Version

<sup>4</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation (Cultural Liturgies, Volume 1)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*, (New York, NY: Random House, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-268: “A common critique of science is that it is too narrow. Because of our well-demonstrated fallibilities, it rules out of court, beyond serious discussion, a wide range of uplifting images, playful notions, earnest mysticism, and stupefying wonders. Without physical evidence, science does not admit spirits, souls, angels, devils, or dharma bodies of the Buddha. Or alien visitors. . . . There is very little doubt that, in the everyday world, matter (and energy) exist. The evidence is all around us. In contrast, as I’ve mentioned earlier, the evidence for something non-material called ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’ is very much in doubt.”

the age and its correlative metaphysics.<sup>7</sup> The metaphysical commitments of much of modern science and philosophy have not only provided the foundation for the debates between physicalism and dualism, but they have set the discussion within the bounds of that debate. Theology, for its part, has largely allowed the resulting narrative to shape its own reflections on anthropology but with the addition of “God” as a character or “the spiritual” as a kind of plot device that the secular versions of the story have overlooked.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, talk about *the soul* has become problematic even for some Christian philosophers and theologians who think they recognize *the-writing-on-the-wall* as dualism seems to lose more and more ground to physicalism by way of advances in neuroscience. So that those philosophers and theologians who have not simply abandoned the soul in the face of reductionistic accounts of human beings, have instead exchanged the soul for some (equally problematic) notion like mind, consciousness, or person. However, such a move precariously skirts a *god-of-the-gaps* position on the soul.

### **The Soul of the (synaptic) Gaps**

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<sup>7</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 64: “Today the sciences are not bound to the mechanical philosophy as far as theoretical and practical methods are concerned; they never were, really, at least not beyond a certain point. Even so, the mechanical philosophy’s great metaphysical master narrative – its governing picture of nature as an aggregate of mechanistic functions and systems, accidentally arranged out of inherently lifeless and purposeless elements – remains the frame within which we now organize our expectations of science and, consequently, or reality.”

<sup>8</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1991). After Duns Scotus’ ‘univocity of being’ came to dominate theological thinking, God became the ‘supreme being’ in an ontology of beings. That is to say, Milbank locates the beginning of onto-theology with Duns Scotus’ alternative to Thomas Aquinas’ *analogia entis*. Scotus’ linguistic move – using “being” univocally for Creator and creatures – produced Deism, on the one hand, and the pantheism of Spinoza on the other hand. Deism then collapsed into atheism, as the “God hypothesis” ceased to be persuasive in accounting for the existence of the universe. And the pantheism of Spinoza gave way to Hegelian Dialectic, in continental thought, and Whitehead’s Process philosophy, from the British scene. For both Hegelian and Process theologians, God is part of the unfolding plot of the universe through history.

Talk of the soul has largely been relegated to the realms of literature, theology, religious studies, and new age spirituality. Occasionally, philosophical publications, even some lacking “religious” or “spiritual” concerns, will employ the word. But it has remained largely eschewed by the scientific community since at least the time of William James, who intentionally avoided it in his *Principles of Psychology* – a point that psychologist and consciousness researcher, Nicholas Humphrey notes in his 2011 book, *Soul Dust: The Magic of Consciousness*.<sup>9</sup> Humphrey points out that for James, the soul is a subject of metaphysics and not the concern of Psychology – a slightly ironic claim given the etymology of James’ discipline. However, the title of Humphrey’s own work suggests a mutiny in the ranks, at least from one of James’ intellectual descendants.

At the beginning of the third section of *Soul Dust*, Humphrey contrasts the “increasing frequency” with which he has used the word “soul” in his book with the scant mention of the soul found in James’ *Principles of Psychology*.<sup>10</sup> Concerning James’ own stated dismissal of the word and concept of “soul” from his own work, Humphrey writes,

That James has taken 350 pages to get to this point – and had become so tetchy – suggests more than a little internal conflict. You can almost hear a rational soul-denying *ego* battling it out with an emotional soul-affirming *id*. The rationalist wins the argument (that is what rationalists do). But it is remarkable what hard work it seems to have been – how stubbornly something inside him clung to the big idea.<sup>11</sup>

In contradistinction to James’ disavowal of the word “soul” and his insistence on the inability of the concept to do any work in scientific Psychology, Humphrey not only

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<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Humphrey, *Soul Dust: The Magic of Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

reclaims and employs the word, but – as the title of his book implies – he also suggests that it may play an indispensable role in understanding human consciousness.

The argument in *Soul Dust* is that the soul is the answer to the question of why humans are conscious – that is, what the selective advantage of consciousness is. But in this way, Humphrey both appropriates the soul and redefines it, even as he retains the importance of the older sense of the word in common parlance. For, according to Humphrey, (human) consciousness is that illusory show in the brain of an (human) organism by which that organism that is conscious comes to believe that it is not simply a conscious organism but a *soul* living amid a world of *souls*. Even the more rudimentary consciousness of other animals provides them with a selective advantage, Humphrey proposes, by allowing them, and even seducing them, to take pleasure in life and the world around them. The more they enjoy the phenomenal experience that consciousness affords them, the more they desire the continuation of that phenomenal experience, the more likely they will be to make choices that will ensure their prolonged lifespan, and the more likely they will live long enough to produce offspring. But human consciousness does even more than simply enchanting the world and enticing us to prolong that phenomenal experience of life; it creates our sense of self and of self-importance. Human consciousness convinces us that we are souls. We are souls with memory and a story to tell about who we have been. We are souls with the ability to project the outcome of our actions and to tell a story of who we might become. The grand show of consciousness convinces us of all this, but there is a price to pay for the ticket to that show.<sup>12</sup> For our consciousness also bestows on us the dreadful capacity to know that we

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Humphrey is insistent that his concept of the illusory show that is consciousness is not equivalent to the “Cartesian Theater” critiqued by Daniel Dennett. Humphrey suggests that he avoids the critique

will one day die, that the show will inevitably end and all its brief sound and fury will have signified an eternal nothing, that all the self-importance that we feel will be judged and undone as our selves dissipate with the last light that shines into our failing eyes. Of course, Humphrey notes, this accidental consequence of existential dread that humans receive courtesy of their robust consciousness could undermine the very advantage gained from phenomenal delight; however, Humphrey suggests that consciousness has one more trick up its sleeve. Consciousness not only convinces us that we are souls, but in doing so it also convinces us that we are not our mortal bodies. And in detaching our sense of self from the limitations and contingencies of our mortal bodies, consciousness lures us into believing that, perhaps, we are not just souls, but we might actually be *immortal* souls. This then is the great illusion and the great gift of human consciousness, the belief that we are souls living in what Humphrey calls “the soul niche” with other souls with whom we share in the phenomenal pleasures of life and in the hope that our selves will persist beyond the death and decay of our bodies.

Of course, Humphrey realizes that his appropriation of the word “soul” could cause confusion. He asks, “Should I really be using it so freely? Doesn’t the word ‘soul’ carry too much baggage?” Then he answers, “Yes, it does, and I should – I should *because* it does.”<sup>13</sup> Humphrey cites theologian and religious philosopher, Keith Ward’s

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because the theater of consciousness of which he is speaking is not reproducing the “outside” world to the “inner” mind but creating a fantasy for the conscious organism about the world of which they are a part. However, he seems to miss the main thrust of Dennett’s critique – namely, that the “Cartesian Theater” assumes that there is some subject to observe or experience the show, which threatens to end in the absurdity of infinite regress. Humphrey’s insistence on the importance of the discrete self in the development of consciousness provides just the kind of subject that Dennett’s account of consciousness is attempting to undermine. See Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 107.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

reflections on the soul as justification for his own use of the term in the particular way he uses it.<sup>14</sup> Ward insists that the word soul continues to have significance because it names for us that deep sense we have that reductionistic accounts of who we are will always be deficient in their descriptions. According to Ward, “the human person seems to have a dual nature, having both a physically observable body and brain and a rich, colorful, value-laden inner world of experience and thought.”<sup>15</sup> For Humphrey, Ward is exactly correct in this claim. But Ward is correct precisely because this deep sense of our irreducibility just is the function – or, better, the functional illusion – of human consciousness. It is this ability to conjure this convincing illusion that we are more than what we are – that we are, in fact, souls – that made robust consciousness a mutation selected for by nature in the unfolding story of human evolution.

As Humphrey implies, when he employs the soul in this way, he is taking a distinctly different tact than his academic forebear, William James. James had rejected the word as a hopelessly metaphysical term that had no place in the discourse of a scientific discipline like Psychology.<sup>16</sup> By using it, Humphrey is not suggesting that James was wrong to exclude metaphysics from his work. He is not suggesting a point of contact or a place of conciliation between science and metaphysics. Humphrey’s move is linguistic and narrativizing, not metaphysical or epistemological. He is co-opting the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 158. Humphrey quotes Keith Ward, *In Defence of the Soul* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 142: “The whole point of talking of the soul is to remind ourselves constantly that we transcend all the conditions of our material existence; that we are always more than the sum of our chemicals, our electrons, our social roles or our genes . . . . We transcend them precisely in being indefinable, always more than can be seen or described, subjects of experience and action, unique and irreplaceable.”

<sup>15</sup> Keith Ward, *The Big Questions in Science and Religion* (West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), 161.

<sup>16</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York, NY: Dover Press, 1890).

soul from the religious story and putting it to work for the tradition of the scientific discipline that has come down to him from James. He is engaged, in an extended and much more nuanced way, in the same move Daniel Dennett is making in his self-adopted motto: “Yes, we have a soul; but it’s made of lots of tiny robots.”<sup>17</sup> He is attempting to out-narrate the Christian (or “religious”) narrative of the soul by incorporating it into the narrative of reductive physicalism.

This move is just part of a larger cultural rejection, on all sides, of Stephen Jay Gould’s argument for Non-Overlapping Magisteria. Gould articulated and popularized the idea in his book *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*.<sup>18</sup> His thesis is that science represents one magisterium, or teaching-office, while religion represents a second, separate magisterium, and the two magisteria neither overlap in their areas of teaching nor are they mutually exclusive. More specifically, science is that teaching-office dealing with the objective, observable reality of facts while religion is the teaching-office focused on the subjective world of meaning and morality. Put differently, science is about facts; religion is about value and values. However, those whose work invites a position on the relationship between Christian theology and science, on the one side, or science and “religion,” on the other, have largely rejected Gould’s thesis of Non-Overlapping Magisteria. As Dennett points out, the thesis has failed because “in the minds of the religious, it proposed abandoning all religious claims to factual truth and understanding of the natural world (including the claims that God created the universe, or performs miracles, or listens to prayers), whereas in the minds of the secularists it granted

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York, New York: Penguin Viking, 2006), 302.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999).

too much authority to religion in matters of ethics and meaning.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, Gould’s NOMA thesis has been found inadequate not just by the “religious” but also by many scientists and philosophers of science because it does not take seriously the kinds of philosophical commitments that adherents of both magisteria are impelled to make by virtue of their perspectives – commitments that, in fact, are mutually exclusive in some cases.

### **Science and Philosophy**

To say that science demands certain philosophical commitments should not be surprising. At the very least, science is an epistemological methodology. But more than that, science is also its own *episteme* – its own body of knowledge and way of knowing with boundaries that demarcate what is knowable and what is not. And, indeed, science as an epistemological methodology implies the *episteme* of science when put to work. Still, the two modes of science can be distinguished, even if they cannot be entirely separated. Therefore, to understand the philosophical commitments required by science and why those commitments may at times come into conflict with the philosophical commitments of, for example, Christian theology, it may be helpful to look at the two accounts of science separately – first the epistemological methodology and then the *episteme*.

When the word “science” refers principally to the disciplined methodology employed to the epistemological end of knowing about and understanding some aspect of the natural world, this might be called a weak account of science. Of course, the negative

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<sup>19</sup> Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 30.

connotations of this descriptor may suggest some kind of judgment on or skepticism about the method, its endeavor, or its goal. That is not what is intended. Rather, the disciplined methodology, in and of itself, is weak in the sense that it demands fewer overt philosophical commitments than the *episteme* of science. The disciplines of the methodology demand, for example, the formation of hypotheses with the clear potential for falsification and the bracketing off of any possibility of unobservable metaphysical factors that would preclude replication of testing, but these disciplines need not be operative outside of the investigation. In other words, one might employ the weak form of science, bracketing off “metaphysics” methodologically for the sake of the epistemic enterprise, without committing to the philosophical view that what has been methodologically bracketed is not part of objective reality. So, what is “weak” in the weak account of science is that it does not necessarily require that the scientist commit to a conviction that the methodological constraints adopted in the work of science correspond to ontological delineations. In this sense, science works in a way somewhat similar to the courtroom, where some potential evidence or testimony is (and must be) deemed inadmissible *a priori*, despite that fact that its inclusion would help to provide a richer and more complex account of what actually happened.

Although this weak account of science may be appealing to those who hold religious beliefs or other overt and robust metaphysical commitments, it is not without its problems.<sup>20</sup> For example, many scientists and philosophers of science claim that no

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<sup>20</sup> For an example of such an appeal to the weak account of science, see Robert D. Hughes, III, *Beloved Dust: Tides of the Spirit in Christian Life* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 58. “John Polkinghorne, a distinguished and world-class physicist turned priest and theologian, has stated that precisely for its own purposes, science trawls experience with a net which lets a large percentage of what is human slip through. Whatever we mean by spiritual life, it will focus on a lot of what has slipped through that net. But it must

evidence is ruled out *a priori*, if it is real evidence. By *real* evidence, what is meant is observable, objective evidence, as opposed to metaphysical *explanations* that defy falsifiable formulations. For example, if one wished to posit the existence of the soul, one would need to do so in the form of a falsifiable hypothesis that explained observable evidence for which there is no suitable explanation or that explains that evidence in a better way than current hypotheses.<sup>21</sup> So, if one wanted to argue, along with Descartes,<sup>22</sup> that an incorporeal soul or *res cogitans* explains why humans think and have free will, evidenced in human culture and individual testimony from the first-person perspective (or, in Dennett's language, the heterophenomenological data from the subject's intentional stance),<sup>23</sup> then they would need to articulate that hypothesis in such a way that it might possibly be falsified. However, an incorporeal *thing* that interacts with the material universe seems to inevitably evade falsifiable hypotheses. This is what it means to say that talk of the soul is *metaphysical*; its existence is on a *meta*-level in relationship with the physical universe. Its explanatory power cannot be reduced to a relationship of cause-and-effect (or *efficient* causation, in Aristotelian terminology); therefore, there is no way to construe the relationship between the soul and the physical phenomenon it is meant to explain in a way that could be tested, and thus potentially falsified through

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do so in a manner that does not dictate to science that there are esoteric or occult realities it ought to acknowledge but cannot.”

<sup>21</sup> What the criteria for a “better” hypothesis are is another question. Often *Ockham's Razor* – also known as the law of parsimony – is appealed to in this regard. But that is not the only criterion to be considered, nor is there any reason to believe that the most parsimonious explanation always corresponds to reality.

<sup>22</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy In Which The Existence of God And the Distinction of the Soul from the Body Are Demonstrated*, (third edition) trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 66-81.

testing.<sup>24</sup> From the scientific perspective, then, there is neither evidence for the soul or *res cogitans* nor is there any need for such a concept.

For this reason, many in the fields of neuroscience and philosophy of mind presuppose reductive accounts of consciousness. That is to say, they begin with the assumption that consciousness can be reduced to physical brain states or processes, and proceed with their work from that starting point. Such a hypothetical starting point apparently conforms to the methodology of science because it can potentially be falsified. For example, the hypothesis that consciousness can be reduced to brain states could be falsified by evidence of a person lacking a functioning brain who is making decisions, acting in observable ways, and reporting phenomenal consciousness. So, Christian philosopher Kevin Corcoran notes that “advances in brain science suggest that the mind is causally dependent on the brain for its existence and functioning . . . . Consciousness itself, for example, can be altered or even (apparently) extinguished by tinkering with certain regions of the brain via drugs or more direct means.”<sup>25</sup> But this hypothetical starting-point is not as straightforward as it first seems. Those who hold that consciousness or mind is a surd in the reductionistic equation, like the proponents of the

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, John R. Searle, *The Mystery of Consciousness* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 1997), 192-193. “If we could answer the causal questions – what causes consciousness and what does it cause – I believe the answers to the other questions would be relatively easy. That is, if we knew the whole causal story then such questions as ‘Where exactly are such and such conscious processes located in the brain, and why do we need them?’ would fall into place. So stated, the problem of consciousness is a scientific research project like any other. But the reason consciousness appears to be a ‘mystery’ is that we don’t have a clear idea of how anything in the brain *could* cause conscious states. I believe that our sense of mystery will be removed when and if we have an answer to the causal question.”

<sup>25</sup> Kevin Corcoran, *Rethinking Human nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerAcademic, 2006), 34.

new mysterianism,<sup>26</sup> would point out that the brain science thus far suggests a correlation between brain and consciousness, even some form of a causal relationship, but it does not demonstrably show that consciousness is reducible to brain processes. In fact, the observable evidence is that, at least in some situations, humans choose to act in a particular ways after conscious deliberation between two or more options. This suggests that the causal relationship goes both ways. But those committed to a reductionistic account of consciousness reject that apparent evidence which supports the view that consciousness is *sui generis*. For example, Nicholas Humphrey writes, “as scientists, we know that this is not the physical reality.” He explains that

Nature, in designing your mind, has contrived that the chain of causation is largely invisible to you. You as a subject do not have mental access to the events in the brain that *precede* your ‘deciding to act.’ The result is that the first you know of your decision is when it is in front of you. And naturally enough, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, you credit your ‘I’ with being the *prime mover* in choosing this action or that.<sup>27</sup>

But Humphrey does not explain how, *as a scientist*, he knows that his description of the agency of consciousness as an illusion generated by the brain is *reality*. In other words, Humphrey’s account is not a conclusion drawn from a falsifiable hypothesis that has proven its viability through batteries of independent testing.

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<sup>26</sup> “New Mysterians” was the label Owen Flanagan gave to Colin McGinn, Thomas Nagel, and anyone else in philosophy of mind claiming that the hard problem of consciousness cannot be solved because humans cannot get outside of consciousness to study it. The term has come to include Jerry Fodor and Steven Pinker, as well. In some cases, David Chalmers and other adherents of panpsychism – the view that consciousness or “proto-consciousness” exists as an irreducible aspect of matter – have also been included among the list of new mysterians; though, including Chalmers begins to stretch the category beyond usefulness.

<sup>27</sup> Humphrey, *Soul Dust*, 131.

Because his account of consciousness is not the product of the scientific method, it may seem that Humphrey is over-extending or engaging in special pleading when he claims to know, *as a scientist*, that the view he favors is “the physical reality,” but this is not necessarily the case. Humphrey is not appealing to the weak account of science outlined above but to a more robust, or strong account of science – that is, the *episteme* of science. Accordingly, the methodological constraints that eliminate metaphysics from the equation correspond, for Humphrey and many other scientists and philosophers, to the contours of what can properly be called reality. And this, in fact, is even implied by the weak account of science because the requirements of reproducibility of testing and predictability in scientific method assume the constancy of the fundamental conditions of the universe, or laws of nature, through time and space. The methodology demands (a significant degree of) determinacy.<sup>28</sup> And this determinacy is understood in terms of a monistic atomism – that is, everything in existence is composed of a substrate of quanta to which all causality can be reduced. Hence, reductionism is built into the *episteme* of science, or as Nancey Murphy puts it, in the strong account of science “the behavior of any complex entity is determined by the laws governing the behavior of its parts, and

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<sup>28</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 82: “The picture that naturalism gives us, at least at present, is twofold. On the one hand, the cosmos of space and time is a purely mechanistic reality that, if we are to be perfectly consistent, we must see as utterly deterministic: that is to say, to work a small variation on Laplace’s fantasy, if we could know the entire history of the physical events that compose the universe, from that first inflationary instant to the present, including the course of every particle, we would know also the ineluctably necessity of everything that led to and follows from the present; even what we take to be free acts of the will would be revealed as the inevitable results of physical forces reaching all the way back to the beginning of all things. On the other hand, this deterministic machine floats upon a quantum flux of ceaseless spontaneity and infinite indeterminacy.” To be fair, some may argue that Hart’s characterization of quantum indeterminacy is exaggerated, but that would be to miss the point.

ultimately by the laws of physics.”<sup>29</sup> In his claim, Humphrey is appealing to this *episteme* of science, which includes, in Dennett’s words, “the massive routine weight of accumulated results, the facts that give science its power.”<sup>30</sup> From this perspective, to opt for the weak account of science only, allowing for the possibility of any kind of metaphysical indeterminacy or top-down agency, would be, according to Dennett, “*cherry-picking*, and it is a scientific sin.”<sup>31</sup>

So, for those committed to the *episteme* of science as *the* representation of reality, the metaphysical claims of theology, or “religion,” can only be understood as part of human psychology and sociology, reducible to the biology and then chemistry of neuroscience, and then finally to physics. Therefore, words like “soul” will either be incorporated into the account of human persons in the way Humphrey has done, or they will be dismissed as outmoded fictions.<sup>32</sup> This applies not just to single words or concepts – what Dennett calls memes<sup>33</sup> – but also to whole complex traditions. Indeed, the way some of the traditions of thought and behavior shared within and between certain communities of people have been brought within the explanatory narrative of the

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<sup>29</sup> Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 74.

<sup>30</sup> Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 372.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>32</sup> See Lynne Rudder Baker, *Saving Belief: A Critique of Physicalism* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987). Baker provides a very nuanced criticism of attempts in philosophy of mind to eliminate conscious, first-personal beliefs or reductively incorporate them into the *episteme* of science – which she labels Physicalism. She argues that to do this undermines the very project of science, itself.

<sup>33</sup> In *The Experience of God*, Hart singles out the concept of memes for critique and derision as “simply faddish jargon” (225). This thesis is not particularly concerned with the philosophical viability of the concept of memes, since their use herein is largely for the purposes of out-narrating their reductive role in Dennett’s work.

*episteme* of science is through the creation of the category called “religion.” As William Cavanaugh has persuasively argued, “Religion is a constructed category, not a neutral descriptor of a reality that is out there in the world.”<sup>34</sup> Yet “religion” has been treated as an essential category since the earliest articulations and developments of modern science. This is because the category of “religion” was constructed in tandem with the “secular,” both of which served as fundamental elements in the larger narrative legitimating the rise of the new political configuration of modernity, the nation-state.<sup>35</sup> And it is the supposed neutrality of the “secular” that came to be claimed as the ground on which the developing scientific methodology and *episteme* could stand for its objective perspective. It was this early belief, held by the natural philosophers who preceded the modern scientists, that there was a “transhistorical and transcultural essence of religion” that occasioned the Enlightenment attempts to uncover the basic, natural religion supported by reason from the particularistic expressions of religion that were distorted and weighed down by cultural accretions, tribal traditions, and claims to revelation. Although this antiquated perspective yet haunts much of political science and even some of the social sciences, such essentialist definitions have been devastatingly critiqued. Still, the category of “religion” has proven useful both within and outside of academia and remained an area of study for the social sciences.

In his book *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, Daniel Dennett recognizes that the essentialist definitions of religion from the Enlightenment are problematic. Moreover, he also acknowledges at least some of the political interest in

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<sup>34</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 58.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

creating definitions of religion; albeit, he makes no attempt to explore the breadth and depth of that political investment in defining religion – as, for example, Cavanaugh does. Yet, however incorrect or unusable the old essentialist definitions were, religion is still, as the subtitle of the book claims, “a natural phenomenon,” and therefore, open to scientific investigation. Or, as Dennett puts it in the paragraphs building to his own “working definition of religion” for the book, “what we usually call religions are composed of a variety of quite different phenomena, arising from different circumstances and having different implications, forming a loose family of phenomena, not a ‘natural kind’ like a chemical element or a species.”<sup>36</sup> So, even as he dispenses with essentialist definitions, Dennett retains the early modern construct of religion and the taxonomy built thereon, wherein religion is analogous to a *genus* under which Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, folk religion, and the like are located as analogous to *species*.

Taxonomy aside, Dennett’s use of the analogy to biological science is central to his book’s premise – namely, that religion can be studied scientifically as natural phenomenon through the analogy between information passed via genetic replication and information passed via cultural replication. Following the predilection of the strong account of science, Dennett suggests breaking culture down into atomistic units of information replication that are modeled on genes. These units of replicating information include words, symbols, beliefs, ritual actions, tropes, and any other discrete cultural elements that can and do get replicated, for which Dennett adopts Richard Dawkins’ term, *memes*.<sup>37</sup> In this way, Dennett is intentionally and explicitly building the analogy

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<sup>36</sup> Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

between biology and culture. More specifically, he is arguing that these units of culture operate in the same way as genes – particularly as genes are described by Dawkins in his book, *The Selfish Gene*.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, complexes of memes, like religions, can be studied in the same way as complexes of genes, or organisms, the continuation and adaptation of which is dependent on the fitness selectors of the evolutionary process.

From this perspective, religions are not the only complexes of memes, the continuation and adaptation of which can be studied along evolutionary lines. Science, also, “is a human phenomenon composed of events, organisms, objects, structures, patterns, and the like that all obey the laws of physics or biology, and hence do not involve miracles.”<sup>39</sup> Of course, no one wants to claim that science involves miracles, but the point here is that science is, no less than religion, a complex of memes whose continual cultural replication does not rely on its truth, validity, or even usefulness for human flourishing but on its survival fitness. Any attempt to extricate science from this description would ultimately require an appeal to some miracle by which science as a natural, cultural phenomenon has escaped the laws it has uncovered for understanding all other natural, cultural phenomena. Dennett is not unaware of the possible implications that might be drawn from this realization – namely, that science has no more guarantee of the veracity of its claims than a religion. He takes this challenge on in small sections throughout the book, whenever it begins to loom over his argument from within, and then in a more sustained way in an appendix in the back. Crudely summarized, Dennett’s answer to the challenge is that science is an endeavor for truth for which methods and

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New Edition), (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

disciplines have been established to reduce the personal, subjective biases of the individual scientists, thereby increasing the probability of objective results. Dennett is surely correct that the disciplines and method of science have this outcome; however, he is missing his very own point. Memes are *for* memes – they are for their own replication. Religions may provide benefits for their human hosts, and some of those beneficial aspects of religion may have been selected for fitness because of their benefit to their hosts, but a religion, as complex of memes, exists and replicates for the sake of existing and replicating itself. *Mutatis mutandis* – science may provide benefits for humanity, but science, as a complex of memes, exists and replicates for the sake of existing and replicating itself.

That the complex of memes constitutive of the *episteme* of science solipsistically seeks its own replication, irrespective of the uses for which it is employed by its stewards (*i.e.* scientists and philosophers of science), is evidenced in the explosion of pseudo-science and the incorporation of scientific language and tropes in discourses largely unrelated to science.<sup>40</sup> However, this suggests that some memes or smaller complexes of memes within the larger structure of the *episteme* of science might not persist because of any relationship to truth and fact or because they are indispensable to science as method or *episteme*, but simply because the larger structure happens to be a *niche* for which that meme or smaller meme-complex is well adapted. And, of course, the problem with turning the scientific method inward on itself to scientifically study science presents the potential for a paradox analogous to the time-traveler who travels to the past only to accidentally kill his past-self before his past-self could travel back in time. If one utilized

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<sup>40</sup> Hart, *The Experience of God*, 72-73.

Dennett's memetic theory to scientifically study the memes that constitute the methodology and *episteme* of science, would such a hypothesis be able to admit evidence that suggested that fundamental memes of the scientific methodology and *episteme* evolved and persist despite irrevocably distorting the method and the picture of reality it produces? And if those memes are already distorting the evidence and method as an adaptation for greater survival fitness, might they not continue to work in that way when turned in on themselves? Anticipating this line of argument, Dennett defends the *episteme* of science by suggesting an analogy between its development and the development of the straightedge. Dennett elaborates,

Over the centuries we refined our techniques for making straighter and straighter so-called straight-edges, pitting them against one another in supervised trials and mutual adjustments that have kept raising the threshold of accuracy. We now have large machines that are accurate to within a millionth of an inch over their entire length, and we have no difficulty in using our current vantage point to appreciate the practically unattainable but readily conceivable norm of a *really* straight edge.<sup>41</sup>

So, the meme of the straight edge has driven the material construction of straightedges that produce increasingly straighter edges. But the development of the straightedge required at first that the meme of the straight edge have a linguistically analogous relationship to something in reality. The *episteme* of science, on the other hand, is a complex of memes meant to not only correspond to the things in reality, but also to circumscribe reality itself. Or, as David Bentley Hart puts it, "physics explains everything, which we know because anything which physics cannot explain does not exist, which we know because whatever exists must be explicable by physics, which we

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<sup>41</sup> Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 368-369.

know because physics explains everything.”<sup>42</sup> What is important here is not the tautology, but the indication that the *episteme* of science – what is sometimes referred to as naturalism, eliminative materialism, or reductive physicalism – has a built-in metaphysics that evades the scientific method.

The overt disavowal of metaphysics is a particularly adaptive meme in science; not only is it selected for because of its utility in the method, but it also protects the whole complex of memes of which it is a member, the “organism” of science, by obscuring the metaphysical commitments of the *episteme* of science. In this way, the overt disavowal of metaphysics operates in an adaptive function very similar to the way that Nicholas Humphrey describes the illusion of the soul created by the consciousness of the human organism, the purpose of which is to convince the conscious organism that it is more than simply a conscious organism. But this is not a critique or indictment of the *episteme* of science, nor does it undermine “the massive routine weight of accumulated results, the facts that give science its power.”<sup>43</sup> This is simply the recognition that the *episteme* of science is what its first articulators and proponents claimed it was, a philosophy of nature. Moreover, it has proven to be a profoundly important and influential philosophy that demands response from and engagement by the philosophical schools that populate the same socio-cultural habitat in which it flourishes.

## **Philosophy and Theology**

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<sup>42</sup> Hart, *The Experience of God*, 77.

<sup>43</sup> Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 372.

To combat the charge of *superstitio* in the Roman Empire, the early Christians sought ways to fit the peculiarities of their beliefs and practices into acceptable categories. One of the earliest ways of doing this, perhaps stretching back to Saint Paul at the Areopagus in Athens<sup>44</sup> (if that event actually occurred) but definitely in place by the time of Justin Martyr (c. 100-165), was the identification of their community and its distinct teachings and rituals as a new *philosophia*.<sup>45</sup> From this perspective then, the Church (to the extent one can speak of *the* Church at this point in history) presented itself as one more philosophical school among others, such as the Epicureans, Platonists, and Stoics. Inasmuch as these other schools not only claimed to pursue wisdom and present a true picture of the cosmos but also included *askesis* and *catechesis* for their adherents, the Church was able to locate its liturgies, teachings, and ethical expectations within the normal categories of philosophy.<sup>46</sup> And by being in such close proximity with these other philosophical schools, interaction and dialogue were inevitable.

To the extent that the Hellenistic philosophical schools directed their adherents to the pursuit of truth and love of wisdom, they shared purposes with the *philosophia Christiana*. However, as Pierre Hadot points out, the early Christians “did not . . .

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<sup>44</sup> Acts 17:16-34

<sup>45</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase and ed. Arnold I Davidson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 128: “In order to understand the phenomenon under consideration, it is essential to recall that there was a widespread Christian tradition which portrayed Christianity as a *philosophy*.”

<sup>46</sup> David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010), 52: “In recent decades scholars have recognized that ancient philosophical schools did not engage in philosophical discourse about the nature of God and other high doctrines for purely intellectual reasons; rather, they were communities in which individuals learned a way of life based on shared principles and teachings.” Brakke also insists that early Christianity did not represent a single, monolithic philosophical school but a collection of schools, or *haireseis*, that differed on certain matters of teaching and *askesis*.

consider Christianity to be just one philosophy among others; they thought of it as *the* philosophy.”<sup>47</sup> Unlike the other philosophical schools, Christianity taught and proclaimed that the truth that the philosophers sought and the wisdom that they desired had been revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. So, for example, Justin Martyr acknowledged the widely held view of his day that the *Logos* is present to all peoples and developed through philosophical training, even as he insisted that the same *Logos* is present and known to Christians in a unique and fulfilled way through the teachings and sacraments of the Church.<sup>48</sup> This understanding of the *Logos*, as the self-revelation of God that is fulfilled in the person of Jesus, who was the *Logos* made flesh, separated Christianity from contemporaneous philosophical schools. But their similarities with each other, even on the concept of the *Logos*, precluded the possibility of complete disassociation.

The question then was whether Christianity would come to see itself as the exclusively true philosophy or the inclusively true philosophy. And the answer to that question has formed a faint dividing line that runs through the writings of the patristics. As George Karamanolis notes, “Justin, Clement and Origen are more sympathetic to philosophy and more assertive of the philosophical character of Christianity than Tatian, Tertullian or Athanasius.” However, then he goes on to argue that this division was “not of substance but of degree.”<sup>49</sup> Which is to say that the early Christians were not pluralists. No Christian philosopher was arguing that the Platonists or other

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<sup>47</sup> Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 128.

<sup>48</sup> George Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 39-40.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

philosophical schools were equally valid paths to truth and the good life. Nevertheless, the Christians had to contend with the fact that some of these other philosophies held strikingly similar teachings and practices to their own, and some of them even contained teachings that could not be found in the emerging Christian scriptures and doctrines but that helped to shed light on those scriptures and doctrines. Even still, for those who held that Christianity is an *exclusively* true philosophy, the only truths to be acknowledged in the other schools of philosophy were those truths that they happened to share with Christian teaching.

The other option available to early Christian thinkers was to see Christianity as the *inclusively* true philosophy. Those who held to this view “believed that that which had been scattered and dispersed throughout Greek philosophy had been synthesized and systematized in Christian theology.”<sup>50</sup> So, for Justin Martyr, the term Christian could be extended to include not only the Hebrew prophets like Elijah but also pagan philosophers like Socrates, since they had also tried to pattern their lives in accordance with the *Logos*. To take this perspective meant acknowledging and incorporating truth found in the other philosophical schools even if there were no analogues in the Church’s doctrine up to that point. Augustine of Hippo, for example, found his way into the faith he had rejected in his youth through the teachings of Neo-Platonism, which he carried into the theology he did for the rest of his life. And when many important leaders and thinkers in the Medieval Church were wary or dismissive of the re-emergence of Aristotelian philosophy, Thomas Aquinas was hard at work creating a theological synthesis between that philosophy and Christian doctrine which continues to exercise a profound affect on

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<sup>50</sup> Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 128.

the Church to this day. Indeed, it seems that theology develops, at least in one way, as the Christian philosophy encounters other philosophies, is forced to face the truth contained therein, truth that heretofore has been obscured or missing in Church teaching, and then has to out-narrate the other philosophy by incorporating its truth into the narrative that is revealed in and bears witness to the incarnation of Truth.

If the argument above, that the *episteme* of science can be understood and spoken of as a modern philosophical school is acceptable and persuasive, then it is as incumbent on contemporary Christianity to be aware of and integrate the truths of science as it was on ancient Christianity to do the same with Platonism.<sup>51</sup> This, of course, does not mean resigning Christianity to the narrative of the *episteme* of science, but neither does it mean that Christian theology should simply appropriate the aspects of science that it finds congenial and dismiss those aspects that do not fit current theological paradigms. Moreover, for Christianity to avoid science by treating the truth of science and the truth of revelation as wholly separate and distinct is to introduce division into that which is coterminous with unity – namely, truth. Rather, theology must be about the task of identifying the truth of science – not just the facts its methodology yields but the truth contained in the *episteme* of science – and incorporating it into the truthful narrative told and embodied in the Church. This has not been easy so far, and promises to continue to

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<sup>51</sup> I hope that by drawing on the history of ancient Christianity as an analogue and by maintaining that ancient Christian commitment to Christ as the incarnation of the *Logos* and Truth, I have shown that the kind of out-narration suggested in this thesis is not a Constantinian move. In this way, nothing I have argued contradicts the position Stanley Hauerwas articulates in his Gifford Lectures, published as *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 220: “That Christians are committed to nonviolence does not entail, as is often assumed, that Christians must withdraw from the world. Indeed, without the church there can be no world because, as Yoder puts it, the church precedes the world epistemologically; for Christians believe that we know more fully the way things are from the confessed faith in Christ than from any other source. Accordingly, the meaning and validity and limits of concepts like ‘nature’ or ‘science’ cannot be allowed to be self-justifying but must be governed by the confession of the lordship of Christ.”

be difficult. Unlike the Aristotelian philosophy with which Thomas Aquinas had to contend, the *episteme* of science is, by its nature, in flux. It may be that eventually a Grand Unified Theory will be established or that consciousness will be explained, but for now science is constantly refining and redefining itself as an *episteme* and even as a methodology. For this reason a *Summa Theologiæ* that accomplishes with science what Thomas' *Summa* accomplished with Aristotelian philosophy is simply not possible at this time. Yet there are devoted Christians who are actively engaged in doing science, using science, and teaching science. Hence, the situation is somewhat akin to the joke about the Englishman who, upon building a magnificent new machine that functions flawlessly, shows the contraption to his German friend, only to have his colleague respond, “*Ja*, it works in practice, but the real question is, does it work in theory?” Still, the theological work must be done if Christianity is to avoid the kind of out-narration that leads to a *god-of-the-gaps* retreat from rigorous intellectual engagement with science or the stubborn refusal to acknowledge the truth found in the *episteme* of science.

## **Theology and the Soul**

On the question of the soul, theology has always had to look to surrounding philosophies to help discover what is revealed in scripture. Scripture is significantly obscure in its anthropology, being more concerned with humanity in relationship with our God than in the question of what a human being is in itself.<sup>52</sup> And this, of course, is an important

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<sup>52</sup> Nancey Murphy makes a similar point in *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, wherein, after surveying the biblical accounts of anthropology, she “[concludes] that there is no such thing as *the* biblical view of human nature *insofar as we are interested in a partitive account*” (22). Hence, the stance Hughes takes in *Beloved Dust*, 59: “That is, we [Christians] confess that in some way life truly is *animated*, that to be alive,

indication of where a Christian anthropology must begin and how it must be guided. But from there the work begins to become more speculative. From there, Christian philosophers and theologians have turned to the schools of philosophy around them to help discover a reasonable anthropology that best suits the truth revealed in scripture.

In the following chapter, this thesis will explore the theological anthropologies worked out in relation to the philosophical options available during different eras. First to be surveyed will be the Patristic period. In particular, the next chapter will begin by looking at Tertullian's adoption of a Stoic ontology to understand the soul and its relationship to the body. Then it will turn to a brief investigation of the adoption of Neo-Platonism by the Cappadocians and Augustine of Hippo for their respective theological anthropologies. Finally, the chapter will conclude with Medieval Christianity and Thomas Aquinas' adoption of Aristotelian metaphysics to provide a new Christian conception of the soul.

After that, the thesis will turn to modern accounts of humans and human consciousness from science and philosophy of mind, and the ways that contemporary theologians and Christian philosophers have responded and reacted to those accounts. In specific, the work of Lynne Rudder Baker and Nancey Murphy will be considered. And from there, I will put forward a suggestion for engaging some contemporary strands in science and philosophy to understand the soul as the embodied narrative of a life. And

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to have a soul, does not mean to possess an additional ghostly property in isolation, but to be in a relationship. To be embodied as souled is first to be in relationship with other embodied souls. But even that does not quite get us where we need to be. . . . To be alive, to be embodied as souled, is to be already and from the beginning in solidarity with all flesh, including animals and other creatures; indeed, it means to be in personal relationship to all other sentient and self-conscious beings, and in the deepest sense of all, in relationship to, even indwelt by, the Holy Spirit. Not the existence of life but its quality as embodied soulness demands we confess life as give, gift, grace, and hence embraced as contingent and finite. To be and make sense as a whole person, a spirited body, in the face of the disintegration of our empirical ego, is to confess thankfully a relationship to the Holy Spirit and thus the triune God as the source of life as a gift, "gift" being one of the proper names of the Spirit herself."

then to see how this view stands up in relationship with the embodied narrative that is determinative for all other narratives – the life of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

## 2

### The Old Story

#### *The Soul from Tertullian to Thomas Aquinas*

There is simply no denying the impact of Plato and the Platonic tradition on the cultural world into which Jesus – the eternal Word-made-flesh – was born and in which the Scriptural witness to Christ was written. Overly-simplistic accounts of history and theology which have tried to glean a pure, Hebraic Judaism and Christianity from the Platonically influenced Hellenistic culture in which they came into existence and developed are not only naive but also fail to appreciate that revelation is always received by a particular people in a particular place and time – even, or especially, when that revelation comes in the form of a person. The *Philosophia Christiana* had no other choice than to engage the witness to God’s revelation in the light of the Platonic tradition. For some, like Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) and Augustine (354-430), the light of the Platonic tradition helped to illumine some of the harder to see and understand aspects of God’s revelation in Christ, but for others, like Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160-220), the light of Platonic tradition was one of contrast with the Truth; otherwise, it threatened to obfuscate or deny the revelation entrusted to the Church.

#### **Tertullian**

Although he was not the first early Christian thinker to have written on the nature of the soul,<sup>53</sup> Tertullian of Carthage did produce the first extended reflection on it. What makes Tertullian's *De Anima* a particularly helpful place to start a discussion of the soul in the history of Christian thought lies in its ability to elude overly simplistic uses of categories like 'dualism.' Tertullian's account does, in fact, present a dualistic anthropology; however, it is within a larger metaphysical monism. Moreover, it is Tertullian who introduced the important and long-debated theological concept concerning the soul's generation known as 'traducianism.' Finally, whereas Origen and Justin Martyr wrote in Greek and showed deep Platonic influence, Tertullian wrote in Latin, in northern Africa, and in some ways opposed the Platonic tradition. This meant that Tertullian's ideas would provide the inescapable intellectual context for the fourth-century North African bishop with Neo-Platonist sympathies who also worked in Latin and became the most important theological voice of Western Christianity, Augustine of Hippo.

Long before Augustine, even before Tertullian and his treatise *On the Soul*, Justin Martyr recounted an experience he had as a young, pagan philosopher with an enigmatic older man who first introduced him to the *Philosophia Christiana*. And in this recollection, recorded in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin's Christian interlocutor used the (Middle) Platonism of the young, still-pagan philosopher against him, problematizing Justin's philosophical assumptions. After making an argument for the supposed inconsistencies in Middle Platonism, the old Christian declared to Justin, "Those philosophers, then, know nothing . . . about such matters, for they can't even explain the

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapters IV, V, and VI; and Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, books II and V.

nature of the soul.’<sup>54</sup> According to Justin’s account of the exchange, he was persuaded by the old man’s arguments and consented to its conclusion. Since it was on the topic of the soul that the Christian had leveled his critique of Justin’s pagan Platonism, this topic then served as the pivot on which the aged Master turned the conversation toward an explication of the kind of Christian Platonism that would come to characterize Justin’s philosophy from then on.

In the teaching of the old man, which was presumably the mature Justin’s own understanding, the Platonists were right to claim that human souls are incorporeal but wrong to presume that they are uncreated and immortal of their own nature. Tertullian, on the other hand, was less interested in, and actually mostly against the Christian appropriation of Platonic philosophy evinced in the work of Justin Martyr. After all, Tertullian is perhaps best remembered for the gems of short witticisms within his larger works, among them his rhetorical question, “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy . . . ?”<sup>55</sup> Still, Tertullian was not unaware of the philosophical schools prevalent in his day, nor did he completely eschew the idiom and arguments of several of those schools – especially, that of the Stoics. And in his *De Anima*, Tertullian made significant use of Stoic philosophy for combating more Platonic conceptions of the soul. While Tertullian’s description of the soul shares Justin’s conviction that the human soul has a beginning, having been created by God, that is one of the few points of

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<sup>54</sup> Justin Martyr, “Dialogue with Trypho,” from *Saint Justin Martyr*, ed. Thomas Falls. Fathers of the Church, 6, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1977), found in Bart D. Ehrman, *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>55</sup> Tertullian, “Prescription of the Heretics,” chapter 7 from *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose and Jerome*, ed. S. L. Greenslade [The Library of Christian Classics, V], (London: SCM Press, 1956), found in Ehrman, *After the New Testament*, 213.

concord between the two theories. Whereas the soul according to Justin is incorporeal and mortal by its own nature, for Tertullian the soul is corporeal and immortal.

In arguing for the corporeality of the soul, Tertullian employed Stoic philosophy to elaborate on his understanding; however, he claimed revelation as the provenance of his position. Setting aside what this appeal to revelation might mean in light of his Montanism, Tertullian specifically referenced passages that were apparently already considered scriptural in his context, such as Christ's parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the Gospel according to Luke.<sup>56</sup> In the parable, the souls of the post-mortem characters – Lazarus, Abraham, and the rich man, Dives – are all characteristically corporeal. They are spatially bound, so that an unbridgeable chasm can be set between them; they are subject to the torments of hell's punishments, as obvious from the cries of Dives; and they have members equivalent to the members of their former bodies, such as a parched tongue or a finger to bear a drop of refreshing water to the lips of the tormented.<sup>57</sup> So, he argued, "the soul possesses the cardinal attributes of bodies, such as external form and definite boundaries . . . of length, breadth, and height by which the philosophers measure all bodies."<sup>58</sup> Still, after finding warrant for the corporeality of the soul in the authoritative texts of revelation, as the quote above suggests, Tertullian needed to turn to the philosophical thought of his day to fill out the attributes of this view.

Despite his own articulated distrust of Philosophy, and especially the Platonic school, Tertullian spent the majority of his treatise *On the Soul* employing philosophy,

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<sup>56</sup> Luke 16:19-31

<sup>57</sup> Tertullian, *De Anima*, chapter VII.

<sup>58</sup> Tertullian, "On the Soul," chapter IX.1, translated by Edwin A. Quain, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, Volume 10* (New York: Father of the Church, Inc., 1950), 196.

particularly for the purpose of countering its use by schools of Christianity he deemed heretical. Indeed, he did not even entirely eschew Plato, accepting for example the Platonic claim that the soul is simple but has both rational and irrational functions; though, he relied far more on the Stoic school.<sup>59</sup> In doing so, he wed his theology to certain ontological commitments particular to Stoicism.<sup>60</sup> For example, Tertullian's main philosophical reason for asserting that the soul must be corporeal was that, like the Stoics, he believed that the incorporeal was simply not real. "For, [souls] certainly are *nothing* if they have no bodily substance."<sup>61</sup> In other words, corporeality was, for Tertullian, a condition of existence, and from that Stoic starting point, he built his description of the soul, concluding that the soul is "born of the breath of God, immortal, corporeal, possessed of a definite form, simple in substance, conscious of itself, developing in various ways, free in its choices, liable to accidental change, variable in disposition, rational, supreme, gifted with foresight, developed out of the one original soul [of Adam]."<sup>62</sup>

Tertullian argued that the soul is an imperceptibly thin, subtle substance; "ethereally bright"<sup>63</sup> in color, though usually "invisible to the eye of flesh"<sup>64</sup>; and hot in temperature. The heat of the soul is obvious from the fact that a corpse goes cold when the soul separates from the body at death; however, it is also apparent in the increased

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<sup>59</sup> *De Anima*, X and XVI.

<sup>60</sup> *De Anima*, V.

<sup>61</sup> Tertullian, "On the Soul," VII.3, trans. Edwin A. Quain, *The Fathers of the Church*, 194.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, XXII.2, 230.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, IX.5, 198.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.5, 195.

heat a person feels when the soul produces its seed.<sup>65</sup> For the first soul was created by God and imparted to Adam as Genesis 2:7 recounts, but since then, the souls of each individual have been the descendants by procreation of that primordial soul bestowed on the first man. According to Tertullian's traducian view, the male soul produces its seed concomitantly with the body's production of its seed, and as the fetus grows into a body, the soul saturates the body, taking its form.<sup>66</sup> "The soul that in the beginning took the form of the body of Adam became the germ not only of the substance of every human soul but also of the shape that each one was to bear."<sup>67</sup> By reifying in the body's form, the soul also gains those members and features proper to the body. So, just as the body has eyes by which it can see, so also will the soul have eyes; and as the body has hands, so also will the soul have hands. Without changing its corporeal substance in any way, the soul grows into the body, becoming a subtler image of its heavier host. "This is the interior man; the other is the outer but together they form one being."<sup>68</sup>

In this way, Tertullian connected his view of the soul with Paul's mention of the "inner man" in 2 Corinthians 4:16. The body is a person's "outer man" while the corporeal soul that has taken on that body's form and powers is the person's "inner man." But Tertullian was not the only ancient Christian thinker to employ this Pauline trope. Origen also made use of it when responding to claims by some that the soul is a body's blood (based on Genesis 9:4 and Leviticus 17:11 and 14). In his *Dialogue with Heraclides*, Origen drew a comparison between the relationship between the Father and

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<sup>65</sup> *De Anima*, XVII.

<sup>66</sup> *De Anima*, X.

<sup>67</sup> Tertullian, "On the Soul," IX.8, trans. Edwin A. Quain, *The Fathers of the Church*, 199.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, IX.8, 198.

the Son and the relationship between the inner and outer man. Just as the Father and the Son are – in Origen’s words – rightfully spoken of as both two Gods and one God, so also the inner man and the outer man are one man. And just as *the Son is the image of the invisible God*,<sup>69</sup> the outer man is the image of the invisible inner man. But this relationship between the inner man and the outer man is purely analogical. For as the Son and the Father are one God but not identical, so also, the inner man and the outer man are one man, but the body of the inner man is not identical with the body of the outer man. Similarly, the body of the inner man takes ontological precedence over the body of the outer man, just as the Father takes precedence over the Son, for the inner man is made after the image and likeness of God and thus incorporeal and intellectual. Because the inner man is incorporeal, language about the inner man’s body, members, and senses is analogical. It is within this context, according to Origen, that scripture speaks of the blood as the soul. For just as the blood of the outer man suffuses the body, mediating life to its members, so also the soul suffuses the inner man with life.

Origen’s explanation of the inner man and the soul is precisely the kind of Platonic Christianity that Tertullian had set out to oppose in his treatise *On the Soul*. For Tertullian, to claim that the soul and the inner man are incorporeal was to claim that they did not really exist. In other words, Tertullian rejected that ontological dualism that would characterize Origen’s theology and also become the dominant theology of the Christian intellectual tradition. Tertullian was not an ontological dualist. However, it would be incorrect to claim that he was an ontological monist, like many modern philosophers and the Epicureans of his own day. The Epicureans, having adopted

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<sup>69</sup> Colossians 1:15

Democritus' atomistic view of reality – that all things that exist do so as the interactions, combinations, and constructions of one kind of stuff, namely atoms – would have agreed with Tertullian in the necessary corporeality of all things in existence; albeit, they would have done so as ontological monists. Tertullian did not claim, as the Epicureans, that all corporeal things are made up of the same stuff, whether that stuff is a substrate of atoms or anything else; he only claimed real things must be corporeal. Indeed, Tertullian can probably best be described as an ontological pluralist though, he his commitment to corporeality may be spoken of as a metaphysical monism. Still, he is ultimately in agreement with the majority report in Christian tradition when it comes to describing what constitutes a human being; that is to say, he is an anthropological dualist. Humans are composed of body and soul. While being explored, refined, and recast over the centuries, this is a position that would not truly be challenged, from either outside of or within Christianity, until modernity.

### **The Cappadocians and Augustine**

Unlike Tertullian, who wrote about two centuries before them, the Cappadocians and Augustine of Hippo embraced the Platonic philosophical tradition to help them think through and understand the truth revealed in scripture and the developing tradition. And in doing so, they were working well within the dominant intellectual culture of the Church throughout the Roman Empire in their respective generations. By the time that Christianity had become legal and acceptable in the Empire, the Platonic tradition and Neo-Platonism, in particular, had come to provide the Church with many of the

categories and concepts that proved invaluable for its theological work. So, after the Council of Nicaea, which was convened less than a decade before the Cappadocian Fathers were born and during which it had been decided that the word *homoousios* – consubstantial – was the appropriate way to refer to the ontological relation between God the Son and God the Father, the term was, nevertheless, eschewed even by its staunchest defenders because of its corporeal connotations. For the bishops and theologians of Nicaea, *homoousios* may have been a word needed to combat the heresy of Arius and direct the minds of the faithful to the true Trinitarian doctrine, but as Origen had noted centuries before, it was also a term that seemed unbecoming for the invisible, incorporeal, eternal God.

This understanding of God, inchoate in the creed of Nicaea and explored in theological depth by the Cappadocians, would eventually convict the philosophy of a young, Manichaean Augustine. In Book VII of *The Confessions*, he describes his concept of God prior to his conversion as being trapped within an utterly corporeal ontology. Like Tertullian, the pre-Christian Augustine was a metaphysical monist. He writes, “Whatever was not stretched out in space, or diffused or compacted or inflated or possessed of some such qualities, or at least capable of possessing them, I judged to be nothing at all.”<sup>70</sup> Presumably, this perspective included not just his understanding of God, but also Augustine’s view of the soul. It would take the teachings of Ambrose, the bishop of Milan with some Neo-Platonic sympathies, and reading “some books by the Platonists”<sup>71</sup> before Augustine would come to dispense with the metaphysics of

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<sup>70</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 121.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

corporeality in favor of what he deemed the truer ontology that he found in Neo-Platonism and a Christianity that incorporated those Platonic insights.

The Cappadocians also found the Platonic tradition particularly helpful in doing Christian theology and constructing their theological anthropologies. For example, Basil the Great writes in his “Homily on the Words ‘Be Attentive to Yourself,’”

Understand that God is incorporeal from the incorporeal soul existing in you, not circumscribed by place; since neither as a matter of principle does your mind spend its life in a place, through its conjunction with the body it comes to be in a place. You believe God to be invisible in understanding your own soul, since it also is ungraspable with bodily eyes, for it is colorless, it is without shape, and it has not been encompassed by any bodily characteristics, but it is recognized only from its energies.<sup>72</sup>

This view of God as entirely incorporeal and utterly different from His creation, and the attendant ontological dualism, would have seemed heresy to Tertullian. However, the Cappadocians were not in the intellectual lineage of the second-century, North African thinker; rather, their theology was heir to the kind of work done by Tertullian’s younger contemporary, Origen. So, like Origen, Basil speaks of the inner man not as the shape the corporeal soul takes from its body but as the true, incorporeal person. “For I am what concerns the inner human being,” Basil writes, “the outer things are not me but mine.”<sup>73</sup> Moreover, while Basil accepts the widely accepted Platonic tripartite division of the faculties of the soul into *logistikos*, *thumos*, and *epithumetes* (reasoning, temper, and

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<sup>72</sup> St Basil the Great, *On the Human Condition*, trans. Nonna Verna Harrison (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 103.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, “On the Origin of Humanity, Discourse 1: On that which is according to the Image,” 36.

appetite), he follows Origen in identifying with the *logistikon* or *nous*.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, even though he also argues that the body is a fitting abode for the soul,<sup>75</sup> in his “Homily Explaining that God Is Not the Cause of Evil,” Basil seems to adopt Origen’s Platonic etiological myth of souls.<sup>76</sup> According to this view, the rational souls preexist their bodies and *fall* into them by turning away from the contemplation of God toward the enjoyment of the lower faculties.

Although sharing much of Basil’s theological and anthropological perspective, his younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa rejected this view of the preexistence and fall of souls in his own treatise, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. In that text, Gregory has their sister Macrina argue “that the soul and the body have one and the same beginning.”<sup>77</sup> But Macrina’s explanation neither fits with the traducianism of Tertullian nor the creationist perspective of Justin Martyr, whereby God creates and joins a soul to its body at some point between conception and birth. Instead, Macrina makes the startling claim that the corporeality of the corporeal world is the product of intelligible principles held in

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 36: “[Genesis 1:26] says that the human being is according to the image of God, but the rational part is the human being . . . . For I am not the hand, but I am the rational part of the soul.”

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 74: “But what was the good set before the soul? It was attentiveness to God and union with him through love. Once the soul has fallen away from this, it is made evil by various and manifold weaknesses. But for what reason is it entirely capable of receiving evil? Because of the impulse of free choice, especially befitting a rational nature. For having been freed from all necessity, and receiving self-determined life from the Creator, because it came into being according to the image of God, it understands the Good and knows his joy and possesses authority and power, abiding in the contemplation of the beautiful and the enjoyment of spiritual things, guarding carefully in itself the life according to nature. Yet it also had authority to turn away from the beautiful at any time. And this happened to it when it received a satiety of blessed delights and was as it were weighed down by a kind of sleepiness and sank down from things above, being mixed with the flesh through the disgraceful enjoyment of pleasures.”

<sup>77</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 100.

“concurrence and union” through comprehension by Intellect.<sup>78</sup> And through its rational part, each soul participates in that comprehension of its body. Of course, the rational soul must develop over one’s life, which Macrina compares to “a sprouting seed [proceeding] gradually to its goal . . . .”<sup>79</sup> She concludes, “Therefore we understand that a common transition into being takes place for the compound constituted from both body and soul. The one does not go before, nor the other come later.”<sup>80</sup> Gregory concludes the section on the Origin of the Soul with Macrina’s prediction that eventually the number of souls in the world will reach its perfection after which no more souls will come into existence. However, neither Gregory nor Macrina offer any explanation of how incorporeal souls produce new souls.

It is this question about the origin of individual souls that would come to vex Augustine throughout his life as a Christian thinker.<sup>81</sup> For unlike the Cappadocians, Augustine spent most of his life in northern Africa, where Tertullian’s theology had left a profound and lasting effect. In particular, Tertullian’s traducianist understanding of the genesis and generations of human souls had been joined with the notion of Original Sin, which had taken hold in the North African Church. Hence, Original Sin was a doctrine for which Augustine had to account in his own theology in a way that does not seem to have been true for the Cappadocians. Furthermore, the truth of Original Sin impressed itself upon Augustine’s thinking as he reflected on the difference between the socially

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 100-101.

<sup>81</sup> Even the most succinct survey of Augustine’s changing thoughts on the soul is far beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, a few brief points will have to suffice. See Robert J. O’Connell, S.J., *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine’s Later Works* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987).

stratifying ascetic heroics of the Manichaeans (and later Pelagius) and the unearned grace bestowed through Christ on all of his people. For Augustine, the *askesis* of individuals, even Christian saints like Anthony of the Desert, could not overturn the effects of sin and death in this fallen world. Only the grace of God given through Christ and membership in his body could free the souls of the elect from the bonds of disordered desire. To deny the power of Original Sin over the souls of humanity was, for Augustine, to deny the saving grace of God in Christ. To deny Original Sin was to make Christianity just another philosophical school peddling the teachings and practices of *a* good life rather than *the* philosophy and true *religio* by which God's grace makes the good life possible both now and in the age to come.

However, in arguing for Original Sin, Augustine realized that his own view of the incorporeality of the soul was irreconcilable with Tertullian's traducianism. So, he turned to Jerome for clarification, but Jerome simply commended to him the creationist account of souls without recognizing the complexity of the issue. In Letter 166, Augustine unpacks the problem for Jerome, revealing his own struggle with the issue, and appeals to Jerome for further assistance. Traducianism does not make sense if one believes that souls are incorporeal, since reproduction and inherited qualities are characteristics of bodies. In fact, one of Tertullian's arguments for corporeal souls was that children seem to inherit intellectual capacities and personality traits from their parents. However, if each individual soul is created by God and joined to its body at or after conception, as Jerome has said, then it is unclear how that soul comes to receive the sin and death that comes through Adam. Augustine pleads with Jerome:

Teach me, then, I ask you, what I should teach; teach me what I should hold, and tell me: If souls are created individually for individuals who are born today, where do souls sin in infants so that they need the forgiveness of sin in the sacrament of Christ, given that they sin in Adam from whom sinful flesh is propagated? Or if they do not sin, with what justice on the part of the creator are they made subject to the sin of another when they are inserted in mortal members propagated from him so that condemnation overtakes them unless they are helped by the Church, since it is not in their power to be able to be helped by the grace of baptism? With what justice are so many thousands of souls condemned which, in the deaths of infants, leave their bodies without the pardon of the Christian sacrament, if individual new souls created without any preceding sin of their own, but by the will of the creator, are united to newborn babies?<sup>82</sup>

To the extent that this letter reveals Augustine's mind on the matter at the time that he wrote to Jerome, he desperately wants to believe in creationism with Jerome, but it creates serious problems for the doctrine of Original Sin. Jerome did not respond with an answer or explanation for Augustine, and eventually his debates with the Pelagians led him to take a stronger line on Original Sin. So, Augustine came to trade the problem of holding a creationist view (which was more in line with his Neo-Platonic metaphysics), despite it being problematic for the doctrine of Original Sin, with a traducian account that preserved Original Sin but is problematic for a view of souls as incorporeal. Still, he never seemed to be at ease with that position either, and he continued to work on the problem into old age – holding to the view that somehow all souls proceed from and participate in the primordial soul of Adam and therefore in the sin of that original, archetypal soul.<sup>83</sup>

Once he had been convinced of them, Augustine never gave up on the doctrine of Original Sin, and he never gave up on the incorporeal and immortal nature of the soul.

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<sup>82</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Part II – Letters, Volume 3: 156-210, trans. Roland Teske, S.J. and ed. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 84.

<sup>83</sup> O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works*.

Nor did he let the tension between those two beliefs keep him from building an anthropology based off of them. He even found within the rational faculty of the soul a trace of the Trinitarian God who created it and all things. And he reflected, like no one before him, on the unity and irreducibility of the first-person perspective in phenomenal consciousness.<sup>84</sup> Each of these contributions would have lasting power in the western Church. But more than all of this, Augustine provided an overwhelming out-narration of the dominant pagan philosophical school of late antiquity, Neo-Platonism, and established the theological language and pastoral concerns of Latin Christianity from his day on. And, notably, this theological narrative he fiercely and eloquently argued included an anthropological dualism within a larger ontological dualism.

### **Thomas Aquinas**

Augustine may have out-narrated Neo-Platonism by incorporating its insights into the Christian theological reflection on Scripture and Tradition, but he apparently had no idea what to make of Aristotle. In *The Confessions*, he admits that he only read one of Aristotle's works, and he was thoroughly unimpressed.<sup>85</sup> However, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Neo-Platonism had long since ceased to be the philosophical school demanding the Church's attention, since the Platonic tradition lived-on almost exclusively through Christian theology's appropriation of it, and Aristotelian philosophy was slowly taking its place as the philosophy that required Christian engagement. All but lost to the West for centuries, Aristotelian philosophy had begun growing in importance

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<sup>84</sup> Gareth B. Matthews, *Augustine* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

<sup>85</sup> Book IV, 16, 28-31.

in Medieval Europe as Arabic translations of Aristotle's work and Muslim commentaries on those works were being translated into Latin. So, courting charges of heresy, the Dominican friar, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) set himself to the task of doing theology with Aristotle.

Thomas' work was seen as potentially heretical because the Western theological discourse of the day operated entirely within the register of Augustine's Neo-Platonic thought and language. This is not to say that Thomas was the only Christian thinker in his day working with the Latin translation of Aristotle, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Ibn Rushd (Averroës). But when Thomas and any other Christian advocate for an Aristotelian theology wrote or spoke, they did so within an Augustinian theological matrix. Augustine had so effectively out-narrated Neo-Platonism, incorporating its truths into the way that Scripture was read and doctrine understood, that any theological account thereafter could only amend, supplement, or correct that narrative. And that is what Thomas did, but in doing so, he contested some of the assumed notions of his colleagues about the world and about human beings.

The Augustinian theology of Thomas' era viewed humans as a kind of amalgam of the bestial and the angelic.<sup>86</sup> Every living thing was thought to have one or more souls according to its respective way of being. Plants were thought to have *vegetative* souls. Animals, who are higher in the hierarchy of being, have both *vegetative* and *sensitive* souls. That is to say, an animal not only has a soul whose function is to keep it alive and growing through procurement of the nutrients necessary for sustaining its life, but it also has another soul, the function of which is sense-perception and locomotion. Humans,

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<sup>86</sup> Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

however, are unique in having a *rational* soul in addition to our *vegetative* and *sensitive* souls, and it is this *rational* soul that is who we truly are. For it is, as the Cappadocians and Augustine argued, the rational soul that is referred to in Genesis when it says that humans were made according to the image and likeness of God.<sup>87</sup> It is the rational soul that sets humans apart from the rest of the corporeal world, wherein the souls serve their respective plant and animal bodies. For humans – and humans alone – the body and the other two souls are meant to serve the incorporeal, immortal *rational* soul, which is the true person, the inner human, that is in the likeness of God and his angels. In other words, anthropological dualism of the dominant theological discourse of Thomas’ time ran down the same dividing line as its ontological dualism. But it is just this anthropology that Thomas’ Aristotelian theology called into question.

For Thomas, humans are not hybrids of the beasts of the earth and the heavenly host, nor are we angelic animals; we are just animals. Denys Turner emphasizes this point in his book on Aquinas when he writes that Thomas insists that “we are *wholly* animal, animal from top to toe.”<sup>88</sup> But that is not to say that Thomas rejects the rational soul. In fact, Thomas follows Aristotle in arguing that the rational soul is the *substantial form* of the human body; however, to make such a claim is just to insist that we are animals. For Thomas, as for Aristotle, souls are not discrete entities that happen to be attached to bodies either through some fall (as Plato would have it) or by Divine will (as the Augustinian tradition claimed); rather, a soul is the act by which matter is formed into a body. As Etienne Gilson explains,

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<sup>87</sup> Genesis 1:26.

<sup>88</sup> Turner, *Thomas Aquinas*, 58.

We must not regard a living being as a machine inert in itself but with a soul as its motor. This is what Descartes wanted to substitute for Aristotle's notion of living being. For St. Thomas, following Aristotle, the soul does not first make a body move, it first makes it a body. A corpse is not a body. The soul makes it exist as a body. It is the soul which assembles and organizes what we call today the biochemical elements . . . in order to make a living body from them.<sup>89</sup>

Put another way, bodies are soul-formed matter; souls are the substantial forms of material bodies. Hence, Kevin Corcoran misunderstands Thomas' anthropology when he describes it as a "compound dualism" between a body and soul or two "incomplete substances."<sup>90</sup> To speak of the matter of the body prior to being formed as a body as an incomplete substance is to misunderstand what matter is – namely, the substrate of potential. To speak of the soul as some kind of substance equivalent to the material substance of the body is to have misunderstood what the soul is – namely, the form of a particular kind of body. Turner explains that "a human being is a body alive in a particular kind of way; and what accounts for the body being alive in just that way is, for Thomas, what you mean by its 'soul' being the body's 'substantial form.' Nothing else."<sup>91</sup>

Humans are animals, according to Thomas, not because we only have *vegetative* and *sensitive* souls without any *rational* soul, but because we have a *rational* soul and only a *rational* soul. For if the soul is *the* substantial form of the body, then that soul forms only one body and that body is formed by only one soul. Again following Aristotle, Thomas holds the view that in the hierarchy of souls, the powers of the lower

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<sup>89</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook, C.S.B. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 187.

<sup>90</sup> Kevin Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature*, 35-40.

<sup>91</sup> Turner, *Thomas Aquinas*, 62.

souls are included in the higher; therefore, a sensitive soul has the nutritive power of the vegetative soul, and the rational soul has the powers of both the vegetative and the sensitive souls. But just because human bodies are formed by rational souls rather than sensitive souls does not mean that humans are not animals. Human bodies are clearly animal bodies, and Thomas did not need to wait six hundred years for Darwin to tell him that. Rather, what it means for human bodies to be formed by rational souls is that humans are rational animals. And that means that whatever we do, we do it rationally. Even when we do things that other animals do without rationality, we do those same things rationally. Or, as Turner puts it:

What exists is a person; what makes me a person is my possessing an intellectual soul, and that one and only soul runs all the way down through my animal and vegetative life, just as my vegetative and animal lives run all the way through and up into my intellectual life. Thus it is that my vegetative and animal life (eating, having sex) can bear sense, carry meanings, become a discourse, become a language of human transaction.<sup>92</sup>

Of course, this does not mean that every action of a human being is preceded by and the result of conscious, intellectual deliberation. It means, rather, that everything we do as humans is done within a world of language and, therefore, meaning. It means that everything we do can potentially be described and reflected upon meaningfully through language, and the world in which we live can be understood as a world. In other words, being a human person means that I can provide a narrative for myself and the world in which I find myself.

It is important, though, to remember that being a human person is not being a rational soul, but being a human body formed by a rational soul. Thomas does argue that

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 96.

rational souls subsist and, therefore, continue to exist after the person dies. However, when you die it is not you, the person, who persists after death, just the rational soul that provided the substantial form of your body. For Thomas, the continuation of the soul after death does not fulfill the Christian hope for *life in the world to come*; this hope will only be realized when the rational soul forms for the deceased person a glorified body in the resurrection of the dead. All of this seems to raise the question of *how* and *when* a rational soul comes to form a body. Thomas, in fact, does pursue the question of *when* the soul forms the body of a new person through human procreation; however, the question of *how* can be misleading.<sup>93</sup> Again, the question for Thomas is not how some discrete entity – the soul – ends up getting connected to a body or even to the material that it will form into a body. The soul *is* the substantial form of the body. So, this is not a matter of *efficient* causation; it is another type of causation – namely, *formal*. From an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective, matter, in and of itself, is pure potential; therefore, matter without *form* is not *anything*. Which is another way of saying that matter is always accompanied by form. Hence, the form of the matter is its formal cause. But this *formal* causation does not negate or replace *efficient* causation; rather, *efficient* causation works within *formal* causation. For example, to say that the rational soul is the substantial form of the human body – that is, that the rational soul is the formal cause of the human body – does not subvert the procreative efficient cause.

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<sup>93</sup> Fabrizio Amerini, *Aquinas on the Beginning and End of Human Life*, trans. Mark Henninger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 133: “The teleology that governs the entire process of generation and the principle of the identity of the subject between what is in potency and what is in act allow us to say that Thomas would not be against affirming that the human being that someone is now is numerically identical (even though in a broad sense of numerical identity) with that embryo that earlier was in potency the human being that now is act.”

Ironically, the natural theology that Thomas' incorporation of Aristotelian philosophy made possible eventually helped lead to the later natural philosophy that would bracket Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics and collapse all causation into efficient causes only. But this development was neither necessary nor was it the result of any evidence or sustained argument against Thomas' metaphysics. Nevertheless, the new narrative of natural philosophy took hold and created a whole new set of questions to be answered and problems to be explored – including those in relation to anthropology and consciousness.

### 3

#### Lost Souls

##### *The Modern Story of Consciousness and Persons*

Theologians / They don't know nothing  
about my soul / About my soul

I'm an ocean / An abyss in motion  
Slow motion / Slow motion

[ . . . . ]

They thin my heart with little things / And my life with change  
Oh in so many ways / I find more missing every day

–Wilco, “Theologians”

Thomas Aquinas' concern for the unity of the human person – whereby the soul is the form of the body and not a separate thing, namely the true antecedent of the “person,” trapped within or making use of the body – has never been universally held within the Church.<sup>94</sup> For example, in the generation after Thomas, John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308), another medieval scholastic working to incorporate Aristotelian philosophy into Christian theology, believed and taught that the soul, which was the intellectual and first-personal part of a human, was distinct from the form of the person's body.<sup>95</sup> In this way, Scotus was able to preserve the neo-platonic identification of the person with the reasoning part of the soul – or rational mind – which the Church had inherited from the theological work of Augustine, the Cappadocians, and other Fathers, but at the expense of

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<sup>94</sup> Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>95</sup> Richard Cross, “Philosophy of Mind,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. Thomas Williams (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

dividing the person perhaps even more substantially than the neo-platonic inspired anthropologies that preceded his work. For Duns Scotus, the rational or animating soul must be joined to the body and its form through an act of God's will. Similarly, that rational soul then relates to its body through the function of the will, and not as the form of the body, as Thomas would have it.<sup>96</sup>

One can see in Scotus' division of the human person an anticipation of Cartesian dualism. For Descartes, as for Scotus, the rational soul (or *res cogitans*) and the body or *res extensa*) are substantially distinct and the causal influence of the one upon the other has been flattened to *efficient* causation via the voluntaristic power of the rational soul alone.<sup>97</sup> Of course, Scotus' view is not identical with Cartesian dualism, since the form of the body cannot sustain the life of the body on its own without the animating rational soul, but there is a sense that comes as a consequence of Scotus' division between the soul and the form of the body – according to which a corpse is still the same species as the living body (*adversus Aquinas*) – that the body is a machine waiting to be put to use by the rational soul. And it is this view, shared by Duns Scotus and Descartes, of the soul's will acting as efficient cause upon the distinctly separate body (to which it is joined only by divine will) that would become the standard philosophical and theological anthropology for early modernity. However, this perspective was burdened with at least

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<sup>96</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

<sup>97</sup> For Duns Scotus, the causation is efficient and material. The rational soul is, in a sense, a substantial form for Scotus, but it does not seem to operate as a form of the body. See Cross, "Philosophy of Mind," in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, 273: "This sort of view, according to which there is a *plurality of forms* in an animate composite, makes it harder to give an account of the unity of a composite. In fact, we might find it hard to see what sense can be made of calling the animating soul a 'form' at all, given the basic claim that forms of material objects ought to have some role in the structuring of a body. Scotus is well aware of both of these two difficulties and spends some time trying to work out a philosophical solution to them – though it must be admitted that his solution to the second is ultimately aporetic."

one important and stubbornly persistent problem – namely, the question of how the will of an incorporeal soul could be the efficient cause of the body’s actions. This problem loomed larger and larger as Aristotelian ideas gave way to the Natural Philosophy of the Enlightenment, wherein all causation was flattened into efficient causation<sup>98</sup> and matter was no longer thought to require forms.<sup>99</sup>

In light of these changing ideas, the Unitarian clergyman and natural philosopher, Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), sought to reintroduce Tertullian’s concept of the corporeal soul. Convinced that the soul must be a substantive thing, Priestley “weighed a mouse just before and just after it died”<sup>100</sup> to gather evidence for the soul. Moreover, Priestley’s friend, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was convinced that Priestley was right to resurrect Tertullian’s view of the soul, since it seemed to be the only account that fit the materialism of the developing Natural Philosophy. And this perspective persisted into the late nineteenth-century among those convinced by the romantic, yet pseudo-scientific Spiritualism of the age, which held that souls were composed of ectoplasm, making them corporeal enough to be photographed and move things other than the bodies they once inhabited. But by that time, the more scientifically rigorous had exchanged talk of the soul for speaking of consciousness, which they assumed was in some kind of causal relationship with the brain.

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<sup>98</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>99</sup> This notion that matter did not necessarily require forms was, again, anticipated in the work of Duns Scotus.

<sup>100</sup> Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* (New York, NY: Random House, 1996), 272.

In his seminal work first published in 1890, *Principles of Psychology*, William James dismissed talk of the soul as a superfluous relic from pre-scientific philosophy that could do no real work in a modern anthropology. Like many of his colleagues, James preferred to speak of consciousness rather than the soul. Still, he eventually became dubious of popular level uses of this term as well. “Consciousness” may be a better word than “soul,” but as long as it is used in such a way as to suggest there is some other substance to the universe than the material of its physicality, then the word is as technically improper as *soul*. James’ arguments anticipated, if not inaugurated, a good deal of the philosophy of mind that developed during the twentieth century and has continued into this century. According to this account, consciousness – which has superseded the soul – is best understood as the functions of the physical brain; albeit, with innumerable debates over interpretation and explanation of the details of this physicalism.

That this is the case is an indication that the primary narrative of the day, the most important philosophical school now, is the natural philosophy at the foundation of the *episteme* of science. If we take Daniel Dennett’s view of memes outlined above, we may be tempted to dismiss the importance of the *episteme* of science merely as an example of the survival fitness of its memes. However, from the perspective of the *Philosophia Christiana*, truth will inevitably appeal to people, since we are created to have our desires oriented thereto. Hence, the *episteme* of science has risen in the esteem of humanity because of the truth it contains and reveals. But Dennett and the other advocates of reductive physicalism and eliminative materialism maintain a faith in the developing *episteme* of science to ultimately provide all truth despite the inconsistency that such a

faith seems to have with the very picture that the *episteme* of science is producing. This faith in what Karl Popper called *promissory materialism* has been at the heart of much modern neuroscience and philosophy of mind. At present, consciousness remains a scientific mystery. So, for example, even Nicholas Humphrey admits that it is more probable than not “that brain scientists would not recognize the [neural correlate(s) of consciousness] for what it is even if it were right in front of them.”<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, even though the supporting evidence has not been found (yet), it is assumed by most if not all committed to the *episteme* of science that consciousness will be explained in terms of physical brain processes. And once consciousness is explained, the *soul-of-the-synaptic-gaps* will have finally been dispelled.

Yet it has not only been philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists who have accepted this narrative. For a number of current theologians, a physicalist anthropology has become more persuasive than the dualistic anthropology that has been taken as the default Christian position in modernity. Nevertheless, many of these theologians have not owned up to the implications of adopting physicalism. Nancey Murphy is a theologian who has taken these implications seriously, hence her suggestion that the *soul* should be seen as a failed ancient-medieval *scientific* hypothesis, clung to by modern Christians who mistakenly think it theologically essential.<sup>102</sup> Still, Murphy recognizes that the reductive materialism that underwrites physicalism should raise concerns for a Christian anthropology. In particular, Murphy fears the strict determinism correlative of such reductive materialism – a determinism that robs the human person of

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<sup>101</sup> Nicholas Humphrey, *Soul Dust*, 66.

<sup>102</sup> Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

any agency necessary for moral responsibility. Therefore, Murphy has argued for the role of “downward causation” or “whole-part constraint” – the ability of a complex system to place constraints on the bottom-up causation of its parts – in maintaining the agency of the complex systems we call *persons*. This personal agency, which is the key to a nonreductive physicalism<sup>103</sup> for Murphy, is significantly enhanced by the uniquely human ability for language.

However, it is difficult to see why the kind of personal agency described by Murphy should put the “non” in nonreductive physicalism, since her account of agency is similar enough to that of Daniel Dennett’s account that both could hypothetically be argued from the same set of metaphysical commitments.<sup>104</sup> And it is precisely on these grounds that proponents of the Constitution View of human persons, like Lynne Rudder Baker, object to the kind of solution Murphy has proposed in response to the problem of materialistic reductionism.<sup>105</sup> In the words of Baker, “*person* is an ontological kind.”<sup>106</sup> Hence, *persons* can never be reduced to the complex, organic systems that constitute them. “Persons are one kind of thing; human bodies are another.”<sup>107</sup> Though a person

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 121: “Nonreductive physicalism grants . . . that we are biological organisms, but emphasizes that our neurobiological complexity and the history of cultural development have together resulted in the capacity for genuine moral reasoning.”

<sup>104</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003). To be clear, I am not critiquing Murphy’s account of personal agency (or Dennett’s), *per se*. Rather, I am suggesting that there is nothing inherently nonreductive about her account; hence, the comparison with Dennett, who *is* an advocate of reductive physicalism.

<sup>105</sup> Lynne Rudder Baker, *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Kevin Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

<sup>106</sup> Baker, *Persons and Bodies*, 11.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 25.

and his or her body may share the same space, the same name, even the same constitutive cells, molecules, and atomic particles, that person is not identical to the constitutive body of the human animal with which he or she is identifiable. For Baker, a *person* is a kind of thing that “has a capacity for first-person perspective.”<sup>108</sup> In later work, Baker qualifies that definition with the distinction between a rudimentary and robust first-person perspective; thereby, allowing for a rudimentary first-person perspective in an animal that is not constitutive of a person but displays consciousness and intentionality, nevertheless. Human infants are, for Baker, an example of an animal with a rudimentary first-person perspective; however, by a further qualification Baker is able to retain the ontological designation of *person* for human animals in the state of infancy. A human person may be constituted by a human infant despite the fact that the infant only has a rudimentary first-person perspective because the infant also has a “remote capacity” to develop a robust first-person perspective as it matures. That is to say, a human animal in the state of infancy has the real potential, even if it is never actualized, of developing the kind of first-person perspective that distinguishes human persons from other kinds of things in the world, but a first-trimester, human fetus is not a person because it lacks the physiological prerequisites for a remote capacity for a robust first-person perspective. Human infants have this potentiality because their physiology allows them to acquire language, which is necessary for the kind of first-person perspective that Baker identifies as robust.

Language, then, is crucial for both Baker’s Constitution View of human persons and Murphy’s defense of personal agency as a uniquely human characteristic.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 20.

Furthermore, without explicitly adopting the Constitution View or reflecting on their ontological status, Murphy begins to make similar claims for *persons* as Baker in the last chapter of *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*.<sup>109</sup> By rejecting the dichotomies of body-soul and brain-mind, then reformulating the question in terms of a *person's* relation to their body, and answering that question by proposing that persons are constituted by their bodies, these anthropologies have attempted to avoid the supposed difficulties associated with a concept such as the soul. Baker's *persons* are not immaterial 'things' that subsist without a constitutive body with the capacity for first-person perspective, as souls are according to Thomas Aquinas. And, since Baker makes the persistence condition of a *person* the continuation of the dispositional property of the person's first-person perspective, she further avoids any confusion of persons with the Cartesian *res cogitans*. Nevertheless, there remains a kind of ghostly quality to this view of persons. For example, Baker is willing to argue that persons can persist beyond the destruction of the embodied animal that initially constituted them. This persistence of the person extends beyond the replacement of essential parts of the constitutive animal's natural body with prosthesis. In Baker's view, God could miraculously provide a person's robust first-person perspective with a new constitutive body, having no continuity with that person's original constitutive body, and that person would persist as the same person. But, as I will argue later, such a view strains against the central Christian narrative of the Incarnation, and specifically the narratives of Christ's own resurrection.

Finally, there is another corollary of Baker's Constitution View that might be problematic for a theological anthropology situated within the Christian tradition.

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<sup>109</sup> Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 132-142.

According to the Constitution View, a human being that is born with only a brain stem would not properly be a person, since that human will never possess the cognitive apparatus necessary for a remote capacity for a robust first-person perspective. Such a being would be a human animal but not a human person. This account of human persons is not necessarily problematic as long as it remains an academic point; however, if the distinction between human persons and human animals becomes normative for ethics, then Christians may find the implications unacceptable.<sup>110</sup> But this just is the corollary that makes Baker's account of human persons problematic, for if it cannot be applied to the ethical practices of the Christian community, then – at least for that community – that account is insufficient. Or, as the words of the Wilco song, “Theologians,” used for the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter suggests, we must be more than such accounts of us imply.

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<sup>110</sup> See Stanley Hauerwas, “Must a Patient Be a Person to Be a Patient? Or, My Uncle Charlie Is Not Much of a Person, But He Is Still My Uncle Charlie,” *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 596-602.

## 4

### Telling a New Tale *The Soul as Embodied Narrative*

#### A Story About Memes

Lynne Rudder Baker's argument for the ontological irreducibility of persons rests on her unflagging commitment to resist the reductive narratives determinative for philosophy of mind.<sup>111</sup> However, it may yet be helpful to follow Nancey Murphy's lead in inching closer to the precipice to see what can be learned. Similar to Murphy, the (teleo)functionalist, Daniel Dennett<sup>112</sup> claims that "language, when it is installed in the brain, brings with it the construction of a new cognitive architecture that *creates* a new kind of consciousness—and morality."<sup>113</sup> Indeed, Dennett would surely agree with Herbert McCabe's Wittgensteinian-Thomistic description of the human as "a linguistic animal,"<sup>114</sup> since Dennett claims that language actually shapes the plasticity of the brain and provides the building blocks for the brain's creation of *self*. "Our human environment contains not just food and shelter, enemies to fight or flee, and conspecifics

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<sup>111</sup> To be clear, this reductionism is associated almost exclusively with philosophy of mind in the analytic tradition, not with the discussions of consciousness in Phenomenology.

<sup>112</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 460: "Am I then a functionalist? Yes and no. I am not a Turing machine functionalist, but then I doubt anyone ever was . . . I am a sort of 'teleofunctionalist,' of course, perhaps the original teleofunctionalist (in *Content and Consciousness*), but as I have all along made clear, and emphasize here in the discussion of evolution, and of qualia, I don't make the mistake of trying to define all salient mental differences in terms of biological *functions*."

<sup>113</sup> Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, 260 (emphasis original).

<sup>114</sup> Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love, and Language* (London: Continuum, 2003), 68.

with whom to mate, but words, words, words. These words are potent elements of our environment that we readily incorporate, ingesting and extruding them, weaving them like spiderwebs into self-protective strings of *narrative*.” And, he continues, “when we let in these words . . . they tend to take over, creating us out of the raw materials they find in our brains.”<sup>115</sup> Dennett’s characterization of words as outside of us, as “elements of our environment,” suggests they have obduracy. Or as McCabe wrote, “I can’t just mean what I like by words,”<sup>116</sup> because the meaning of a word is not dependent on my subjectivity or will.

So it seems that words have a kind of ontological ‘weight’ for Dennett (at least in some of his work), which can be seen in Dennett’s description of the way language makes consciousness possible. Words, according to Dennett, are *memes* that can be spoken, and memes are the “stuff” of consciousness. “Human consciousness is *itself* a huge complex of memes (or more exactly meme-effects in brains) that can best be understood as the operation of a ‘*von Neumannesque*’ virtual machine *implemented* in the *parallel architecture* of a brain that was not designed for any such activities.”<sup>117</sup> In this description of consciousness, “a meme is an information-packet with attitude – a recipe or instruction manual for doing something cultural.”<sup>118</sup> According to Dennett, they are invisible, require some form of physical media to migrate, are subject to natural selection and evolution, and are parasitic – requiring human brains to reproduce. Such a

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<sup>115</sup> Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 417.

<sup>116</sup> McCabe, *Law, Love, and Language*, 88.

<sup>117</sup> Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 210.

<sup>118</sup> Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, 176 (emphasis original).

description lends a kind of creaturely gravitas to memes. And, if this ‘weight’ or obduracy is true for words as spoken *memes*, it is also true for narratives – both the narratives we tell and the narratives that tell us. So, Dennett says, “Our fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is . . . telling stories, and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others – and ourselves – about who we are.”<sup>119</sup> Dennett calls the story-telling *self* of each, individual *linguistic animal*, its “center of narrative gravity.”<sup>120</sup> And he reminds us that, in fact, the narrative precedes and produces that *center of narrative gravity*. “Our tales are spun, but for the most part, we don’t spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source.”<sup>121</sup> Just as the ‘narratives’ encoded in our DNA form the matter of our physicality into our bodies, so also our embodied narratives form *ourselves* and give rise to consciousness.<sup>122</sup> But Dennett is quick to insist that there is no magic in play here. The life of these invisible, incorporeal creatures called memes is completely reducible to physical processes, and a *center of narrative gravity* is as much a “theorist’s fiction” as the physical center of gravity.

So, finally, the metaphysical commitments of Dennett’s narrative of reductive physicalism trump his commitment to the obdurate reality of narratives, words, or memes – revealing that the two commitments are ultimately irreconcilable. Unlike the eliminative materialist Patricia Churchland, Dennett is not prepared to dismiss the

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<sup>119</sup> Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 418.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Recent work in epigenetics suggests that these two types of narratives may be connected by more than just analogy.

evidence that language plays a crucial role in the formation and functioning of human consciousness.<sup>123</sup> To engage in such a dismissal cannot help but philosophically call into question the whole project of science itself (as well as any other human, cultural project). Still, Dennett is aware that the admission of the power of words or memes to change the way we think, recollect, reflect and thus react in future situations provides a layer of causality that strains against purely physical, atomistic (efficient) causality.<sup>124</sup> “The philosopher Jaegwon Kim . . . has argued that once mental causality is admitted, physicalism has, in effect, been given up, and we have a dualist view of spirit and matter, no matter how much scientists dislike the thought.”<sup>125</sup> Dennett struggles to establish some elbow room in the efficient causality and reductive physicalism of the *episteme* of science for the causal power of such immaterial things as words and memes.<sup>126</sup> By resisting the temptation to treat a person’s consciousness as something apart from their physicality, he’s able to avoid the dualism of the mind’s will and the body’s action, however, he never seems to get around to giving an account of how the words and narratives that spin that consciousness into existence and change the patterns of its web exercise causality.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Patricia S. Churchland, *Touching a Nerve: The Self as Brain* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013).

<sup>124</sup> Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*.

<sup>125</sup> Keith Ward, *The Big Questions in Science and Religion* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), 158.

<sup>126</sup> Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*.

<sup>127</sup> Dennett suggests that language works in a way similar to the way software runs on the hardware of a computer; although, he’s willing to admit that the plasticity of the brain allows for that linguistic or memetic software to actual alter the hardware of the brain. But the differences that this analogy inevitably highlight only serve to beg the question.

Moreover, as Baker has pointed out, Dennett has been unable so far to explain away the first-person perspective from a third-personal stance, despite the fact that to do so is the intended goal of his “neutral method” for studying the data provided by conscious subjects, *heterophenomenology*. Furthermore, Baker notes that Dennett’s narrative-based concept of the “self is much richer than the idea of a first-person perspective.”<sup>128</sup> Her point is that a first-person perspective is necessary for Dennett’s narrative-self, but the narrative-self is not necessary for a first-person perspective. However, it is exactly on this point that I think Dennett’s work is most helpful. His recognition that the self is given through narratives that are not necessarily of that self’s own making underscores the contingency of who we are. Even the emergence of the robust first-person perspective might only be made possible through the narrative-selves that are spun for us while we are yet in a state of rudimentary first-person perspective. I did not choose my own name nor did I narrate my own personhood as an infant; rather, I was given a name and my life was narrated by others who treated me like a person before I ever developed the robust first-person perspective necessary for me to have an active, conscious share in that narrative.<sup>129</sup>

### **How Does the Story Begin?**

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<sup>128</sup> Baker, *Persons and Bodies*, 87.

<sup>129</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 148: “The necessary existence of the other for my own self is but a reminder that the self is not something we create, but is a gift. Thus we become who we are through the embodiment of the story in the communities in which we are born.”

When Gregory of Nyssa asked his saintly sister about the soul, what it is and whether it stands up against the attacks of the skeptics, Macrina began her answer by directing Gregory to the way in which all of Creation acts as a book of signs, a narrative that tells of its Creator and Sustainer.<sup>130</sup> Macrina's conviction was that knowledge of the things of creation must begin with the recognition that they are created and sustained by One that is uncreated and transcendent. The being of any creature is not its own but a gift from the One whose essence is existence, a gift received by participation in the gift.<sup>131</sup> To the extent that this metaphysical presupposition has been ignored or rejected in modern accounts of reality, much of the language of the Christian narrative – that is, Scripture and Tradition – has become problematic.

To be sure, there have always been accounts of creation that have approached reality as something to be known in itself, apart from the transcendent. But following the argument above, it was René Descartes who made the definitive move in this direction in the history of ideas when he sought a foundation for epistemology in a mathematical rationality. According to Etienne Gilson, Descartes' "systematic application of the mathematical method to reality could only have as its immediate result the substitution of a limited number of clear ideas, conceived as true reality, for the concrete complexity of things."<sup>132</sup> Catherine Pickstock reads the Cartesian epistemological project through his ontology, symbolized as a planned and mapped-out city. She characterizes this project as

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<sup>130</sup> *On the Soul and the Resurrection*.

<sup>131</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I, q 44.1

<sup>132</sup> Etienne Gilson, *Methodical Realism: A Handbook for Beginning Realists*, tr. Philip Trower (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 62.

*immanent spatialization*<sup>133</sup> – according to which, the arrival of contingent being in time as gift is replaced with the flattened-out map of self-subsistent being beneath the omniscient Cartesian gaze.<sup>134</sup> When the spatialized city is applied analogously to the human person, “there will follow absolute divisions between mind and body newly conceived as ‘areas,’ and the mind itself conceived as the spatial traverse of an inevitable order of intuited deductions.”<sup>135</sup> It is this Cartesian gaze and dualism that Dennett is keen to reject; however, from this perspective, the only counter to such dualism is to dismiss the “area” of the person that is resistant to empirical observation and might well be reducible to the physical “area.” But such options ignore the metaphysical claims of the older Christian tradition, explicated in the theology of Augustine, the Cappadocians, and Thomas Aquinas, among others. This narrative, the narrative of Christian Scripture and Tradition, is centered on Jesus Christ, who is the Transcendent entering the categories of Creation in the unique way of actually being indivisibly joined to an immanent, creaturely nature. Moreover, that narrative says that “in him all things . . . were created.”<sup>136</sup> The hypostatic union makes Macrina’s claim about the Creation intelligible – for the Trinity’s work of Creation and Incarnation are inextricable. Apart from the Second Person of the Trinity, there is no Jesus Christ, and apart from the gift of *being*

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<sup>133</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 69: “The interiorized ‘flattening-out’ of this new intellection thus offers an immanentized version of the angelic vision for which diverse perspectives are unified into a single omniscient gaze. But the Cartesian gaze is inward and reflexive, gazing only at its own projection of order and sign, as if in its own mirrored reflection.”

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>136</sup> Colossians 1:16 (NRSV).

that Creator and Sustainer provide *through* Jesus Christ, there is no Creation. And yet, apart from the contingent *being* of the Creation, there is no Jesus Christ. It is by the Incarnation, it is in Jesus Christ, that the *being* of the world is suspended, for “in him all things hold together.”<sup>137</sup>

So, a Christian anthropology must begin with this one in whom all things hold together, the one about whom it can most truthfully be said that he was fully human; it must begin with the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. That the Word not only took on flesh but also dwelt among us clarifies that this is not just a matter of matter, but of embodiment. And bodies, like the *persons* they constitute, are inextricably bound to language *in general* and narratives *in particular*, since the body is the site of the self.<sup>138</sup>

The elegant simplicity of Herbert McCabe’s description of this begs for extended quotation:

All animal life, then, is a matter of communication, of creating a significant world out of an environment. In the case of man this communication reaches the point of being linguistic, that is to say man is able to some extent to create the media through which he makes his word significant. These media have their roots in the sensuous life of man and their creation is the history of a community leading in to biographies, which are themselves the histories of minor communities.

It is because I have this sort of body, a human body living with a human life, that my communication can be linguistic. The human body is a source of

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<sup>137</sup> Colossians 1:17 (NRSV).

<sup>138</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2012), 306: “How wonderful it would be to discover where and when the robust self came to mind and began generating the biological revolution called culture. . . . It is certain that the self matured slowly and gradually but unevenly, and that the process was taking place in several parts of the world, not necessarily at the same time. . . . A mind capable of symbolic processing was obviously at work there. The exact relation between the emergence of language and the explosion of artistic expression and sophisticated tool making that distinguishes *Homo sapiens* is not known. But we do know that for tens of thousands of years humans had engaged in burials elaborate enough to require special treatment of the dead and the equivalent tombstones. It is difficult to imagine how such behaviors would have occurred in the absence of an explicit concern for life, a first stab at interpreting life and assigning it value, emotional of course, but intellectual as well. And it is inconceivable that concern or interpretation could arise in the absence of a robust self.”

communication; we must be careful not to think of it as an instrument used in communication like a pen or a telephone; such instruments can only be used because there is a body to use them. If the human body itself were an instrument we would have to postulate another body using it – and this, indeed, is what the dualistic theory really amounts to; the mind or soul is thought of, in practice, as a sort of invisible body living inside the visible one. Instead of this we should recognize that the human body is intrinsically communicative. Human flesh, the stuff we are made of, the intricate structure of the human organism, is quite different from wood or stone or even animal flesh, because it is self-creative. It does not simply produce other bodies which are its children in its own image, it produces *itself* at least to the extent of creating the media, the language and communication systems which are an extension of itself.<sup>139</sup>

This is to say, along with Thomas Aquinas, that being formed by a rational soul means that everything that the human body does – even those things that are not done with conscious deliberation or followed by linguistic-symbolic reflection – are done rationally, or linguistically. Along a similar line of thought, which he finds in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, James K. A. Smith concludes that “the body carries a kind of acquired, habituated knowledge or know-how that is irreducible and inarticulable, and yet fundamentally *orienting* for our being-in-the-world.”<sup>140</sup> And this habituated knowledge that is the formation of the body toward the world in a particular way comes through that human body’s participation in what Stanley Hauerwas calls a story-formed community.<sup>141</sup> Looking next to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Smith explains how “a social order or social body recruits me by conscripting my body through the most mundane means: through bodily postures, repeated words, ritualized cadences.”<sup>142</sup> And

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<sup>139</sup> McCabe, *Law, Love and Language*, 90-91.

<sup>140</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Cultural Liturgies Volume 2), (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 45.

<sup>141</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

<sup>142</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 95.

as McCabe has argued, this social body is a unique structure because it is a structure of linguistic signification; it is story-formed. Or, as Smith writes, “to acquire a *habitus* is to have been incorporated into a social body and its vision of a way of life.”<sup>143</sup>

It is the body that provides the self with its boundaries and situates the self in society. From the narratives encoded in a body’s genes to the narratives encoded in that same body’s memes, the physicality constitutive of a body is formed into the body of a particular person in a society of persons. McCabe points out that humans “have the sensations we have, broadly speaking, because of the structure of our nervous systems.”<sup>144</sup> But, he goes on to write:

We conceive the meanings we have not because of the physical structures of our words, or of our enunciation and imaginings of words, but because of the use we make of these signs in the human business of communication with each other which lies at the heart of the human kind of society.<sup>145</sup>

Hence, Jesus’ historic life also embodied the socially particular narratives of being a child of Israel, the son of Mary, the friend of tax collectors and sinners, the awaited messiah, and the criminal to be crucified. Jesus Christ was not only the eternal Word through whom creation was spoken into existence and in whom all things hold together, but he was also a particular *person* with the persistent dispositional property of his own first-person perspective, and with a narrative-self that provided the integrity of his conscious self-understanding within the larger narratives of his relationships, his family, and his culture. And he was also the recipient of genetic and memetic narratives that formed his

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>144</sup> Herbert McCabe, *Faith Within Reason*, ed. Brian Davies, OP (New York, NY: Continuum, 2007), 147.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 147-148.

living, human body capable of bearing his narrative self-consciousness and first-person perspective. Yet, as the unique fulcrum of history and human signification, Jesus Christ draws together the narrative of all Creation; hence, his story begins with the first moment of creation and points to the fulfillment of all time. But that is to get ahead of the story.

## 5

### He Gets to Narrate *Word, Scripture, and Tradition*

#### **The Word Made Flesh**

The narrative of Jesus Christ could not have been completely apprehended by a glance at the body of the babe lying in the manger because narrative – like *being* – must unfold over time, arriving as a seemingly inexhaustible gift. As McCabe points out, “to be is to have a lifetime, a development; but for us, and unlike for other animals, our lifetime is a life *story*.”<sup>146</sup> Hence, when we speak of Jesus Christ as Incarnation, we are certainly making metaphysical and theological claims that we should not try to obscure, but primarily we are talking about the unfolding gift of a particular life. “Thus incarnation is not a doctrine that places all significance on the birth of Jesus, nor is it a doctrine about Jesus’ person or nature, but it is a reminder that we cannot assess God’s claim of Jesus’ significance short of seeing how his whole life manifests God’s kingdom.”<sup>147</sup> Put more philosophically, McCabe writes, “Jesus, then, the communication of [God] the Father. Is mankind come to its meaning; it is because of him that mankind makes sense.”<sup>148</sup> He goes on to explain,

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<sup>146</sup> Herbert McCabe, *On Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies, OP, (New York, NY; Continuum, 2008), 52.

<sup>147</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 75.

<sup>148</sup> McCabe, *Law, Love and Language*, 127.

So the coming of Jesus would not be just the coming of an individual specimen of the excellent or virtuous man, a figure whom we might try to imitate, but the coming of a new humanity, a new kind of community amongst men. For this reason we can compare the coming of Jesus to the coming of a new language; and indeed, [the Gospel according to] John does this: Jesus is the word, the language of God which comes to be a language for man.<sup>149</sup>

Given these exalted claims about the significance of this incarnate life, one might expect that the seeming inexhaustibility of the narrative should be fully manifest in the life of Jesus Christ. But, of course, the gift of our personal narratives – the stories that are refracted by the *center of narrative gravity* that is the self and participated in through our first-person perspective – are exhausted when the bodies that carry them, that they formed, die or are killed. And this was no less true for Jesus than it is for each of us.

Indeed, this is what we see with Jesus' life as it unfolds towards his own passion and death on the cross in the narrative of the Gospel according to Mark. John Dominic Crossan notes that the "Gospel narratives were constructed from units of tradition whose divergent forms and contents, locations and interpretations underlined the artificiality of the narrative frames that now encompass them." But, he continues: "No such situation exists for the passion accounts."<sup>150</sup> In fact, the passion of Mark is so coherent in plot and marked by such narrative verisimilitude that it is strikingly different from the rest of the Gospel. Crossan concludes that, instead of this being an example of the disciples' memory heightened by the tragedy and importance of the event (*history remembered*), the passion narrative is better explained as *prophecy historicized*.<sup>151</sup> One can watch,

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>150</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 367.

<sup>151</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?: Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 1-38.

starting with the proleptic anointing of Jesus for burial by the unnamed woman in Bethany (Mark 14.3-9), as the narrative overtakes Jesus and constricts around his body. And especially as Jesus is led toward torture and death, the process of self-expansion through language “is reversed. The immediacy of pain, its monopoly of attention and its incommunicability, reduces the world of the sufferer down again to the limits of the body itself . . . . In torture this phenomenon takes an extreme form. The immediacy of the pain shrinks the world down to the contours of the body itself; the enormity of the agony is the sufferer’s only reality.”<sup>152</sup>

Then at the crucifixion, the Word is nailed to the flesh irrevocably; for the point of the crucifixion (from the Roman perspective) was the silencing of the narrative through the obliteration of the body. It was not simply the death of the body that was the goal of crucifixion; it was the complete eradication of the body. A corpse can still carry the ghost of its narrative, haunting its decaying boundaries as the dénouement of the dead – allowing for the possibility of traces of the narrative to continue upon the boundaries of other bodies whose own narratives had once included the deceased. Crossan’s reconstruction of the crucifixion of Christ ends with the conclusion: “*Nobody knew what happened to Jesus’ body.*”<sup>153</sup> But, of course, everyone knew what happened to the bodies of the crucified. “It was precisely that lack of burial that consummated the three supreme penalties of being burned alive, cast to the beasts in the amphitheater, or crucified. They all involved inhuman cruelty, public dishonor, and impossible burial. In the first two

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<sup>152</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 37.

<sup>153</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 394.

cases, that is obvious: there would be hardly anything left for burial. In the case of crucifixion, it presumes that the body was left on the cross until birds and beasts of prey had destroyed it.”<sup>154</sup> That is why, of the thousands crucified in and around Judea in and around the first century, only the stories of two have been uncovered – one of whom is known because his skeleton was found in 1968. “Lack of proper burial,” Crossan writes, “was not just ultimate insult, it was ultimate annihilation in the ancient Roman world.”<sup>155</sup>

The Gospel according to Mark ends just after the fallen powers and principalities of this world had destroyed the body and extinguished the narrative of Jesus of Nazareth, co-opting the cry of dereliction into their story of violence and domination. And I suspect the unease and even outrage that has so often been expressed over Crossan’s suggestion that (what was left of) the body of Jesus probably did not receive the burial portrayed in the Gospel of Mark (or the other gospels, who each added to the tradition to make it more palatable) is surely a sign of the intuition that the obliteration of the body is the complete erasure of the narrative self and the first-person perspective – in other words, the end of all bodily-narrative possibilities. But is this not the true scandal of the cross – an empty tomb?

### **The Word in Scripture and Tradition**

At the heart of history and the nexus of all narratives, the story that was ended on the cross of Calvary, though truly exhausted and erased, burst back in upon the deafness of the world that had silenced it. In the bodily resurrection of Christ, narrative itself was

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<sup>154</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 161.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

redeemed, and meaning restored. Had there been no resurrection, irrationality would have triumphed, the silenced story refusing to ultimately provide meaning and form to the substrate of matter.<sup>156</sup> Bodies would cease to have been bodies. Matter would have ceased to be any thing. By conquering the irrationality of death, Christ restored the rationality of the universe, making possible truthful narratives of it from the smallest subatomic particle to the fullness of the cosmos itself. But more than that, Christ's resurrection opened the way for the embodied narratives of each and every person to subsist in his own body. As Hauerwas puts it:

The resurrection is not a symbol or myth through which we can interpret our individual and collective dyings and risings. Rather the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate sign that our salvation comes only when we cease trying to interpret Jesus' story in the light of our history, and instead we interpret ourselves in the light of his. For this is no dead Lord we follow but the living God, who having dwelt among us as an individual, is now eternally present to us making possible our living as forgiven agents of God's new creation.<sup>157</sup>

This is to say that, by his resurrection, "Jesus Christ is himself the medium in which men will in the future communicate, he is the body in which we shall all be interrelated members, *'la cellule première du cosmos nouveau,'* he is the language in which we shall express ourselves to each other in accordance with the promise and summons of the

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<sup>156</sup> McCabe, *Law, Love and Language*, 132: "After the crucifixion, to interpret the defect of the world as sin, to interpret it, that is, as involving the rejection of the Father's self-giving, is the same as to say that given the sin of the world, the crucifixion was bound to happen. It is to say that this is the kind of world we have, a crucifying world, a world doomed to reject its own meaning."

<sup>157</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 90.

Father.”<sup>158</sup> And according to McCabe, “this language, this medium of expression, this body which belongs to the future is made really present for us in the church.”<sup>159</sup>

What makes the *Philosophia Christiana* the story wherein all other truthful stories must be narrated is that it is the story of the Church. And the Church is the embodied narrative of Crucified and Resurrected One – the Word made flesh. The Church is his embodied narrative in that it participates in that great cloud of witnesses who remember (*anamnesis*) and reflect the narrative of the Word, thus having their own narrative formed by the embodied narrative of the Word. This cloud of witnesses is Scripture, mediated through the scriptures. And that which is mediated through the scriptures is the narrative of the Church unfolding over time in liturgies and embodied practices of the people drawn into the narrative.<sup>160</sup>

From the beginning, the witness to the Word was embodied and enacted rather than simply reported and recorded. In part, the nascent Church was formed by its reflection on and participation in the Scriptural tradition of Israel fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Its further formation came in its enactment of that witness to Jesus Christ – doing that which he commanded in remembrance of him and proclaiming his life and death by imitation and repetition, habit and ritual, word and deed.<sup>161</sup> In this living out of the

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<sup>158</sup> McCabe, *Law, Love and Language*, 140-141.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>160</sup> Katherine Sonderegger, “On the Holy Name of God,” *Theology Today*, Vol 58, No. 3 (October 2001): 384-398.

<sup>161</sup> See, for example, John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 403-406; and *The Essential Jesus: Original Sayings and Earliest Images* (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1994), 22: “Many of Jesus’ early companions adopted a lifestyle like his own . . . . They had done that during his life and they continued to do so after his execution . . . . Once again, for emphasis: The continuity between Jesus and his first companions is less in memory than in mimesis, less in remembrance than in imitation.” See,

developing tradition, the witness came to be written down, the Word became text, though never divorced from that cloud of witnesses in whom it was embodied. For, in the words of Stanley Hauerwas, “the very character of the stories of God requires a people who are willing to have their understanding of the story constantly challenged by what others have discovered in their attempt to live faithful to that tradition.”<sup>162</sup> That is to say, the narrative continues to unfold over time, moving toward the inexhaustible *telos* of Truth embodied in the resurrected Christ, but not fully realized in the narratives of the individual lives that have been grafted into that narrative through the worship and disciplines of the Tradition. “The Christian claim that life is a pilgrimage is a way of indicating the necessary and never-ending growth of the self in learning to live into the story of Christ.”<sup>163</sup> But our sanctification, indeed the very realization of who we are, the knowledge of our souls, comes through the grace of faith lived out in the embodiment of the Church’s worship, in the learning of the new language of God in Christ, and in those disciplines and “those practices that ‘carry’ the true story of the whole world as articulated in the Scriptures, centered on Christ.”<sup>164</sup>

Tradition names the narrative embodied in the Church unfolding over time. The narrative itself is known in Scripture, which is the witness to the narrative that is the embodied Word, Jesus Christ. Those who find the rationality or meaning of their own

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also, Richard A. Horsely and Jonathan A. Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performace, and Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999); and Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

<sup>162</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 150.

<sup>163</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 95.

<sup>164</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 163.

narratives within his are those who seek to have the same mind that was in Christ.<sup>165</sup> And having the same mind that was in Christ is another way of saying that they engage in the type of life and practices by which his story comes to spin them.

### **The Narrative Nexus**

In the first chapter of this thesis, I attempted to argue that the modern mind has been captivated by a new story – the reductive physicalism of the *episteme* of science. At the end of the last chapter, I have tried to tell the new-old story of the Christian tradition in such a way as to recapture the mind and rekindle the heart for the truthful narrative that only the Church can tell. The Church provides the truthful narrative but it is not the exclusively true philosophy. Indeed, the truth revealed to the Church often requires the truthful witness of other philosophies to help uncover or interpret it. In the first chapter, I tried to take the *episteme* of science seriously in itself and listen to the narrative it had to tell about Christianity. In the second chapter, I did the briefest survey of several ways the ancient and medieval Church found a place in the narrative for the truth contained in the Philosophies that surrounded them. The third and fourth chapters looked at how three different modern, nondualistic anthropologies have responded to the narrative of reductive physicalism that dominates certain sections of philosophy and science today.

The three anthropologies responded to the reductive physicalism of the *episteme* of science in significantly different ways. Lynne Rudder Baker's proposal that persons are an ontological kind that emerge from their constitutive bodies is a clear rejection of

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<sup>165</sup> Philippians 2:5

that reductive physicalism. Daniel Dennett's conception of the self as the *center of narrative gravity* is formulated to exist comfortably within reductive physicalism (though, it is not at all clear to me that it does so). And Nancy Murphey's attempt to construct a nonreductive physicalist anthropology is meant to chart a *via media* in the debate. However, each account begins with ontological givenness. So, for example, Baker's view that persons emerge from their constitutive animality as new things in an ontologically plural reality does not require an account of the donation of *being* from a Creator. Hence, Baker's account of persons and Dennett's view of the self seem mutually exclusive. This need not be case, though, as long as the *being* of persons, their constitutive bodies, and their formative stories are understood as contingent and sustained by the donation of *being*. Therefore, what I have tried to do is resituate these anthropologies within the more determinative narrative of the life of Jesus Christ, thereby beginning with the donation of *being* – for *all things came into being through him*.

Finally, I reflected on how the narrative of that life was silenced. But this particular story could not have stayed silent, for this embodied narrative signifies the eternal Word, whose *being* truly is inexhaustible. The resurrection of Christ was not simply the raising of an individual and his narrative from death and silence and the reestablishment of Jesus' robust first-person perspective in a spiritual body; though, it was this. But more than that, Christ's resurrection was the renewal of all Creation. Therefore, it included both the resurrection of his body and the gathering of a cloud of witnesses into that body, whose membership therein proclaims the Gospel, the story of God in Christ. Moreover, it is through this particular embodied narrative, Jesus Christ, who was dead and has been raised to new life, that the contingent *being* of the whole

Creation – subatomic particles, persons, genes, memes, words, and stories – is suspended. Finally, if the eternal Word lends such weight to words as revealed in the Christian narrative, then it seems that we should not, after all, abandon the tradition’s word for the narratives that “spin us” and which we embody – namely, *the soul*.

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