Throughout the history of the church, particularly since the Enlightenment, one of the most frequent challenges for believers has been the pressure to square their biblical beliefs with the philosophical or scientific conclusions of the day. In recent decades, many believers have ceded to this pressure and accepted the present philosophical and scientific claims of monistic anthropology, largely altering the traditional view of biblical anthropology in the process. John Cooper, professor of philosophical theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, laments this decision. In his book, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Cooper’s primary purpose is to establish the biblical view of anthropology and its implications for life after death. Nevertheless, he secondarily defends the rationality of his conclusion of the biblical message against the common philosophical and scientific arguments lodged by believers and unbelievers alike.

**Summary**

Cooper presents his thesis in his introduction, suggesting that “there is a way of making the body-soul distinction which is faithful to Scripture, upholds the traditional teaching of the church about the afterlife, and is perfectly consistent with the ‘assured results’ of contemporary science and philosophy” (4). In developing this thesis, Cooper organizes his work in a logical progression. His initial chapter lays out the issue and its historical background by noting prominent scholars throughout history who have been on both sides of the monism-dualism debate. Cooper also highlights some of the scientific, theological, and historical challenges that he will address in the final chapters.

While Cooper does address these challenges, he posits that “Christian belief must
be normed by biblical teaching” (32). Building upon this presupposition, Cooper spends chapters two through seven providing a biblical-theological survey of anthropology in relation to the monism-dualism debate. He begins in the Old Testament, noting the clear holistic teaching of the Hebrews, yet arguing that the view of holism is functional rather than ontological, a position which does not entail monism (46-47). Moreover, he argues that the Hebrew position of existence in Sheol (55-59), the use of the term *rephaim* (59-62), and a hope for the resurrection (62-66) all have dualistic implications. Moving into the intertestamental period, Cooper builds upon the conclusions of the Old Testament view and suggests that the intertestamental writings are replete with examples of a belief in the intermediate state (81-85). Finally, Cooper addresses the New Testament in two parts: non-Pauline (chapter six) and Pauline (chapter seven). Cooper looks at specific passages that have been used frequently in the debate to determine the overall New Testament picture of anthropology. Cooper concludes from his overview that the New Testament’s overall witness is one of fellowship with Christ in an intermediate state, during which believers anticipate a future bodily resurrection (156). Cooper’s conclusion of the biblical witness, therefore, is one that he terms holistic-dualism (xxvii). While there is a functional, integrated unity in this life, nevertheless the soul can exist after bodily death and remain in an intermediate state until the time of the future resurrection.

In the final chapters, Cooper returns to the challenges he mentioned briefly in the introduction. Though he ultimately gives authority to Scripture, he asserts that “intellectual bad faith is not a necessary condition for Christians who participate in the contemporary academic enterprise” (231). In attempting to prove this point, Cooper defends the rationality of holistic-dualism in the areas of science and philosophy. He
argues that holistic-dualism is not incompatible with brain physiology, psychology, holism, or near-death experiences. Moreover, Cooper highlights philosophers from several different traditions (process, dualistic interactionism, Lublin Thomism, Neo-Calvinist) whose conclusions are all consistent with holistic-dualism.

**Critical Analysis**

In placing the strengths and weaknesses of Cooper’s book on a balance, the scale weighs heavily in favor of the strengths. The first and greatest strength of Cooper’s book is placing the authority where it belongs: with Scripture. In arriving at a biblical anthropology, Cooper recognizes this must be done on Scripture’s terms, not those of science and philosophy. Furthermore, his confidence in the authority of Scripture shows in his clear, insightful exposition of the relevant passages.

While the biblical conclusions he arrives at are valuable and perhaps sufficient for all believers, he has admirably accomplished the apologetic goal of making these conclusions rational in the realm of science and philosophy, and on the terms that they require no less. For example, in defending holistic-dualism as rational in the area of brain physiology, Cooper explores research which has suggested the possibility that the mind affects the brain, an implication that could weaken or destroy the stronghold monism (materialism) has had on the scientific endeavor (207). Likewise, in analyzing the

1Interestingly, research completed shortly after Cooper’s republication of this book further develops these conclusions. In studying patients with obsessive compulsive disorder, Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz, research professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, has found that “directed, willed mental activity can clearly and systematically alter brain function” (18). He concludes as a result that there “exists a ‘mental force’ that is not reducible to the material” (52). His research lends further support to Cooper’s argument that dualism is a viable scientific position. What is even more interesting is how Schwartz’s expression of his conclusions looks extremely similar to Cooper’s holistic-dualism. “Dualism, with its assertion that there are two irreconcilable kinds of stuff in the world, and materialism, with its insistence that there is only the material, should both be tossed on the proverbial trash heap of history. Dualism fails
philosophic views of John Cobb, Richard Swinburne, Pope John Paul II, and Herman Dooyeweerd in chapter ten, Cooper succeeds in showing how holistic-dualism can transcend philosophical categories, an accomplishment that speaks to its rational expression in philosophical academia.

While many more strengths could be presented, the above examples give a representative sample of the clear reasoning and thorough defense of holistic-dualism that exist throughout his work. Regarding those areas of weakness in his book, there are few, but there seems to be one omission that stands out as unfortunate. In his discussion of the Old Testament view of anthropology in chapter two, Cooper discusses five anthropological terms (38-43): nephesh, ruach, basar, qereb, and leb. The problem is not in Cooper’s discussion of these terms, which is quite helpful and fair. The weakness seems to be in the absence of any discussion of man being created in the image, tselem, of God. While the term tselem is not strictly an anthropological term, it does seem to have some role in the debate. The Bible is clear in its witness that God is spirit (John 4:24—c.f. John 1:17; 1 Tim. 1:17; etc.). Likewise, it seems that God has communicated to human beings a spiritual nature something like his own. How can it be that God communicates a spiritual nature like his own, immaterial nature, to a being who is strictly material as the monist argues? While a close analysis may not add much to Cooper’s conclusions, Cooper shows elsewhere in his book that he will address all issues involved,

2Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 188.

_____________________

Schwartz’s conclusion of a quantum theory of mind ultimately recognizes the psychophysical interactionism associated with holism, while still positing that a “real, active, causally efficacious mind operates in the material world” (374), a conclusion compatible with dualism. [Jeffrey M. Schwartz, and Sharon Begley, The Mind & The Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002).]
even if they do not advance his position. Thus, whether or not the issue of God creating man in his image, *tselem*, adds anything towards advancing his position, it does appear a significant enough issue that its omission ought to be considered a weakness.

**Conclusion**

In *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Cooper successfully defends his thesis that the biblical view of anthropology is best defined as holistic-dualism. Moreover, he succeeds in defending these biblical conclusions against the challenges of science and philosophy, an accomplishment that will aid believers not only in their own convictions but also in their apologetic task. Cooper’s clear, insightful exposition also makes the biblical message clear and accessible to a variety of readers, not only those involved in this academic discipline. With only minor weaknesses, Cooper’s book is a valuable addition to any believer seeking a better understanding of the biblical writers’ portrayal of humanity. Moreover, his strong defense of the position and emphasis on the authority of Scripture are good reasons for believers to stand firmly behind his conclusions without fear of being intellectually dishonest.

---

3 See, for example, his analysis of the use of spirit in 1 Peter 3:19-20, which he determines is inconclusive to defend the view of the intermediate state. “This is an extremely obscure passage and provides no firm foundation for inferences about the intermediate state” (112).

4 Cooper is not entirely unaware of this line of reasoning. He relates how Pope John Paul II sees man’s creation in the image of God as pointing to love as the “goal or meaning of all human capacities” (223). It is all the more surprising, therefore, that Cooper never addresses this issue in his own appraisal of the biblical message.
Bibliography
