

Correspondence

DAVID BOOTH

A soul alive in Christ

John Turl¹ argues that the soul is a separate part of a human being that survives death without a body and, it seems, without a society either. From the start of his paper,² he rejects one particular view of the soul as the whole person, a psychobiosocial unity that is entirely mortal but will be raised by God for the final judgment with its sociality, physicality and mentality, either self-separated from the Creator or reconciled in Christ then as in this life. Unaccountably, he conflates that position with the views that it opposes³ for reducing our social and mental life to complex functions of a purely physical body or indeed of a curiously bodiless brain.

Immortal part or mortal whole?

Belief in the immortality of the soul is deeply rooted in our culture. The longing wells up when a loved one has died, even in those who are not religious. In medieval times the idea of survival after death in purgatory was exploited to sell indulgences. The Greek philosopher Plato had elaborated pagan notions of the human soul into something more real than the mortal shadow of the body. His approach was widely adopted in the early church.

In contrast, Aristotle viewed the soul as simply the activities of a living being. This approach was regarded as much closer to the Bible than Plato's by Thomas Aquinas, the premier Christian theologian of the Middle Ages. It is consistent with an holistic view of the human person (whether mortal or not), as a soul in the inclusive sense of the word. Scientists and philosophers will catch up as the realisation widens that the conscious and unconscious mind develops itself throughout life from ongoing interactions between genetic expression and social acculturation.

1 Turl, J. 'Substance dualism or body-soul duality?', *Science & Christian Belief* (2010) 22 (1), 57-80.

2 Turl *op. cit.*, (1) p. 57 and his first footnote, plus several later passages and their footnotes.

3 Booth, D. 'Human nature: unitary or fragmented? – biblical language and scientific understanding', *Science & Christian Belief* (1998) 10 (2), 145-162. See too Booth, D.A. 'Neither lifeless nor mindless', *Science & Christian Belief* (2001) 13 (2), 143-155; 'Psychobiosocial muddle or model?', *Science & Christian Belief* (2005) 17 (2), 243-246; 'Biological and cultural inheritance of the Image of God and of Original Sin' (2007), www.c-a-n.org.uk; 'The 150-year-old science of active virtual machines' (2008), <http://epapers.bham.ac.uk>. Also Green, J.B. 'Scripture and the human person: further reflections', *Science and Christian Belief* (1999) 11 (1), 51-63, although essentialism and brain-mind physicalism may not have been warded off since with as much care as advocated in the comment at *Science & Christian Belief* (2000) 12 (1), 65-66.

Dividing 'scientific' from 'non-scientific' Christians?

John Turl refers to concerns that rejection of a separately immortal soul-part of a human being will spawn another great divide among Christians, like that over creation and science.⁴ An irony about these misgivings is that they seem to grow from a weak doctrine of God's creation, old and new. The present comment reflects anxiety that it is such misunderstandings of the light breaking forth from both God's books that will generate the division, as unbiblical views of creation have done.⁵

Even more serious is a conflict with the New Testament's teaching about salvation. The redeemed have eternal life in Christ now.⁶ As a new creation living within the old creation, the believer represents the Ruler of all and so is far too busy in the power of the Holy Spirit to worry about a mental state between death and the resurrection and judgment.⁷

Indeed, the hope of a resurrected soul far outshines longings for an immortal soul.⁸ When a saved sinner dies and goes to glory, it is to a resurrection into a fully restored humanity, indeed with a glorified social, bodily and mental life, consisting of both objective achievements and subjective experiences.⁹ Why speculate about mere survival that is somehow in time while not in space, and is totally bereft of community or body?

David Booth is Professor of Psychology at Birmingham University, UK.

4 Turl, *op cit.*, (1) p. 57.

5 Booth, D. 'Biblical creationism: faithfully reading both of God's two books', contributions section (2009), www.christianacademicnetwork.org.uk. A scholarly exposition of divine creation as a central theme throughout the Bible is given by Wilkinson, D. *The message of Creation*, Leicester: Apollos (2002).

6 e.g. Jn 3:16, 2 Cor. 5:17 and many similar passages. Creation and redemption are one great act of the eternal God of love. Failure to acknowledge this amounts to an incomplete Gospel, leading to neglect of the Holy Spirit and a life of scripturally unwarranted pietism. See footnote 7.

7 Booth, D. 'The penalty for which Christ was our substitute: spiritual death or human suffering as well?', C-A-N- Publications (2008), www.christianacademicnetwork.org.uk.

8 1 John 3:2 It should be noted that God is in eternity where/when there is no past to be remembered and so it makes no sense to say that God keeps Abraham alive in his memory awaiting resurrection (Turl *op. cit.*(1) p. 67) or indeed as a lonely disembodied soul.

9 Contrary to Turl *op. cit.*, (1), p. 86, if an immortal human wraith without a society or a body is a coherent concept, God could create any number of replicates of that soul-part, no differently from replicates of a resurrected psychobiosocial unity. If people divided like amoebae, we would have a different concept of personal identity.

JOHN TURL

A Response to David Booth

I thank David Booth for his response to my article, and welcome this opportunity to reply to his comments.

It is unfortunate that the first footnote of my article may convey a wrong impression since it escaped modification at an earlier revision of the main text, which originally commented on the varying degrees of assertiveness in essentially monistic positions. D.Booth's comment was at one end of the spectrum, whilst J.Green's was at the other. I don't think that my article as a whole conflates Booth's 'psychobiosocial unity' with physical reductionism, but it certainly draws attention (e.g. pp.60-63) to the problem of how the former may not be able to escape the conclusions of the latter in any thoroughgoing monistic programme. Far from rejecting *one* particular view of the *soul*, it was the purpose of my article to give reasonable grounds for rejecting a range of views, all essentially monistic, and all of which deny the existence of a soul as an ontologically distinct entity from the body.

It was intentional not to consider in detail in my article the arguments concerning the effects of Greek philosophy on Christian theology (p.58) for the very reason that I believed that its relevance is debatable and that other arguments are more cogent. It may be both important and enlightening to consider what has influenced a particular school of thought, but it is even more important to consider whether that influence leads to conclusions which are consistent with scripture, philosophy and science. Essentially the appeal to a Greek school, from either side, *as an argument in itself* is an example of Bulverism:¹ 'What is the answer to an argument turning on the belief that two and two make four? ...The answer is, "You say that because you are a mathematician"'²

My comment about 'scientific' and 'non-scientific' Christians did not proceed from any personal anxiety, but rather from an attempt to put the debate into a wider context, and to sympathise with the concerns of those who may regard the views of scientists with suspicion. It was intended only as a passing comment, and was not in any way the motivation for the article.

I am not sure that I understand why Booth sees a conflict between a dualist philosophy and the New Testament teaching about salvation, specifically the immediacy of the gift of eternal life. I would see a greater difficulty for a monistic philosophy, because the new creation is a spiritual operation. I assume that a monistic explanation would have to be in terms of divine inter-

1 Lewis, C.S. 'Bulverism, or, the foundation of twentieth century thought', 1941; the essay can be found in Lewis, C.S. *First and Second Things*, Collins (1985): 'Assume that your opponent is wrong, and then explain his error.'

2 Lewis, C.S. *The Pilgrim's Regress*, London: Dent (1933).

ference with either brain cells or mental states (or attitudes). The first would be open to the objection that drugs or surgery might do the job equally well, in contradiction to scripture (e.g. Jn 1:13, 3:6), and the second is beset with the causality problem (how can a mental state be the cause of physical changes in the brain if it is not itself caused by the brain?). In fact, Booth's description of the new creation 'living within the old creation' seems much more at home with dualism than monism, but in the case of many believers one of the effects of this indwelling is an earnest desire to contend for what are believed to be correct interpretations of Scripture. On the subject of the intermediate state of the soul, men such as Calvin,³ Luther⁴ and Bunyan⁵ have all considered the subject worthy of treatment.

I wholeheartedly concur that the hope of resurrection⁶ far exceeds the longing for immortality, but there are other issues at stake, such as the meanings of rationality, free will and identity. The last of these is closely tied to the continuity problem, which is felt to be sufficiently serious by Peter van Inwagen⁷ and Kevin Corcoran⁸ for them to propose their simulacrum and fission theories that preserve the material identity of each person from death to resurrection. On the other hand, John Polkinghorne feels that it is sufficient for God to use a 'pattern' (I do not agree), and it is his imagery of this being held in God's memory⁹ that I used in the proposed monist's response mentioned in Booth's footnote 8. It is extremely difficult to adopt a wholly God-centred view of God's dealings with humanity. We do not have any concept of an extra-temporal existence which allows a richer rather than an impoverished view of God's dealings with us within time. The Bible tends to permit a degree of anthropomorphism that is often denied by its expositors, particularly with regard to what God does or does not remember,¹⁰ so I feel that this metaphor is acceptable.

Why speculate? Why indeed, and the belief that I should do more was the motivation for the article. The need for a belief in 'mere survival' was not, and

3 Calvin, J. *Psychopannychia*, (1534), Stocker, T. (trans.) as 'An excellent treatise of the Immortality of the Soule', (1581): 'Some, while admitting it [The Human Soul] to have a real existence, imagine that it sleeps in a state of insensibility ... while others will sooner admit anything than its real existence, maintaining that it is merely a vital power ... and being unable to exist without body, perishes along with the body ... We, on the other hand, maintain both that it is a substance, and after the death of the body truly lives, being endued both with sense and understanding.'

4 Luther, M. *Commentary on Genesis*, (1535-1545): 'so the soul after death enters its chamber and peace, and sleeping does not feel its sleep'.

5 Bunyan, J. *Greatness of the Soul*, London (1682): 'The soul is immortal, it will have a sensible being for ever.'

6 What is a resurrected soul? The Christian's belief is in a resurrected & glorified *body* (1 Cor. 15:42-43).

7 Inwagen, P. van *The Possibility of Resurrection and Other Essays in Christian Apologetic*, Boulder: Westview Press (1998).

8 Corcoran, K. *Soul, body, and survival: essays on the metaphysics of human persons*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press (2001), pp.201-217.

9 Polkinghorne, J. *The Faith of a Physicist*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press (1994), chap.9 'Eschatology', p.163.

10 e.g. Isa. 43:25, thank God.

the idea that the surviving soul is bereft of community is alien to my thinking. When believers die, they are 'with Christ' (Lk. 23:43, Phil. 1:23, Rev. 6:9-11), whatever your view of the period between death & resurrection.

In one area I am very much in agreement with Booth, that resurrection can only make sense if it gives reality to 'a glorified social, bodily and mental life, consisting of both objective achievements and subjective experiences'. Then I find myself wondering: 'But what have they to do with the particles, energy and fields which make up my body and its environs, now or at any time in the past or future?' The problem is that from a monist point of view, the only possible answer is 'Everything'.

John Turl was formerly Head of Science at Woodford County High School. He is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society.

PETER CLARKE

Dualism that makes contact with science

I enjoyed reading John Turl's article¹ even though it goes against my own preference for dual-aspect monism. As John points out, monism in its various forms has had a virtual monopoly in *Science & Christian Belief* over the last decades, but substance dualism is not dead and John's spirited defence of it is timely. The monism-dualism debate addresses one of the most fundamental issues at the science-faith interface, and I am glad that John's article has revived the debate in *S & CB*.

The almost uniformly monist approach of previous *S & CB* authors contributing to the monist-dualist debate may reflect the fact that most of them are neuroscientists (including myself) or philosophers interested in neuroscience. Most neuroscientists, whatever our theological beliefs, are reluctant to invoke an immaterial Cartesian (or Ecclesian) soul that pushes around the electrons in the brain. But, among Christians, the dialogue between neuroscientists and dualistic theologians and philosophers can be confusing, because the latter are often vague about the implications of their arguments for the brain. Are they saying that an immaterial soul is interacting with the brain? In that case, do they predict that the present laws of physics do not apply? Usually they leave these questions unclear. Some dualistic philosophers emphasise the qualitative differences between the mental and the physical, or the fact that mental processes can lead to physical consequences, but fail to address the implications for the brain. Others focus on the *intermediate state*, the period

1 Turl, J. 'Substance dualism or body-soul duality?', *Science & Christian Belief* (2010) 22, 57-80.

between death and the resurrection² but fail to say clearly what they think this implies for the present life. For example, philosopher J.P. Moreland³ criticises ‘Christian complementarians’ such as Donald MacKay and Malcolm Jeeves, but fails to make clear whether his own version of Thomistic substance dualism implies anything different from the monism of MacKay and Jeeves at the level of neurons.

John Turl’s article is different. He makes contact with science. He makes it perfectly clear that his dualism involves an interaction between soul and matter. He leaves no doubt that his disagreement with the monism of most *S & CB* authors is at the level of facts, not just the way to formulate concepts. If we could perfectly study every neuron in a conscious human brain, John predicts that we would make observations incompatible with monism. He even speculates about the physics that might underlie the soul-matter interaction. Of course, it remains to be discovered whether John is right, and I have my doubts, but at least he expresses clearly the implications of his dualism.

After reading John’s article, I remain a dual-aspect monist, but a more cautious one for at least three reasons. 1. I admit that the present lack of evidence for a soul-matter interaction in the brain does not (yet?) rule out the possibility of its occurring. 2. I am challenged by John’s claim that the Holy Spirit’s activity in the world is incompatible with the closure of the physical domain. Most authors say nothing about this question, because we understand so little, but I admit that I cannot see how standard science could make sense of ‘charismatic’ phenomena such as the gift of prophecy. 3. Phenomenal consciousness does indeed seem to be beyond the explanatory power of objective science.

Prof. Peter Clarke is a neurobiologist working in the Department of Cell Biology and Morphology of the University of Lausanne

2 Jeeves, M. ‘The Boyle Lecture 2008: Psychologising and Neurologising about Religion: Facts, Fallacies and the Future’, *Science & Christian Belief* (2009) 21, 25-54; Cooper, J.W. *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting. Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (2000); Moreland, J.P. & Rae, S.B. *Body and Soul. Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics*. Downers Grove, Illinois. InterVarsity Press (2000).

3 Moreland, J.P. *op. cit.*, (2).

C.J. SCHORAH

Scientific explanations of religious experience?

Patrick Richmond, in his article on scientific explanations for religious experience,¹ enters the philosophical debate about the merit or warrant of having

1 Richmond, R. ‘Scientific explanations of religious experience and their implications for belief’, *Science and Christian Belief* (2010) 22 (1), 23-42.

faith in God. He covers a difficult and often perplexing subject succinctly. However, a greater focus on the topic in his title 'religious experience' could have been more rewarding because claims about encounters with God are open to direct scientific investigation. Indeed, it is these claims, rather than belief in general, that seem to be most challenged by the findings of cognitive science that Patrick Richmond reviews.

Because alleged encounters with God are commonplace² and may occur during emotional stress or when desired or even when sought through prayer, meditation or physical deprivations, it is claimed that they are nothing but expressions of the mind, self-induced, from within rather than God-given. But how successful are these challenges: specifically, how effective are they with regard to actual experiences of God as opposed to belief in general? Patrick Richmond doesn't say and I know of no detailed analysis of this.

In Christianity, a significant number of encounters with God are reported to occur under conditions that make the perception very difficult to explain away as a self-creation by known neurological, psychological or psychiatric mechanisms.³ Some encounters are unforeseen and occur in unemotional settings to both believers and sceptics. They can last for hours or even days, never to return. They have been reported for over 2000 years across cultures, generations and socio-economic groups: for example, the recent anecdotal accounts of Muslims having visions and dreams of Jesus, but not of Mohammad. In spite of the variety of presentations, it is said that the outcome of these God-encounters is often an increased belief in and a commitment to God, usually through the Christian faith.

The central issue is that the critical verification, or otherwise, of these characteristics would go a long way to answering the question as to whether these experiences were God-given or self-induced. For example, what proportion of the encounters defies explanation by cognitive science and encourages people to adopt beliefs counter to the one they held? Do these unexpected perceptions align predominantly with the Christian faith and a monotheistic God or is that just a Western interpretation?

It seems that we have a great resource at the science-faith interface which, to my knowledge, has not been studied with anything like the analytical rigour that it could be.

Dr Chris Schorah is a Former senior lecturer in Clinical Sciences, University of Leeds.

2 Argyle, M. 'The psychological perspective of religious experience', Occasional Paper No. 8, Ceredigion: Lampeter Religious Experience Research Centre (1997); Hardy, A. *The spiritual nature of man*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1979); Hay, D. *Religious experience today*, London: Mowbray (1990), p. 79.

3 Weibe, P.H. *Visions of Jesus*, New York: Oxford University Press (1997).

PATRICK RICHMOND

A Response to C.J. Schorah

I am grateful to C.J. Schorah for his letter and to the editor for inviting a brief response. I agree that there is a lot more scientific, philosophical and theological work to be done on religious experience. Some might find John Horgan's *Rational Mysticism* (Houghton Mifflin, 2003) an interesting introduction to the scientific study that has been taking place, and Evan Fales and William Alston's contributions to *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy Of Religion* edited by Michael Peterson and Raymond J. Van Arragon (Blackwell, 2004) helpful for the philosophical discussion.

Though taking a broad and general title, my article focused on newer explanations of religious experience popularised by the 'new atheists', Dennett and Dawkins, and especially on the nascent and promising field of Cognitive Science of Religion, which aims to explain the general prevalence of belief in spirits and a creator. In possible contrast to Dr Schorah's letter, one of the pioneers of this field, Justin Barrett, writes that relatively *few* people, believers or not, report having personal encounters with God. Further, such experiences have *not* been convincingly linked to the prevalence of religious belief in a community (*Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* Altamira 2004 p.121). Special 'religious experiences' do not occur in a conceptual vacuum but need to be processed to become relevant to life and action, and this is why the more general theories of Cognitive Science of Religion are more significant.

Dr Schorah's letter might give the impression that the main options are whether 'these experiences were God-given or self-induced' but, as I assume he recognises, these two are not the only available alternatives. Likewise, even if apparent encounters with God are not explained by *known* neurological, psychological or psychiatric mechanisms, they may yet be explained by presently unknown ones, given the present state of our knowledge. To avoid a fearful encounter with the god of the gaps I suggest it is worth exploring whether our religious belief can survive the possibility that there are scientific explanations of our various religious experiences.

The Rev'd Dr Patrick Richmond is Vicar of Christ Church, Eaton, Norwich.
