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978-0-521-85944-8 - Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?

Nancey Murphy

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Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?

Are humans composed of a body and a nonmaterial mind or soul, or are we purely physical beings? Opinion is sharply divided over this issue. In this clear and concise book, Nancey Murphy argues for a physicalist account, but one that does not diminish traditional views of humans as rational, moral, and capable of relating to God. This position is motivated not only by developments in science and philosophy, but also by biblical studies and Christian theology. The reader is invited to appreciate the ways in which organisms are more than the sum of their parts, and that higher human capacities such as morality, free will, and religious awareness emerge from our neurobiological complexity and develop through our relation to others, to our cultural inheritance, and, most importantly, to God. Murphy addresses the questions of human uniqueness, religious experience, and personal identity before and after bodily resurrection.

NANCEY MURPHY is Professor of Christian Philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary. She is an internationally known author and speaker in the field of religion and science. Professor Murphy's many publications include *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (1990) and *Religion and Science: God, Evolution and the Soul* (2002).

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To my husband, Shel Rosell
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Preface

It is a strange fact about our culture that we are operating with a variety of radically different views of the basic nature of human beings. Even stranger is the fact that so few people seem to notice the first fact. Are humans immortal souls temporarily housed in physical bodies, or *are* we our bodies? The purpose of this book is to pursue this question from the perspectives of three disciplines: Christian theology, science (especially the cognitive neurosciences), and philosophy.

My central thesis is, first, that we are our bodies – there is no additional metaphysical element such as a mind or soul or spirit. But, second, this “physicalist” position need not deny that we are intelligent, moral, and spiritual. We are, at our best, complex physical organisms, imbued with the legacy of thousands of years of culture, and, most importantly, blown by the Breath of God’s Spirit; we are *Spirited bodies*.

This book has grown almost organically, rather than in the linear manner of most books. It began as a single lecture, variations of which I have been privileged to present at numerous institutions as distant as New Zealand and South Africa. It divided in half and each half grew when I was invited to give the Harold Stoner Clark Lectures at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, California. The invitation to give a series of three lectures at General Theological Seminary in New York led to further division and growth, finally culminating in its four-part structure when I gave the Scottish Journal of Theology Lectures at the University of Aberdeen. I have profited immensely from discussion at all of these institutions.

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PREFACE

I have also enjoyed the hospitality of Professor Mitties DeChamplain at GTS, along with that of her husband Ron, recently deceased. Iain Torrance was responsible for inviting me to give the SJT Lectures; he and his wife Morag offered me lodging in the guest apartment of their centuries-old farmhouse, showed me castles, and introduced me to the adventures of Scottish dining. Thank you all so much!

Thanks also to students at Fuller Seminary who have read drafts of the book and have given me valuable suggestions for improvement. Also deep gratitude to my colleague at Fuller, Warren Brown. He and I have been working on the philosophical and scientific issues touched upon in this book for the past five years. Philosophers will not be satisfied with the arguments herein against neurobiological reductionism. Neither are we; we hope soon to publish an adequate treatment of the issue.

In its process of growth this book has incorporated pieces written for other purposes. Several pages are adapted from *In Search of the Soul*, edited by Joel B. Green and Stuart L. Palmer, copyright 2005 by Joel B. Green and Stuart L. Palmer, used with permission of InterVarsity Press, P. O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515, www.ivpress.com. Others are adapted from *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* edited by Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, copyright 1998, used with permission of Augsburg-Fortress Press, P. O. Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440.