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Moreland & Rae, BODY AND SOUL: HUMAN NATURE AND THE CRISIS IN ETHICS

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Establishment Purposes," *San Diego Law Review* 16 (1978-79)

7. See, for example, Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*; and Incorvaia, "Teaching Transcendental Meditation in Public Schools."

8. See, for example, Francis J. Beckwith, "Ignorance of Fetal Status as a Justification of Abortion: A Critical Analysis," in *The Silent Subject: Reflections on the Unborn in American Culture*, ed. Brad Stetson (Westport, CT: Praeger Books, 1996)

9. Special thanks to the Board of Regents of Trinity International University which graciously awarded me a sabbatical for the 2000-01 school year so that I may do work on religion, law, and the public square as part of my completion of the Master of Juridical Studies degree (M.J.S.) at the Washington University School of Law in St. Louis. Thanks also to the Discovery Institute and W. Howard Hoffman, M.D., for their financial support.

Body and Soul: Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics, by J.P. Moreland & Scott B. Rae. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000. Pp. 384. \$22.99.

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It takes a lot of spunk to swim against the intellectual tide; to do it well and convincingly takes serious intellectual work. The authors, an ethicist and a biblical scholar, demonstrate plenty of both in their spirited defense of Thomistic dualism. They are not alone in their anthropological assessment; their company includes noted contemporary Christian philosophers like Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, Charles Taliaferro, and William Hasker, who espouse divergent types of dualism. But their view will not be popular in the current cultural milieu.

The first chapter, which sets the stage for the rest of the discussion, establishes the approach the authors intend to take in addressing the issue of the human person. Rejecting the view that we should "'re-examine the claimed cognitive content of Christian theology in the light of the new knowledge derivable from the sciences'" (Peacock), the authors hold that "when it comes to addressing the nature of human persons, science is largely incompetent either to frame the correct questions or to provide answers" (40-1). Their method, following the Reformed theological model, is first to "formulate an adequate Christian worldview, beginning with biblical teaching and the contours of church history, then to employ philosophy with a special emphasis on scriptural teaching, ...guided by common sense beliefs ... and our own first-person awareness of ourselves and our inner states" (44). "Philosophy," they conclude, "is autonomous from and more authoritative than science even in some areas that are properly within the domain of science itself (e.g., the nature of time, space, causation, consciousness, the person)." Finally, "ethical knowledge [is] a source of information for adjusting the ontological model when appropriate and relevant" (46).

Thus, as expected, the opening chapter contains their fundamental theological and biblical arguments. The philosophical argument goes: "God is the paradigm case (i.e., clearest example) of a person, and arguably angels are as well.... God is an immaterial reality, most likely an immaterial sub-

stance... Angels are immaterial beings.... Anything is a person if and only if it bears a relevant similarity to the paradigm cases.... The relevant similarity... is grounded in something all persons have in common, namely, personhood. Personhood is constituted by a set of ultimate capacities of thought, [etc.].... None of these ultimate capacities is physical, and therefore neither is personhood itself.... Human persons qua persons are [therefore] immaterial substances and not material ones" (24-5). The argument from the biblical text is a much shortened and less nuanced version of the able defense given by John Cooper (*Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, 1989).

In the succeeding chapters the authors contrast their Thomistic substance dualism with the view that persons are property-things. In chapter two they develop an extensive metaphysical primer, complete with the use of modal logic (hardly expected in a book from InterVarsity Press). The discussion is careful, informative, and helpful, though some suggested implications might be problematic. For example, in the discussion of the Aristotelian view of substance, we are informed that a severed hand is not a human hand but "merely a heap of atoms and other parts" (71). But why is not a severed hand a substance? Would it be one if we were trying to reattach it? – "Please prepare the human hand in the cooler, not the simian one." The mere fact that something is unsustainable in its current condition seems irrelevant to establishing what are substances. Is a potted but not an uprooted plant a substance? Would the body, as a corpse, cease to be a *human* body (substance)?

The authors suggest several difficulties with the naturalist view. For one thing, naturalists cannot hold "to an emergent supervenient view of mental states and properties," in part because "there is neither need nor room for anything else" (101). Neither can naturalists account for "absolute personal identity at and through time." Thirdly, naturalists are incapable of accounting for a libertarian concept of free agency. In place of a property-thing view, the authors argue for substance dualism and the existence of a soul. Several arguments are advanced. First, "the various properties and states that constitute the conscious lives of human persons are immaterial mental properties and states. Moreover, these mental properties are kind-identifying properties; they tell us about the kind of thing that has them. Therefore, human persons are at least immaterial, mental kinds of things" (158). The authors stress the "intrinsic, subjective, inner, private, qualitative feel" of first-person reports and the role of intentionality to substantiate their view of mental properties. Second, they appeal to "Christian theology, common sense and various philosophical arguments ... to affirm that persons sustain a primitive, absolute unity of the self at a time and absolute, real sameness through various kinds of change," (170), something, it may be recalled, for which the view that persons are property-things cannot account. The third argument, whose dubiousness is conceivable and possible, is based on the contention that the conceivability and possibility of substance dualism provides good grounds for thinking that the view is true.

The authors make clear they are not contending for a Cartesian but a Thomist form of dualism, where the soul is the form or individuated essence of the body, diffused throughout and "fully present in every body part" (201). The soul makes it a human body, employing biochemical processes

“as it teleologically unfolds its capacities toward the formation of a mature human body that functions as it ought to function by nature” (202). In this the authors adopt the natural law theory, with its doctrine of essences and the four causes. This brings one to the old chestnuts of how the body and soul relate and how the soul is transmitted. As for the first, we are told that the soul “has direct, immediate conscious awareness through the body ... and [that] it can directly and immediately will to move the various parts of the body” (202). Directing the development of the body, the soul “takes parts within itself through nourishment, informs these parts with its own essence, and develops a spatial order or extended structure ...in order to realize other properties, functions or activities” (205). In effect, the physical parts and processes are tools of the soul. None of this, of course, has the slightest confirmation in science, but for the authors that is as it should be since it is a conclusion of theology and philosophy. As for the second, transmission of the soul likewise is not a scientific but a theological subject. Application of it, however, leads to interesting speculation, especially when the traducian view is developed by suggesting that “any cell...has these soulful potentialities” (304). In this regard, humans have empathy with starfish (their suggestion) or perhaps African violets, whose leaves and cells have soulful potentialities by virtue of their cloning capabilities (the authors don’t discuss plant souls, though there must be such, given their view that anything alive requires a soul to direct it and give it identity).

One peculiar argument arising out of their discussion is that organs themselves have a proper function. Accordingly, if an organ evolved from having one function to having another, “it would still be true to say that [that organ] *ought* to function” in the original way (208). Though widely espoused in the early 19th century, this view is scientific nonsense. What, for example, is the function of the flap on the ear? Its essence is — the authors might say it ought to — to collect sound. True enough, but in elephants this function is overshadowed by the more significant function of being a thermal radiator. Or again, there is evidence that feathers, one of whose functions is to handle air in flight, evolved from epidermal scales, whose function is to insulate by trapping dead air next to the skin. Ought feathers to function differently than they do in flighted birds?

Once one concludes that something cannot be alive without a soul and be a human person without a human soul, and that ensoulment occurs at conception, the particular applications of this doctrine to matters of medical ethics having to do with life and death are fairly apparent. Abortion, use of reproductive technologies, and experimental applications, all that intentionally bring about the death of the fetus or embryos, are immoral because they unjustifiably destroy human persons. Indeed, women are morally obligated to undergo in utero fetal surgery to correct defects in the unborn because “the pregnant woman has a higher obligation to seek the best interests of her unborn child because that unborn child is totally dependent on the mother for its existence and nurture, and this dependence heightens the obligation to care for the unborn child” (310).

One issue that bears mentioning relates to end of life moral decisions. The authors consider four types of cases: physician-assisted suicide (PAS), patients in a persistent vegetative state (PVS), people in an eyes-closed

comatose state, and anencephalic infants. They critique the functional view of persons as applied to PAS on grounds reminiscent of earlier discussions. But beyond refuting four arguments given in favor of PAS, they never clearly argue for the wrongness of PAS. Presumably PAS is immoral because it involves the unjustified taking of a human life. With respect to the other three cases, they argue that although the individual in each case is fully a human person, "recognizing the personhood of the ... patient does not obligate one to offer all necessary treatments to keep such a patient alive." Withholding treatment is justified because the treatments are futile and, even if not, "may still be refused" (337). Included in unnecessary medical treatments are ventilation, nutrition, and hydration.

Now why is PAS unjustified whereas withholding medical treatment from PSV patients is moral? That is, what is the morally significant difference between PAS and withholding treatment, so that in the one case we are justified and in the other unjustified in our actions? (We might employ "active euthanasia" and "passive euthanasia," though the authors never use these traditional terms.) Futility of treatment, insofar as it includes nutrition and hydration, does not constitute a morally significant difference, for the treatments successfully keep persons alive. Karen Ann Quinlin and Nancy Cruzan survived for almost a decade with such assistance. Their futility must relate to the disease; that is, administering these treatments does not restore health. But the same can be said for those to whom PAS is administered: continuing assistance to maintain their lives is likewise futile; as terminally ill they eventually will die of their disease or its complications. Likewise, refusal as a manifestation of autonomy seems irrelevant to the distinction, since in cases of both PAS and PSV treatment might be refused or active euthanasia encouraged. The authors maintain that "autonomy [may be] limited when there is evidence of harm that results from the exercise of such autonomy." The harm suggested by allowing requests for PAS consists of "incidences of nonvoluntary euthanasia" (320), a result that may occur from PAS (or even PVS) policy decisions but hardly from granting individual autonomous requests. There is reason to think that the authors may suggest that the morally significant difference is to be found in that PSV patients die of their disease whereas PAS patients do not. But why should what one dies of constitute a moral difference? The authors may want to appeal to allegedly differing motives, but it is not clear that the motives differ in the two types of cases. In both, the motive is not to extend the patient's misery and the dying process. Finally, they may want to appeal to the principle of double effect to differentiate the two cases, but their apparent rejection (341) of the oft-included criterion that the bad effect not be the means to the good effect removes this from consideration. In short, it is difficult to see how the soul doctrine helps us with the difficult issue of active (PAS) vs. passive euthanasia.

The authors have written a fine and useful philosophy book; it provides a strong, argumentative but readable philosophical defense of the immaterial soul and its ethical import in matters having to do with life and death. Its great shortcoming, from my perspective, is its almost total neglect of what science contributes to the discussion. Indeed, science is largely excluded on the ground that deciphering the nature of human persons is strictly a philosophical matter. For example, this provides the basis for the authors' reply to the

thoughtful monist position of Nancey Murphy (*Whatever Happened to the Soul*, 1998). Whereas Murphy considers her nonreductive physicalism as part of a scientific research program, the authors object that "this approach to the mind-body problem seems to be an expression of the low epistemic value usually attributed to theology by advocates of the complementarity approach" (168). For them, the weight of evidence clearly rests on theology and philosophy, and not science; "science provides little evidence at all for settling the issue" (170). Furthermore, where science is introduced in the book, it is basic and at times inaccurate. For example, biologists deservedly would be perplexed when informed that reproduction and growth "cannot be accounted for solely by the laws of chemistry and physics" (80). Or consider the authors' contention "that DNA needs a driver." Quoting a noted French geneticist Francois Jacob that "'able to function only within the cell, the genetic message can do nothing by itself,'" they conclude that "he is describing something like a substance in which the DNA is an important part that needs instructions from some other part of the organism," which "leaves the door open for consideration of ... the soul" (296-7). Not only does this discussion of a driver for DNA mistake cause for context, but it confuses the very elements the authors have been at pains to distinguish elsewhere, i.e., the scientific and the metaphysical, for here they posit a metaphysical entity to perform biological tasks such as gene expression and determining how "'the cell senses danger and instigates responses to it'" (quoting geneticist Barbara McClintock). As my geneticist colleague commented, McClintock would rise out of her grave on hearing such an interpretation of her contention that DNA needs a context in which to function. The welcome attempt to avoid genetic reductionism leads to serious misrepresentation of genetics and a type of philosophical soul-of-the-gaps. As a philosopher, I would be the last (well, almost) to denigrate the value of philosophy. But at the same time, philosophy must take account of the empirical. Science has greatly advanced our understanding not only of the human body with its brain, but of the human person expressed in its many features. We fail to integrate science with our theology and philosophy at significant peril.

Persons & Causes, by **Timothy O'Connor**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pp. xv, 125 plus References and Index. \$35.00 (hardcover)

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Timothy O'Connor is one of the leading contemporary advocates of a libertarian view of freedom (free will or agency theory) that incorporates the concept of agent causation, and *Persons & Causes* is a first-rate presentation of this kind of libertarianism. It contains a defense of a version of a modal argument for incompatibilism (Chapter 1) and an examination of the agent causationist views of Thomas Reid, Richard Taylor, and Roderick Chisholm (Chapter 3). The principal aim of *Persons & Causes*, however, is to explain why an adequate libertarianism must include agent causation. The main opponents of O'Connor are either (1) libertarians who affirm that agent cau-