

*Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* By Nancey Murphy. *Current Issues in Theology*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. x + 154 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), \$22.99 (paper).

Though the dualist account of human nature—that human beings are made up of two distinct substances, body and soul—lost much of its scientific credibility decades ago, it remains common in the minds of many people, both inside and outside the church. That is certainly understandable. The loss of a doctrine of the soul seems to call into question the possibility of our unique human capacities: free will, morality, spirituality, and the knowledge of post-resurrection life with God. The only alternative to the dualist account is often presented as purely reductive physicalism, the view that all human actions and abilities can be reduced solely to brain processes, pre-determined by genetics. That is a view clearly incompatible with Christian religious belief.

Murphy suggests a third option for contemporary Christians: non-reductive physicalism. Non-reductive physicalism, Murphy claims, provides a scientifically and theologically defensible justification for the maintenance of those higher-level characteristics. Murphy agrees with contemporary science that humans are physical beings; there is no separate soul or spirit that functions as an invisible substance alongside our body. Yet that fact does not deny the human properties of continuous self-identity, moral responsibility, and the like. Murphy makes the convincing case that though our bodies are our selves, we are also “blown by the Breath of God’s Spirit” (p. ix); we are social creatures by nature, and responsive to God. The capacity for these high-level characteristics, which are unique among animals, developed through the natural process of evolution. That these characteristics have a physical basis makes human nature more remarkable, however, not less so. The concept of an immortal, non-material soul, on the other hand, is one that is not required by Scripture, not recommended by contemporary theology or philosophy, and not allowed by current scientific understanding.

Murphy is fighting a battle on two fronts. The first is in the context of the church, convincing the faithful that physicalism is religiously acceptable, that we still maintain our identity, free will, and relationship with God—in short, that science doesn’t contradict belief. The second is against the reductionist argument that sees the actions of all organisms, including humans, as physically pre-determined. (“Did my neurons make me do it?” is the title of one chapter, as well as a forthcoming book by Murphy and Warren Brown.) To be sure, pure reductionism is not the unanimous opinion of the scientific community, even among its secular members, but it is the view that receives the most alarmist coverage in the popular press, generated by writers such as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett.

As with the first two books in this Cambridge series, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*<sup>9</sup> is slim and accessible. The book is based on lectures that Murphy has given, including the Paddock Lectures at The General Theological Seminary, and the lecture tone comes through, to the reader's benefit. Murphy does an excellent job of distilling technical issues into concepts more easily understood, while acknowledging that the underlying issues are complex. The book would be helpful for those who take science seriously and want the new brain research translated into terms meaningful for their lives. Murphy does that translation and does it well, in ways that are both comforting and challenging to the Christian reader. The brevity of the book has its drawbacks: Murphy dispatches the issue of divine action in ten pages or so, and the effect of physicalism on the doctrine of Christ's incarnation is mentioned only in passing. Her clear footnotes throughout, however, provide the interested reader with plenty of material for additional study. It is a solid introduction to a complicated and controversial subject.

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*The General Theological Seminary*  
New York, New York

*Being With God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion.* By Aristotle Papanikolaou. South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006. 238 pp. \$25.00 (paper).

In this book, Aristotle Papanikolaou compares the Trinitarian theologies of Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas, two of the foremost Orthodox minds of the twentieth century. He argues that while both men take the reality of divine-human communion as the starting point for their reflection about God, they wind up constructing dissimilar, even mutually incompatible, theologies. The "root cause" of their differences, he says, lies in their "distinct understandings of the limits of knowing God," or "diverse epistemologies" (p. 105). The book addresses most of the key concerns of both theologians while revolving around this particular issue.

According to Papanikolaou, Lossky's commitment to Dionysian apophaticism causes him to make a sharp break between our economic knowledge of God, that is, what we learn of God in the life of Jesus Christ, and our theological knowledge of God, our knowledge of the divine life in itself. The Incarnation reveals the "fact" of the Trinity, but not the "how" of God's life, which, because it is beyond being is also beyond knowing. Papanikolaou sug-