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An Unwelcome Guest: A Response to My Critics¹

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Abstract: The present article is a response to my critics of *The Soul of Theological Anthropology* from the 2018 EPS at AAR annual conference. The panel was comprised of one science-engaged theological materialist (Sarah Lane Ritchie), one historical philosopher (Jesse Couenhoven), one systematic theologian (Paul Allen), and one analytic theologian (J.T. Turner). Two of the four critics responded from the perspective of some version of Thomist hylomorphism (i.e., Turner and Allen). Another responded from a sympathetic position toward either constitutional materialism or some version of hylomorphism, (i.e., Couenhoven) and the final one responded from a broadly materialist standpoint (i.e., Ritchie). The concerns raised vary from dogmatic objections to Cartesianism, methodological, philosophical, and theological. My intent has been to address all of the concerns raised by my critics and give reasons why Cartesianism fares better than alternative anthropologies in a cost-benefit analysis. I begin by prefacing general methodological and dogmatic considerations. Finally, I spend a considerable amount of time on objections from the nature of the body's relation to the soul and eschatological considerations of the resurrection body. If there was one central concern, then it would be a concern of the role of the body to the soul both protologically and eschatologically. I conclude that when we weigh all the issues Cartesianism has several benefits over the competitors, and bodily concerns can be alleviated.

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We have all had that unwelcome guest who didn't quite fit in. On the surface, he or she has come off as awkward, bombastic, or just a little larger than life. We have also had those cases where, at times, the unwelcome guest positively surprises us. In many respects, Cartesianism is that unwelcome guest. Cartesianism is often derided in the social sciences, ignored in the physical sciences, and quickly dismissed in philosophy. Yet, while surprising for some, even the majority of theologians reject Cartesianism as a viable option worth taking seriously. However, that same unwelcome guest may surprise us. In recent years, Cartesianism, or some version of substance dualism, has made its way back into the philosophical and theological discussions. In many cases she is still unwelcome, but she can't be ignored. In *The Soul of Theological Anthropology: A Cartesian Exploration*, I expose the philosophically inclined theologian to some of the positive developments in the literature on Cartesianism. In particular, I show that many of the common, yet denigrating, caricatures of Cartesianism are unwarranted (particularly the claim that in a myriad of ways, Cartesianism necessarily denigrates the body), and, in fact, the philosophical and theological benefits of Cartesianism are numerous. In what follows, I will argue that what was once an unwelcome guest not only cannot be ignored, but she will likely surprise us.

In what follows, I will, first, preface some of the general methodological and theological concerns. Second, I lay out some of the reasons why I am not a Thomist. Third, I advance some philosophical and theological reasons why I am a Cartesian. Fourth, I advance a more substantive objection to both Thomism and materialist anthropologies. Fifth, I list several responses on key doctrinal issues raised primarily by J.T. Turner (on the resurrection) and Jesse Couenhoven (on the doctrine of original sin and corruption).

The predominate support on this panel is with some form of Aristotelian or Thomist hylomorphism, except for Sarah Lane Ritchie who supports some version of materialism or theological naturalism.²

² Sarah Lane Ritchie, "Comments on Joshua Farris's *The Soul of Theological Anthropology*," at the EPS/AAR 2018 conference in Denver, Colorado. Also see Ritchie's recent publication that was published after this symposia, *Divine Action and the Human Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Both Allen and Couenhoven³ (although Jesse notes his sympathies for Baker's constitution account)⁴ are, not surprisingly, strongly sympathetic to some variation of hylomorphism or Thomistic dualism. J.T. Turner has explicitly defended a version of Thomistic dualism in his recently published contribution to theological anthropology, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*. With this in mind, I will devote a significant amount of time to Thomism. Many of my reasons for not accepting Aristotelianism or Thomism (from here I will just collapse all the many variations into Thomism) are, undoubtedly, reasons, that would apply to materialism. Some of the reasons are found in the monograph, but they may be more implicit than explicit in what I wrote. Below, I will advance a philosophical argument that is not found in *The Soul of Theological Anthropology*, but it is consistent with many of the items therein. I only do this after answering the general concerns raised by all the participants.

Before I jump into some of the reasons I do not accept Thomism, let me offer two prefatory comments on method before entering some of the more direct philosophical and doctrinal concerns. Paul Allen began his response with a reflection on Athens and Jerusalem, i.e., theological method historically represented in two cultural milieus. Allen perceives my project as beholden more to Athens than to Jerusalem, or philosophy rather than theology. And, more specifically, my commitments are with Plato rather than Aristotle. As for the latter claim, it is true that I side more closely with the broad Platonic tradition than with the Aristotelian tradition, which I state explicitly early on.

With that sufficiently clear, I am not sure that this appropriation of Plato or Aristotle is synonymous with one's association with either Athens or Jerusalem, and maybe this is not what Allen intends. If this is Allen's claim, then I would like to learn more from Allen as to why Aristotle is or should function in one's theology more consciously. That said, it seems to me that in the Reformed (and, even, the Anglican) tradition both the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions have functioned theologically as authorities.

³ Paul Allen, "Comments on Joshua Farris's *The Soul of Theological Anthropology*," at the EPS/AAR 2018 conference in Denver, Colorado. Jesse Couenhoven, "Comments on Joshua Farris's *The Soul of Theological Anthropology*," at the EPS/AAR 2018 conference in Denver, Colorado.

⁴ Lynne Rudder Baker, *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

On a side note, I find it somewhat odd of Paul Allen to situate Augustine fixedly in the Aristotelian tradition more than the Platonic tradition, given his emphasis on immaterial ontology, the intellectual vision of God, and the epistemic role Augustine gives to self-awareness as having an important theological function in his overarching vision of Christian thought. I fear that placing Augustine in the Aristotelian tradition is a similar category mistake as Paul Hoffman's categorizing Descartes as one committed to an Aristotelian account of the soul and body as form is related to matter, i.e., where the human being is a substance rather than simply the soul as substance or the soul and body existing as distinct substances.⁵

Since Calvin (and I presumed Augustine in *The Soul of Theological Anthropology* [hereafter *The Soul* for brevity]), where I advanced some modest justification), Plato is seen as an authority with respect to much of what we find in later developments of Reformed anthropology and eschatology. This is, in part, due to Calvin's influence (and expounded quite a bit in Paul Helm's two academic treatments on John Calvin), but it also has to do with the emphasis on the strong distinction between the soul and the body in the intermediate state.⁶ Furthermore, there is a common emphasis on the role of the intellect in the vision of God after somatic death, but it is not always clear with some Reformers if the vision occurs in both the disembodied state and the resurrection state or simply the resurrection state.

All that to say, I think that, to some degree, Allen is correct to point out that in *The Soul* I do give more credence to independent philosophical arguments for the soul, especially in the first part. I am reticent to say that the present work is a piece of philosophy of religion, as Allen claims, precisely because my interests are in specific doctrines that fit into a larger systematic whole in addition to the fact that various theological authorities do function throughout my treatment on *The Soul*. But I will take Allen's implicit admonition to develop anthropology in a more constructive systematic *theological* manner in future works. This brings me to prefatory comment two.

Preface two, Allen and Couenhoven have prodded some reflection on the traditional appropriation of Descartes. They ask: Why do we not see more of Descartes? That is a fair question.

⁵ Paul Hoffman, *Essays on Descartes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), see especially Part I.

⁶ Paul Helm, *John's Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and *Calvin at the Centre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

To be clear, I was working more explicitly with ‘Cartesianism’ as a term of art for a long and developed tradition of reflection on the mind-body problem; that Descartes only happens to initiate with his emphasis on the clarity and priority of mental items (through the first-person perspective and qualitative experience) vs. physical things. In this way, as I stated up front, I am not and was not beholden to Descartes’ writings, positions, or specific articulations of the mind in relation to the body. Whatever Descartes held is not directly in the purview of my research interests. His views are of secondary importance, and there are certainly other important interpreters in the literature on Descartes. Instead, I was and still am committed to a family of substance dualist views often associated with Descartes, i.e., “the Cartesian tradition”. Let me say a bit about what I take this tradition to be and why it does not neatly fit into Thomism.

Why I cannot affirm Hylomorphism or a Thomist Dualism

Antony Flew noted that there are two broad traditions for which positions on the mind fit, namely: the Platonic tradition and the Aristotelian tradition.⁷ On the former, it is often construed as a dualistic variety and on the latter, it is often construed as a monistic variety. Now, what was once an absolute bifurcation between monism and dualism is not apparent in the recent literature. Some have even argued quite persuasively that Aristotle was a dualist of a sort because of the mind, but Aristotle is something of an emergentist where the mind is the most radical of all things that emerge from within the physical world.⁸ I would rather not get into the technicalities of Aristotelian anthropology and whether it is monist or dualist. Although, I am inclined to agree that he is a dualist of a sort, but one that insufficiently appreciates the distinction of mind and body—which Cartesian tradition gives careful exposure. Then, there’s Thomas. Let me state a fear about Thomist readers before I parse out what I see are clear distinctions between Thomas and Descartes.

⁷ Antony Flew, “The Cartesian Assumption,” *Immortality* ed. by Paul Edwards (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 220.

⁸ See Howard Robinson, “Aristotelian Dualism,” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 1 ed. By Julia Annas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

One of my fears when engaging with Thomists who are ready to dismiss anything that smells Platonic or Cartesian is that they give too much latitude Thomism. In fact, there is at times a tendency to think that all aspects of one's anthropology can be synthesized in a Thomist frame in a similar way that some attempt to fit all "aspects" or "theories" of the atonement under the name penal substitution. In other words, Thomism functions, at times, as a catch all that is broad enough to include all the various distinctions between body and soul, which leads to the temptation to subsume the benefits of substance dualism under Thomism. I am hesitant to make this move regarding Thomism.

It seems to me that there are, at least, three salient points that distinguish Cartesianism from Thomism—construed monistically or dualistically. First, Cartesianism allows for a clear distinction between mind and body. Second, the Cartesian distinction on the mind and the body allows for the conceivable possibility that *I* could persist disembodied. Third, on the point of the person being a compound or composite of mind and body, the Cartesian endorses the notion that the body is non-essential to that compound in order for the person to survive somatic death. There may be another important point that has theological implications based on the epistemology that follows from these anthropologies, but let me set these aside for now.

I say all that to draw attention to the numerous hylomorphic and Thomist options on the table. While I was trying to give some exposure to a greater diversity of Cartesian options in *The Soul*, the variations of hylomorphism and Thomism seem far daunting to address in one volume. Despite what some argue, the Cartesian variations offer us profitable ways of dispelling common associations with the denigration of the body, which is a common complaint to Cartesians and one that has come up in this panel. It is here, once again, that I attempted to disabuse the reader of these problematic associations, which I made some progress toward in *The Soul*. But, on to a more positive case for Cartesianism.

Why I am a Cartesian

With all its challenges, why do I find myself compelled to believe Cartesianism is actually true? There seem to be two immediate responses, which I disclose in *The Soul*.

First, it seems to me that the transparency of the mind as, *prima facie*, a pure immaterial substance distinct from the body is most at home with Cartesianism. While it might find a home in some version of Thomism, it is unlikely to find a home with materialism or hylomorphism.

This is one philosophical reason that favors Cartesianism of which one could offer several arguments, but there is also an important and related theological reason.

Second, the disembodied intermediate state, which is implicit, if not explicit, in the Scriptural data (e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; 2 Corinthians 12) and appropriated by the Holy Tradition entails something akin to Cartesianism. In fact, this understanding of the disembodied person is most at home with Cartesianism. In *The Soul*, chapter 8, I advance an argument from modal possibilities for Cartesianism, and substance dualism generally, as the best way to make sense of the disembodied intermediate state. In chapter 8, I worked with an essential Cartesian idea that persons are souls, or, alternatively, the idea that souls provide the essential core of persons. Bodies are contingent. On this understanding, some variety of Cartesianism is the most natural story that makes sense of the intermediate state. Undoubtedly, as Allen has pointed out, there may be successful ways that a Thomist can expect survival given one's modal intuitions as a Thomist. However, there is a further challenge for all variations of Thomism, and that has to do with the intimate experience of the personal presence of God during the interim state. This becomes an even greater challenge for Thomism. The literature addresses this topic from a variety of perspectives that could be summed up as two: Thomist extinctionism and Thomist survivalism. Extinctionism has it that the person does not survive, and Survivalists attempt to advance a case that persons survive. The jury is still out. As I note in chapter 8, Jeffrey Brower has articulated one version of Thomism that could potentially account for the disembodied vision of God because as he articulates it, the person does actually survive *via* the soul and not simply as a soul simpliciter, but it is not clear that such a version is superior to the version of Cartesianism I advanced, with the soul's fine grained dependence on the brain.⁹ There is, at least, one other reason I could not endorse Thomism.

Why I could not jump the gulf to become a Thomist or a Materialist

In a few recent publications, I have advanced a view of thisness (i.e., haecceity) that not only favors Cartesianism, but seems to require Cartesianism.

⁹ Jeffrey Brower, *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World: Change, Hylomorphism, and Material Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), see chapter 13.

In two recent articles, I advance an objection to emergent substance dualism where the soul is either the product of a highly complex neural structure or the proximate cause of the soul. Related to this, there are three lines of data that seem to exclude Thomism and Materialism, which push me toward Cartesianism.

First, as the scientific data strongly suggests, the physical world functions in a lawful mechanistic manner. Natural or physical events occur by way of lawful regularities.¹⁰ When this natural event occurs another natural event follows in a lawful manner. While this does not exclude materialism, itself, Thomism does seem incompatible with a mechanistic view of the physical world that functions according to lawful regularities.

Second, the soul is a primitive mental particular that carries a novel fact that is non-universalizable. This certainly rules out materialism because there is not a pure substantial mind/soul that is primitive, absolute, and fundamental to what it means to be a person. All of the garden variety options would simply be excluded as viable mental accounts. A hylomorphic view of matter is also inconsistent with the present view of a primitive particular view of the mind. For on a hylomorphic view of matter, the mind is a product of the form-matter arrangement that would give rise to the mind. As such, on this view the mind is comprised of a complex set of parts configured in a specified manner. Regardless of whether the defender of hylomorphism could endorse some version of simplicity in order to account for a simple view of personal identity does not get around the problem because the mind itself is a primitive, fundamental, absolute substance that is not dependent on the properties or the body etc. (at least not essentially).

Third, and finally when taking the first and second together, it is not possible that the mind could emerge from a suitably complex brain—at least, not from the brain alone. But this point has more to do with variations of emergentism (whether monistic or dualistic) and less to do with hylomorphism or Thomism.

¹⁰ Richard Swinburne touches on this view of thisness in his book. The objection from lawful regularities that would lead us to a contradiction or a perfect duplicate soul was an argument I began developing in 2012 (and mentioned to Swinburne) and developed in a few publications. See Richard Swinburne gives some exposure to this fact in his *Mind, Brain, and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Joshua R. Farris, “Souls, Emergent and Created: Why Mere Emergent Dualism is Insufficient” *Philosophia Christi* vol. 20, issue 1 (Summer 2018), pp. 83-93; “Emergentism, a Novelty without Particularity,” *Philosophy, Theology, and the Sciences*, vol. 7, issue 1 (2020), pp. 70-89.

But for these scientific, *or* philosophical, reasons, I cannot get behind materialism or hylomorphism. An updated and modified version of Cartesianism where the soul functionally depends on the brain (and the central nervous system) seems the best option to account for the following: intuitions I have about the self; the philosophical arguments from simplicity and modality; the theological entailment from the disembodied interim state of beatific vision; and the fact of a mechanistic physical and natural world. All of these reasons combine to give me strong reasons to prefer Cartesianism.

There are a couple of challenges of a doctrinal sort, given primarily by Jesse Couenhoven and J.T. Turner. I will now offer some responses or gestures in the direction of a response.

Anthropology and Doctrinal Development

Original Sin and Transmission

Jesse raises some concerns with *The Soul* on the basis of my underdeveloped views of original sin and the transmission problem. An expert himself on the subject of original sin, Jesse states the following:

That doctrine, of course, indicates that all humans born via natural generation are tainted by the primal sin (Farris calls this “original corruption”), and perhaps somehow share in the guilt of that sin, as well. Farris argues that his view can help us in making sense of these claims, but my sense is that the central work here is done by a person’s action theory, not one’s view of the soul. In addition, I worry that Farris does too little to escape Augustine’s old worry about creationist accounts sounding Manichean. Emergent creationism seems to locate the origin of our sinfulness in a tainted body, thereby both denigrating the body as specially associated with evil and giving it an astonishing power to corrupt the soul that presumably ought to rule over it. Second, it makes God seem either cruel or naïve, since God ought to know what will happen to poor the innocent souls falling into bodies.¹¹

¹¹ Jesse Couenhoven, “Comments on Joshua Farris’s *The Soul of Theological Anthropology*,” at the EPS/AAR 2018 conference in Denver, Colorado.

First, I must reiterate that what I was attempting to do was lay out several lines worth developing concerning original sin and how the various options work in light of one's view of constitution. That said, while I did lean in one direction, I did not specify which if any were actually true.

Second, I was working with the traditioned assumption from both catholic Christianity and Reformed Christianity that original sin (however, it might be construed) is transmitted from Adam to his progeny. Furthermore, within Reformed Christianity, there is a tendency to talk about original sin as a property that is transmitted from Adam to his progeny. Working with these assumptions, I attempted to offer some ways forward in light of substance dualism.

Third, while Jesse may be right that sin and corruption have more to do with action theory than human constitution, as the discussion suggests there is an important discussion about human constitution and where it is that original sin resides substantially, as seen in theological reflections historically. However, the problem, picking up on a recent set of literature, is worse when we think about certain anthropological views where the soul is somehow disconnected from the body.

Fourth, it seems that even if we assume a weak version original sin, namely original corruption, there must be some story that is supplied to make sense of the curse being passed on from generation to generation all the way back to Adam, unless we endorse some version of Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism.

Fifth, I offered one way forward that may be the more promising route if we take it that there is some immediate transmission of Adam's guilt. The solution I offered conjoined emergent-creationism with a view of Augustinian realism as it has been recently discussed in the literature (e.g., with Oliver Crisp and Michael Rea).¹² Augustinian realism is the view that all humans are somehow parts of Adam. On Oliver Crisp's proposal, we are part of one space-time worm that are all connected as one organic whole to Adam. On Michael Rea's proposal, instead of a space-time worm, we are connected to Adam in stage theory.¹³ All this to say, it seems that the view of emergent-creationism I was advancing here is made best sense of in light of some version of Divine occasionalism and constant creation (ala Jonathan Edwards), and as such, our

¹² Oliver Crisp, "Original Sin and Atonement," *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* ed. by Thomas Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 430-452.

¹³ See Michael Rea, "The Metaphysics of Original Sin," *Persons: Human and Divine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 319-357.

being parts or stages of Adam grounds the legitimacy of God's action of connecting us to Adam in his corruption and guilt.

While one might argue that the metaphysics undergirding this would dismantle the notion of "transmission" because there is no time for which sin would transmit, there would be a transmission of God's somehow linking all the parts up to Adam as the covenantal (and metaphysically substantial) head of the human race.

Intermediate States

Theologically, there is much that hinges on the disembodied intermediate state. If it is true, then materialism is without hope as a viable anthropology to make sense of the transition from somatic death to somatic resurrection. Thomist extinctionists too are lost. However, there are versions of Thomist survivalism that could work, which I give some exposure to in *The Soul*. But given the beatific vision, again, Cartesianism seems the most viable explanation of the data. This raises another charge that was advanced by all the respondents, for which I am grateful. The intermediate state does raise some challenges for a Cartesian view of the body, especially the resurrection body.

Bodily Resurrection

The fact that there is a resurrection, based on premises from revelation, does lend itself to the idea that the disembodied state is not the final eschatological state. However, Cartesianism, some think, would have you believe that the resurrection body is superfluous and unnecessary. This charge comes out most clearly in J.T. Turner's response.¹⁴ The charge falters for several reasons.

First, Cartesians could respond by claiming that it is simply revelation that leads us to believe that we will need a resurrection body, but why that is-is philosophically unclear. Yet, a Cartesian need not lead with that.

Second, Cartesians, guided by Holy Tradition, can argue that the bodily resurrection is necessary to bring about the beatific vision, at least Christ's resurrection. Christ's resurrection was necessary to causally bring about the eschaton for humans.

Third, Cartesians can argue that the intermediate state is the inauguration of the beatific vision, something we may have tasted in the present life, only completed in some sense in the bodily resurrection state.

¹⁴ J.T. Turner, "Comments on Joshua Farris's *The Soul of Theological Anthropology*," at the EPS/AAR 2018 conference in Denver, Colorado.

Fourth, Cartesians, following some Reformed theologians, could argue that the disembodied beatific vision state is the instrumental means by which individual resurrections occur.

Fifth, Cartesians who recognize the fine-grained dependence relation of the mind on brain should argue that the phenomenological fullness of the beatific vision does not occur until souls are re-attached to their new bodies in the resurrection.

Finally, it is worth noting that even though the body is a contingent part of human personhood, it does not follow that it is unimportant, insignificant, or superfluous to a fully functioning and flourishing life in the age to come. Instead, the *natural* expectation is that our souls are reembodyed because our souls are naturally embodied in their created states.

Conclusion

For all these reasons, it seems the body is significant to the soul. Cartesianism, of a refined and updated sort, is the best way to make sense of all the philosophical and theological data taken together along with some of the pertinent scientific data. Cartesianism deserves a place at the anthropological table.

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