

Recommending the Tripartite Biblical Anthropology: A Structure for Exegetical and Theological
Discussion

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1 Introduction: Spirit, Soul, and Body in Biblical Anthropology

The current majority view in evangelical Christendom regarding the makeup of man is dualism, that is, two components, the physical (body) and the immaterial (soul or spirit). This view, however, is currently finding challenge from an anthropological monist, or physicalist view, as well as the persistent tripartite view. From the physicalist side, leading theologians like Joel Green are using both biblical and especially scientific data to argue that not only does the bible speak of an essential unity of the human rather than three separate parts, but that modern brain science shows such a high degree of dependence of the soul’s faculties on the body, that it is arguable at best that these faculties support only a substance dualism, if not a non-reductive physicalism (J. B. Green, 2008). In addition, evangelical Conditionalists are arguing towards these same nuanced physicalist/substance-dualist positions based on their challenging of the assumption of the immortality of the soul, a philosophy which they argue is rooted in Platonic

dualism rather than scripture (Fudge, 2011, pp. 19–21). From the tripartite side, the modern rise of both Pentecostalism as a tripartite-favoring movement, as well as challenges brought on by the aforementioned challenges to innate immortality, which suggests that dualism cannot account for the persistence of the image of God in fallen man, are challenging the explanatory power of dualism (Yong & Anderson, 2014, p. 271). Bipartism (or in this context, dualism) is under fire from both sides, and perhaps with good reason. Interestingly, though dualism hangs on as the majority view, it was not always the clear orthodoxy of the church, and has had at least one other major historical but modern challenge from the tripartite view at the turn of the previous century in the United States.

2 A Short History of the Tripartite Model and Its Mainstream Rejection

Naturally, exegetical arguments are by common Protestant convention, the primary and most authoritative argument for Christian doctrine (*sola biblia*), and not tradition, reason, or experience (Outler, 1985; Stott, 2006, p. 12). However, since many current orthodox positions were established on the arguments of the early divines as well as the Reformers and the 19th century anti-scholastics, it is helpful to explore their views, and some of the circumstances surrounding their choices to determine if their exegesis and logic were sound, or if other historical pressures may have guided them to their conclusions.

2.1 Early Church Divines Who Supported Trichotomy

Before about 400 A.D., Church fathers Irenaeus, Tatian, Melito, Didymus of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Caesarea, all held to tripartite anthropologies, though they differed a bit on the definitions of the spirit and soul.¹

¹ As well summarized by Ellicott:

There are other trichotomist divines after about 400 A.D., but this cutoff date is notable because at this time Apollinaris of Caesarea and Origen strayed into heretical views from their trichotomy. Apollinaris ended up denying the humanity of Christ, while Origen ended up following his logic to Christian universalism (Heard, 1868, p. 6). These heresies become important in that they may have influenced Augustine, whose work almost single-handedly shaped Christian doctrine since, to reject trichotomy as part of the heresies of Apollinaris and Origen. In addition, Augustine also had to battle with semi-Pelagianism, which, in trying to explain the remaining *imago dei* and partially functioning conscience in fallen humankind, concluded that man's spirit was not affected by the fall. All of these may have influenced him to reject trichotomy, since it was directly connected (though perhaps incorrectly) as an antecedent to these heresies (Delitzsch, 1866, p. 106). An additional factor which may have swayed Augustine away from trichotomy is the limitations of the Latin used by the Western Church, which was not as facile as the Greek. Heard argues that these many factors may have illegitimately swayed Augustine away from a tripartite anthropology:

...the distinction of Psyche and Pneuma was caught the Greek, but lost or neglected by the Latin fathers. The Latin language wanted the precision of the Greek, and spiritus and anima never acquired the same precision of meaning as Pneuma and Psyche....With the error of Apollinaris, who denied to Christ a

In Irenaeus, the existence and union of body, soul, and spirit is defined as the characteristic and criterion of the perfect man. Justin Martyr speaks of the body as the tenement of soul, and the soul again as the tenement of the spirit. Clement of Alexandria, amidst much additious Platonism, is no less definite. Origen, in his commentary on St. John, makes the express statement, that the soul is different from the spirit; and in his commentary on Romans...he enlarges, not only on his threefold composition of man, but on the relations and interdependence of the component parts. His greatest pupil, Didymus of Alexandria, in his admirable treatise on the Holy Spirit, urges this very text on which we are dwelling as irrefragable proof of the tripartite nature of man (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Gregory of Nyssa, in his special work on man's creation, bases the same truth upon the same text; and last of all, Basil of Caesarea defines our imperishable part as the soul and spirit, and designates the spirit as that part which bears the truest image of God. (1858, p. 111)

human Pneuma, the reaction came, and the trichotomy fell into disfavour, and was neglected even in the East. In the West it cannot be said to have ever received the attention it deserved. Tertullian opposed it from the first, and Augustine thought it safest to neglect it. (Heard, 1868, p. 5) ²

Interestingly, it is not as though Augustine did not see potential in trichotomy; he theoretically admitted trichotomy, but considered it safer practically to ignore it (Ellicott, 1858, p. 112; Laidlaw, 1895, p. 67).

2.2 Reformers and Trichotomy

The reformers, save Luther, followed Augustine in the dualist perspective. Interestingly, Luther courts trichotomy in his commentary on the Magnificat:

Scripture divides man into three parts, as says St Paul (1 Thess. v. 23)... And every one of these three, together with the entire man, is also divided in another way into two portions, which are there called Spirit and Flesh. Which division is not natural, but attributive; i.e. nature has three portions spirit, soul, and body... (Delitzsch, 1866, pp. 460–462)

Interestingly, Luther mentions the flesh/spirit duality, which he says is not ontological, but attributional, meaning that it may be a quality attributed to any of the parts. This is further

² Heard goes on at length, opining in a brief Jeremiad: “If Augustine, the authority and the oracle – not only of his own age, but of the whole western Church down to our day, had adopted the trichotomy, instead of the prevailing dichotomy of body and soul...how much smoother would have been the course of theology....Pelagius asserted, and Augustine denied the reality of human goodness till, heated by controversy, the one bordered on denying the fall; while the other went so far as to call the virtues of the heathen “splendid vices,” and in his greatest work, “The City of God,” fell into a narrow and half-Manichean conception of the world as divided into two cities, owing allegiance to two distinct rulers, God and the Devil, and ending, of course, in an eternal separation at the last day. Had “Augustine only adopted from Greek the distinction of *Pneuma* and *Psyche*, and bend the still living Latin tongue to the exact use of *spiritus* and *anima*, as *geist* and *seele* as distinguished in the German, or as *esprit* and *âme* originally in the French, or as *spirit* and *soul* might be even still in English – what clouds of controversy which have troubled the Church for the last fourteen centuries might be rolled away!... his refutation of Pelagius would have been sufficiently convincing, without hurrying him to an exaggeration in the opposite extreme.” (Heard, 1868, pp. 6–7)

explained below in Section 3. However no significant push for trichotomy seemed to originate with the reformers, though it was discussed and perhaps even advocated by Luther, and no significant push for trichotomy seems to appear again until the doctrinal innovations, upheavals, and Christian response to higher criticism in the 19th century.

2.3 Anti-Scholastics and Trichotomy

In the 19th century, post-Civil War, frontier America, with its lack of Papal or State Church oversight and geographically expanding populace, created a spiritual freedom that led to all kinds of innovations, including communal experiments and utopian communities, as well as frontier evangelists like Wesley and Whitefield, and provided an atmosphere for continuing the reformers' reconsideration of traditions and doctrines in the Church. Not only did groups like the Anabaptists and Baptists seek to restore baptism for believers and eliminate priestly confession (still features of Lutheranism), others innovated, exploring doctrines that were sometimes heretical or heterodox. Among the latter were a significant number of supporters for Conditional Immortality (CI, or annihilationism), trichotomy, and soul sleep. These three were all actually linked (though not necessarily so) by their rejection of the Platonic immortality of the soul (Laidlaw, 1895, p. 68). While not all authors supported all three, many supported a combination, such as the author of the chief monograph supporting trichotomy during this era, J. B. Heard's *The Tripartite Nature of Man* (liberally quoted herein).³ Heard's chapter on *Final Rewards and Punishments* does not openly support CI, but neither does it outright condemn the traditional view. His arguments make it obvious that CI is the more logical position to him, but perhaps to avoid putting a second stumbling block in front of traditional readers, he is content to let the reader decide on this related issue. In fact, it is my contention (for future research) that the main

³ I believe Grudem refers to Heard's book when referencing "the most recent scholarly defense of trichotomy, which is from more than 100 years ago." (Grudem, 2016 Ch. 23 6:15)

reason that both CI and trichotomy were rejected as the majority view at the turn of the last century was due to, among other factors, their association with the arguably less biblical, if not heretical doctrine of soul sleep. It is quite probable that amidst the attacks of higher criticism, fundamental Christianity was not willing to consider such huge doctrinal shifts such as CI and trichotomy (though the former was very popular, see (Highfield & Travis, 2015, p. 52)), which ended up getting shunted into either heterodox cults like the Millerites and Seventh Day Adventists, or into otherwise orthodox movements such as the Adventist churches and the founding Asuza street and other Pentecostal movements, which carry the torch of trichotomy until today. Despite these outcomes, not only was there quite a bit of sound writing on this subject, and some well-known anti-scholastics like those of the Princeton movement were trichotomists, such as A.W. Pink were (A. W. Pink, 2011, p. 107; Arthur W. Pink, 2011 Ch. 2) ⁴

3 Trichotomy Defined

While there is no universally accepted model of trichotomy, modern trichotomists rely heavily on the model outlined by Watchman Nee in his perennial classic *The Spiritual Man* (Nee, 1968). Nee presented his trichotomy in a bullseye diagram, in part to show that the spirit is at the core of the person, the body is the outer man, and the soul is in between (Nee, 1965), recreated in. Within each

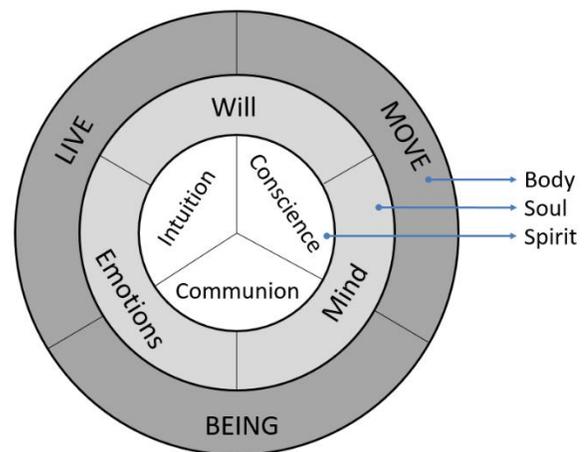


Figure 1: Trichotomy with Functions

⁴ "Is it not clear then that the ark divided into three stories more than hints at our threefold salvation in Christ? The salvation which we have in Christ is a threefold one, and that in a double sense. It is a salvation which embraces each part of our threefold constitution, making provision for the redemption of our spirit, and soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23); and further, our salvation is a three tense salvation—we have been saved from the penalty of sin, are being saved from the power of sin, we shall yet be saved from the presence of sin." (A. W. Pink, 2011, p. 107)

part, Nee outlined the associated functions (Nee did not include a triad for body, but I have proposed one from Acts 17:28), shown in Figure 1. A simple functional set of definitions might be as follows:

1. **Body:** The material, natural capabilities of humankind
2. **Soul:** The non-material, natural capabilities of man
3. **Spirit:** The non-material, spiritual or “super-natural” capabilities of man

Of particular note are what bipartists often call “the higher functions of the spirit,” which are attributed here to the spirit, not just the “higher soul.”

3.1 Biblical Functions of the Body

Identifying biblical purposes for our use of the body is an exercise in deduction, and there are no detailed explicit scriptures regarding this, except perhaps for Paul’s combination of ideas from Greek philosophers Epimenides and Aratus in Acts 17:28 (Wayne, 2016). It is improbable that Paul was creating a comprehensive list of intended functions for the body or our physical existence, though we would not put it past Paul as an educated theologian to construct such a framework even in common oratory. In context however, his purpose seems merely to merely acknowledge the truth of God’s omnipresence. Nevertheless, as a triadic outline of ambiguous terms, it can suit us well as a taxonomy of the major functions of the body sanctioned or obvious in scripture.

1. **Live:** Life includes eating, sleeping, and procreating, all activities God has recommended to humankind from his initial creation (Genesis 1:29, Genesis 2:2, Exodus 4:21, Genesis 1:28)
2. **Move:** We move in the material world with a material body. Bodily endorsed movement includes work, and all obedience to God (Genesis 1:28, Romans 12:1)

3. **Being:** The body serves as a container for our true being, that is our soul (“and the man became a living being” Genesis 2:7), as well as our spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

None of this is controversial, though all points are certainly arguable.

3.2 Biblical Functions of the Soul

Under the trichotomy model, the soul’s non-material, natural functions include:

1. **Will:** Nee defines this simply as “the organ of decision-making.” (1968, p. 75 Vol. 3) God indirectly addresses Adam’s will by commanding him “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:16-17a)
2. **Emotions:** Emotions are the emission of feelings. We are often commanded in scripture to direct our praise, as well as our griefs, towards God.
3. **Mind:** The mind, or intellect is “the organ of thinking and reasoning” (Nee, 1968, p. 191 Vol. 2). As the territory between the spirit and the body (flesh), it is the primary battleground where our sanctification is accomplished (Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23).

Notable here is that these soulful functions operate in both the regenerate and unregenerate, except that the latter have little or no influence from the spirit of God, and are largely informed by natural philosophy and logic, but also by worldly reasoning that knows nothing of the invisible kingdom which it cannot see (John 3:3, Romans 8:6-7, Ephesians 4:17, 1 Cor 2:14).

3.3 Biblical Functions of the Spirit

When pressed, most dualists will acknowledge that we may identify some higher-level spiritual functions in the soul, either because they more directly interact with the Spirit (though certainly the Spirit shapes or influences our mind, will, and emotions), or because they are associated with our moral reasoning (conscience). Another way to understand spiritual functions is through a presuppositional lens – what functions are awakened despite possible obstacles in

the mind, will, and emotions? Additionally, one may think of these as the true loci for the image of God in man. These functions, as per Nee, include (Nee, 1968, p. 67 Vol. 2):

1. **Conscience:** The organ for determining moral right from wrong. According to trichotomists, this organ is damaged or dormant due to sin, but perform in a rudimentary job to ensure our culpability before God (Romans 2:15).
2. **Intuition:** The organ for determining what is true. This important function allows us to recognize that God exists (Romans 1:19-20), as well as what is true even if our intellect cannot tell what is true (1 John 6:26-27), and confirms we are children of God (Romans 8:16).
3. **Communion:** The organ for perceiving, experiencing, and communicating with God.

Nee argues that these are the principle, but not the only functions of the spirit (Nee, 1965, p. 68 Vol. 2), but again, they serve as an excellent high-level taxonomy.⁵

4 Flesh and Spirit Superimposed on Trichotomy

There are many other related terms in scripture that require examination, some of which, such as “heart,” have been nicely addressed elsewhere (Terry, 1907, p. 47). However, an important related taxonomy for flesh and spirit

Flesh		Spirit
Body	Soul	Spirit

Figure 2: Spirit and Flesh

may be understood to enhance our discussion of the explanatory power of the trichotomy model. As Luther mentioned in Section 2.2 above, there is an attribute layer we can superimpose over our trichotomous model, as shown in Figure 2. The importance of this distinction, for both

⁵ For example, the function of discerning of spirits might be considered a sub-category of intuition, or even a combination of intuition and communion.

dualism and trichotomy, is to avoid the confusion that may come when discussing the body and spirit of a person v. the principals of the fallen nature (the “flesh”) and the redeemed nature (the “spirit”). This imperfect diagram, however, is much clearer when we see that the soul is the battleground between the two poles, and where transformation takes place in our lives (as indicated by the gradient in the soul). Our bodies certainly will not change until our resurrection, and according to trichotomy, our spirits are new (white) from regeneration.⁶

5 Primary Biblical Proof Texts and Their Rejoinders

As mentioned, entire books have been written on this subject, as well as some excellent reduses of the issue, such as that in Grudem’s Systematic Theology (Grudem, 1994, pp. 472–486). Using Grudem’s counterpoints to the well-summarized trichotomy arguments, I offer the following surrejoinders:

5.1 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Grudem argues that Paul is merely using a typical Hebrew device of repetition, “piling up synonyms for reference” (p. 478). He then cross-references Mark 12:30’s list of “heart, soul, mind and strength,” presenting the straw man that the trichotomist’s logic would here propose a four-part anthropology. However, this reductionist approach lacks any consideration of greater precision. The clear difference between these two passages is the wholistic approach of 1 Thes. 5:23, with its concern for the entire person. The Markan and parallel Matthew 23:27 passage not only exclude the body, they are being used with an entirely different emphasis, that of effort and

⁶ Out of the union of three natures in one person result two tendencies, the flesh and the spirit. “Soul,” the union point between “spirit” and “body,” was created free to choose to which of these two opposite poles it would be attracted. The equilibrium between flesh and spirit is the state in which man was created, and which he lost by the fall. Adam was created innocent and capable of becoming holy, endowed with inherent capacities for becoming spiritual, capable of becoming pneumatical through the native powers of the pneuma. (Laidlaw, 1895, p. 77)

completeness of will in pursuing God, rather than the complete composition of the person being preserved and sanctified by God.

5.2 Hebrews 4:12

With a weak (non-existent) exegesis of the passage, Grudem argues that “piercing to the division of soul and spirit, joint and marrow” is not about an actual separation or division, but depth, essentially arguing for “piercing to the *depth* of soul and spirit.” Not only does the Greek not favor this reading (merismos / separation), it misapprehends the real power of the Word being discussed, which is that the power of the spirit is much greater and different from the power of the soul, even though they are closely intertwined. How can you tell truth from error, real from fake? It is the spirit, not the faculties of the soul (emotions, will, intellect) which are truly powerful, and only discernment by the spirit and word can distinguish them. They show the difference between emotional ecstasies and the real presence of God, between man’s “vain philosophies” and God’s wisdom, between God’s callings and man’s self-willed drives. In fact, even greater lessons can be pulled from this analogy, such as the gradient between bone and marrow that makes them hard to distinguish, the hardness of the bone and softness of the marrow, the deeper, more difficult to reach recesses of the marrow compared to the outer bone, all of which can tell us something about the soul and spirit of man. However, all of this is lost by conflating the soul and spirit.

5.3 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:4

Grudem seems to think that the trichotomy argument demands that the unregenerate don’t have a spirit, and so then must be wrong, and therefore his position that the soulish “natural” (*psychikos*) person is merely being influenced by the flesh or spirit is the right interpretation. However, the trichotomist argues that the unregenerate have a dormant spirit, not none. Additionally, this passage is not even about unbelievers, but about carnal, immature Christians

who are “soulish,” i.e. they follow the fleshly impulses on the soul instead of those of the spirit. Admittedly, this is not a clear trichotomist passage, but a trichotomist interpretation is reasonable, if not more helpful as compared to the dualist one.

5.4 1 Corinthians 14:14

Grudem contends that “nothing in this verse suggest that Paul regards his spirit as different from his soul.” Yet “My spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful” certainly seems like Paul is discussing two separate organs, rather than a sub-part. But that seems strained. It would be like saying “my soul prays but my soul does not understand.” What part of the soul then is praying? The emotions? Who is this separate soul? Grudem’s point seems the less likely understanding of Paul’s differentiating the spirit and mind.

5.5 Synonymous Usage

Most dualists, as well as Luther above, recognize that there is some division of functions in the soul that involve “higher” and “lower” functions, such as the conscience v. the intellect. The question is whether or not these are actually separate organs. In light of the bible’s use of different words, rather than qualifiers on the soul, it seems likely that they are separate. Grudem argues that Occam’s razor would point us to a simpler conflation of these, but that is only valid if nothing is lost by this conflation and all relevant questions or distinctions are answered, but he does not make a good case for that. Rather, it seems like the hard work of separating spirit from soul has not been attempted apart from observing that they seem to share functions, or appear to be used interchangeably. However, at least one possible good explanation for the mixed dualisms of soul/body and spirit/body use is suggested by Ellicott:

When the nature of man is considered simply and by itself, apart from any higher principle, then the contrast is not body and spirit, but body and soul; as when our Lord says, ‘Fear not those who can kill the body, but are not able to kill the

soul.’ Ever the same contrast: when higher principle is balanced against higher principle, then flesh and spirit; when only perishable part against imperishable part, then body and soul. (1858, p. 109)

That is, when referring to the immaterial part of man, the Bible selects the part that is more relevant to the point being made, or more influenced in the context. So either soul or spirit is chosen to represent the immaterial part of man, but not to the exclusion of the other.

5.6 Indiscriminate Usage

Although Grudem does not use this descriptor, it is a corollary to the Synonymous Use argument. Somehow, both the New Testament authors, as well as the Author behind them, could not figure out the meanings of the words clearly, and so used them interchangeably. However, this notion, though perhaps a straw man of my assumptions, is clearly refuted by Laidlaw:

It is easy to prove, from the Old Testament Apocrypha, and from the writings of Philo and Josephus, that, by their time, a definite use of the terms “soul” and “spirit” had passed into psychological language, and even into current popular speech. In the New Testament usage of these terms, therefore, we must recognize a real meaning for which the old parallelism of Hebrew poetry will not alone account. There is evidence enough to show that while maintaining with strong consistency the Unity of the human being, Scripture confirms the usual dual conception that his two natures are flesh and spirit, or soul and body, yet makes use quite consistently of a trichotomy depending on a distinction between soul and spirit, which distinction...is charged with a...doctrinal significance. Anyone who does not force on Scripture a dogmatic system, must acknowledge that it speaks dichotomously of the parts viewed in themselves, trichotomously of the living reality, but all through so as to guard the fact that human nature is built

upon a plan of unity. In commenting on 1 Thess. 5:23, Lunemann says: “The totality of man is here divided into three parts. We are not to assume that this trichotomy has a purely rhetorical signification, since elsewhere, Paul also definitely distinguishes pneuma and psyche.” (Laidlaw, 1895, p. 86)

This inability to discern the different uses, and the apparent indiscriminate or synonymous use seems a great copout for the usually word-focused evangelical scholar. It is a bit of a mystery why dualists do not work harder at seeking the meaning under the specific word usage here as they do in almost all other exegesis.

5.7 Different from Animals

Here the conflation of soul/spirit certainly lacks explanatory power, and denies the fact that animals have a soul, or emotional and intellectual life. Grudem argues that the lower functions of the soul such as the mind and emotions can interact or emote towards God, so they must be spiritual, and not merely animal in nature. But this is not an argument from difference, but of degrees. In Genesis, when God creates man, he does it different from the animals, making him from earth, and then breathing the breath (spirit) of life into him, making him a “living soul.” This *nephesh* is the same soul, or life principle, that the animals are said to have. Yet somehow Adam’s is different. Rather than make an argument from degrees of intelligence or emotion, it seems much simpler to postulate a separate set of functions (Occam might here say that it is essential to propose the more complex trichotomy to avoid the argument from degrees). By placing the human distinctive in the soul and its lower powers, we may also be risking having to move our markers as science advances in knowledge of animal capabilities as well. ⁷

⁷ [We] cannot say in what the mental faculties of a child differ from those of a young chimpanzee. “The range of the passions of animals is as extensive as that of the human mind, and I am not at a loss to perceive a difference of kind

5.8 Regeneration

Here Grudem again presents a bit of a straw man, suggesting that the spirit of man is not dead before regeneration, but merely alive and rebellious against God. However, the trichotomist argues that the spirit is disabled, dormant, but still has a rudimentary conscience that allows him to be culpable of sin and unbelief. By Grudem's logic, such phrases as "dead in our sins" and the proleptic, if not actual death of Adam would require a dead soul, which seems as useless as Grudem's complaint about a dead spirit. In point of fact, the trichotomy view gives us a much clearer understanding, not only for the fall of man, but for his redemption and sanctification, while dualism leaves it obscure, content to rely on the spiritual disciplines, but largely unaware of how they are working.

5.9 Origins in Greek Philosophy

This commonly used genetic fallacy could be employed equally against dualism, if not more so when we read of the influence of Plato on the Church fathers, as well as Cartesian dualism, and the Platonic view of the immortality of the soul, the doctrine that trichotomists claim the scriptures deny. This is a petard that dualism cannot bring up without hoisting itself. The better arguments will be exegetical, not genetic in origin.

6 The Vanishing Soul: The Multiple Uses of ψυχή (Psyche)

New Testament scholar Joel Green has studied and published on body/soul dualism, and is a functional monist. In a recent lecture, he outlined that the New Testament word "psyche," traditionally translated "soul" in the New Testament, has been decreasingly used due to

between them, however much they may differ in degree in the manner they are expressed. The gradations of the moral faculties among the higher animals and man are, moreover, so imperceptible, that to deny to the first a certain sense of responsibility and consciousness would certainly be an exaggeration of the difference between animals and man." (Heard, 1868, p. 150)

improved understanding of the many uses of this word in varied biblical contexts. He relates the following counts of the word soul in English translations (J. Green, 2013):

Translation	Year Published	Count of “Soul”
KJV	1611	39
ASV	1901	34
RSV	1952	27
NRSV	1989	22
TNIV	2001	20
NAB	2011	15
CEB	2011	3

Figure 3: Translation of Psyche over Time in English Bible Translations

This data is important in that it acknowledges the multiple uses of *psyche* in the New Testament. Traditionally dualists admit this, but fail to recognize that the very contextual rules they use to differentiate these meanings can reveal, not only the differences between Biblical uses of *psyche*, but of *psyche* and *pneuma*, or even varied uses of *pneuma*. Not just functional differences, but differences in emphasis. In fact, I propose that when spirit and soul are used *together*, we should see them as separate entities, but when *apart* from one another, we may use the following possible interpretations of soul:

1. **Life – the whole person:** When the whole person is being spoken of, that is, their being, *psyche* (or the Old Testament *nepeš*) means their whole person (E.g. “eight souls were saved by water” in the ark. 1 Peter 3:20)
2. **Immaterial Part of Humankind:** In this usage, the words soul or spirit are used without the other, though often used with synonyms (especially “soul,” “heart” and “mind”) or paired with the body, either soul/body, or spirit/body, and as such, represents both soul and spirit, the immaterial part of the person. As discussed in Section 5.5 above, choosing one over the other as the primary descriptor may not mean they are synonymous, but of priority within the context. E.g. “rather be afraid of him who can destroy soul and body in Gehenna” (Matthew 10:28), which may emphasize the suffering of the soul, especially

the emotions, in destruction. Or cf. Matthew 26:41, “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” does not mean we do not have a soul or immaterial part, it is emphasizing the origins of the desires in play.

3. **Unique Usage:** When both soul and spirit are used together, I propose to the dualist that the differences matter, and in the case of 1 Thessalonians 5:23, clearly represent integrated but separate parts.

This approach is almost admitted by dualist Systematic Theologian M. S. Terry, who in taking a conciliatory approach, admits a real difference in the terms, though he still finds no pattern in their “indiscriminate” use:

The words for soul and spirit are employed too indiscriminately in other connections to accord with a consistent doctrine of trichotomy. In many passages the word souls is used to denote the entire person (Gen 46:27, Joshua 10:20, Jeremiah 43:6, Ezekiel 18:20). Flesh or “all flesh” is often employed in the same sense (Genesis 6:12, Psalm 65:3, Isaiah 40:5-6)....[Yet] spirit and soul are not synonymous. Spirit has the higher connotation...And while it may be shown...that there is no clear doctrine of a threefold nature in man to be found in Scriptures, it does not follow that he is therefore not possessed of such a nature. (Terry, 1907, pp. 52–53)

7 Doctrinal Impact of Tripartisism: Explanatory Power v. Dualist Confusion

In his seminal book, Heard outlines in the subtitle the doctrines that are either clarified or impacted (positively we assume) by trichotomy. Those are “original sin, the new birth, the disembodied state, and the spiritual body.” These impacts are summarized below, and I have added sanctification as an additional doctrine that is clarified by trichotomy.

7.1 Original Sin

This doctrine has at least two controversies associated with it that trichotomy claims to clarify or enhance: the fall of mankind and the delayed death of Adam and Eve, and the manner in which sin is passed to their children.

In the infamous text of God’s warning to Adam and Eve contains the phrase “on the day you eat of it, you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17). The problem is, on the day that they ate, they continued to live. So what happened? Some authors examine the original Hebrew and make hay of the fact that it actually says something like “in dying you will die,” perhaps indicating a proleptic application, or perhaps a process. Others conjecture that somehow Adam died “spiritually,” which began a process that eventually led to physical death. These theories both align well with either dualism or trichotomy (but perhaps not with monism), though dualists are forced to rely on referring to the spirit as part of this discussion.⁸ Adam died in spirit, which then rolled outwards through his soul, culminating in his bodily death (Figure 4).

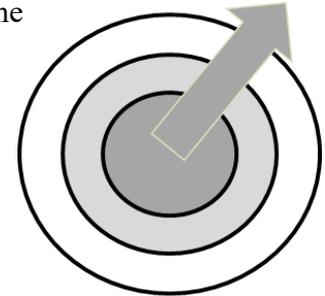


Figure 4: Progress of Sin from Spirit Outwards

The second controversy associated with the fall is that of how sin is passed from parent to child, and how God creates the soul/spirit of children, commonly known as the Creation/Traducian question. Augustine set the orthodox position for centuries as a creationist, believing that God created the soul of the unborn child and infused it after conception. But that meant that the only vehicle for passing sin on to children from their parents was the body, which seemed awkward at best. Under Traducianism, it is hard to assign sin as passed down through the soul, since none of these faculties are yet developed, and it would be hard to argue that the mind,

⁸ “The first stage in the fall was the disintegration of the spirit into body and mind; and the second was the enslavement of the mind and body.” (Chandler, quoted in Strong, 1972, pp. 591–592)

emotions, and will of the unregenerate are crippled in their abilities, though their worldview may be. While trichotomy does not entirely clear up the dilemmas of this debate, it gives a clear locus to which original sin, or brokenness, is pinned, and as we will see, connects nicely to trichotomy's explanation not only of the fall, but of the new birth.

7.2 Regeneration (“the new birth”)

As with the fall, the locus of regeneration seems obscure under dualism, since we know that many functions of the soul, chiefly the mind, will, and emotions, do not experience a complete or full transformation. So where does this singular regeneration event take place? It makes sense that, in reverse of the spiritual death of Adam, it also starts with the spirit, working its way outward through the unconverted soul, culminating in our resurrection bodies.

Additionally, the self-attesting witness of the Holy Spirit is described as a confirmation process between our *spirits* and God's (Romans 8:16), not our soul and God.

7.3 Sanctification

The gradual transformation of the mind, will, and emotions is perfect picture of sanctification, since these are not entirely transformed upon regeneration. Trichotomy allows us to locate a part of us that is entirely transformed, though still affected by the lack of transformation in the soul.⁹

7.4 The Intermediate State

Here is where trichotomy gets interesting. Because it denies the innate immortality of the soul, it may be thought to support soul sleep. However, since it posits a locus for the personality that is not dependent on the body as the soul is, it supports a conscious disembodied intermediate

⁹ The gradual character of sanctification and the conflict implied in it thus explains itself. It is the working out of that which was begun at conversion, The seminal principle, then quickened, grows and asserts its presence by asserting its mastery over the lower part of our nature, until the true harmony of man's constitution, spirit, soul, and body, overturned the fall, is completely restored. (Laidlaw, 1895, p. 80)

period, which is consistent with the majority orthodox position. Dualism, with its soul contingent on the body, is less congruent with a conscious intermediate state. Admittedly, though, if the soul does not exist in the intermediate period, does that also mean that we have no mind, emotions, or will? This would argue for dualism, though both models must explain how the soul can exist without the body.

7.5 The Resurrection Body

Admittedly, we are told little about the “spiritual body” we are to receive at resurrection, except that it will exceed our current bodies as a flower exceeds a seed (1 Corinthians 15:36-38). However, one dilemma that trichotomy may throw light on is the nature of this body, in that it reflects the spiritual principle, not the fleshly, that it is not even like the soulish part of man, but the divine.

8 Summary

The trichotomy view of anthropology sets out to make sense, not only of scripture, but of the processes and experiences of the spiritual life. In some areas, such as in the explanation of the fall, regeneration, and sanctification, it seems to provide helpful illustrations of just how and where in the human these events take place. It also applies logic to the mystery of the supposed synonymous or indiscriminate use of psyche and pneuma in the New Testament, allowing our exegesis to be as useful and focused on the words used as in other areas of Biblical interpretation. It seems to me to make less contributions in the understanding of intermediate state and the resurrection, but it does not cloud the issues either. Neither does it inexorably lead to heresies like those of Origen, Apollinaris, or Pelagius, nor the doctrine of soul sleep, which may have been the one associated doctrine that kept it from becoming the majority view in the 19th century, and this historical idea is worth exploring. Another idea not explored here is how the tripartite model of man, with the Spirit living in man, was hidden in the Old Testament,

similar to the Trinity. In fact, perhaps Ezekiel's foreshadowing of the new birth (Ezekiel 36:26) was not even understandable until Pentecost, and Jesus' overtures regarding the new birth were part of God revealing the truth of the indwelling spirit. In addition, the understanding of man's makeup supports a presuppositional apologetic more directly, and applications to evangelism and preaching could be developed, as attempted in Morrin's *Core Preaching* (Morrin, 2013). This doctrine seems very useful as an explanatory tool, has more than adequate biblical warrant, has no logically required heretical doctrinal bedfellows, and offers the chance to solve the issue of the supposed inconsistent use of the words for soul and spirit in both the Old and New Testaments. It may have less problems than the dualist or monist approaches, and rests upon some needed doctrinal reforms, chief of which are the reliance on the unbiblical doctrine of the immortality of the soul and other artifacts of Platonic dualism.

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