# “Body and Soul”

Forthcoming in *Routledge Companion to Jewish Philosophy*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the question of what we are, maps the possible answers, and locates those answers in certain classical Jewish sources. It then develops a distinctively Jewish approach to that question–an idiosyncratic version of dualism–that hasn’t been seriously explored in the general philosophical literature. After defending its Jewish bona fides, the paper motivates it based on more neutral philosophical considerations. It will emerge that there’s a well-motivated, deeply Jewish, and heretofore neglected contender on the question of human ontology.

*Word Count: 6366*

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## 1. Introduction

The topic of body and soul–like its close cousin, mind and matter–is vast. It consists of a number of large questions and a range of approaches to these questions. Such questions include: Do we have a soul? If so, what is it like? And do we have a body? These questions raise further definitional questions, about what it *is* to be a soul, or a body, or to *have* a soul, or *have* a body. And there are still further substantive questions: what is a soul good for? Is it a prerequisite for some other special feature we have–like consciousness, thought, freedom, moral worth, *imago dei*, or immortality? And what should our attitude be toward our bodies, and the material world more broadly: celebration, negation, sanctification, or what?

For obvious reasons, I will not attempt to articulate and document the full range of Jewish approaches to all of these questions. The questions are too many, the Jewish tradition is too diverse, and the word limit is understandably strict. My plan, instead, is as follows: I will begin briefly with some largely stipulative definitions. Then I will focus on one central and organizing

question–What are We?–map the possible answers, and locate those answers in certain classical Jewish sources. With that out of the way, I'll turn to what strikes me as a distinctively Jewish approach to that central question. As far as I am aware the approach hasn't been seriously explored in the general philosophical literature. After defending its Jewish bona fides, I will motivate it based on more neutral philosophical considerations. It will emerge that there's a well-motivated, deeply Jewish, and heretofore neglected contender on the question of human ontology.

## 2. Terms and Definitions

I will take the terms, 'x is thinking' and 'x is (im)material' to be unproblematic. (This despite the fact that the latter, at least, is in fact quite problematic. See my discussion in Segal 2023 §2.3) And I will take 'a soul' to mean 'an immaterial thinking thing'. Nothing material will count as a soul, no matter how gifted and talented it is, and nothing unthinking will count as a soul, no matter how critical it is in making a human person the being that she is.[1]

I will likewise take the term 'x is a human body' to be unproblematic. (This despite the problems with *that* term. See van Inwagen 1980.) I will further take it to be true by definition that human bodies are (wholly) material–having no immaterial parts. They are composed of nothing but portions of matter.

What is to *have* a body, or a soul? I'll reserve the term 'have a (human) body' for the notion of having a (human) body *as a part*. I'll use the more general term, 'is embodied', for the notion of standing in a particularly intimate and direct relationship with some (human) body–there being some (human) body whose movements are under one's direct voluntary control, for instance. Thus, at least conceptually there's room for a view that says we are embodied without having a body (i.e. without having a body as a part).

Likewise, I'll reserve the term 'have a (human) soul' for the notion of having a soul *as a part*. I'll use the more general term, 'is ensouled', for the notion of standing in a particularly intimate and direct relationship with some soul–there being some soul who is responsible for thinking one's thoughts, for instance. Thus, at least conceptually there's room for a view that says we are ensouled without having a soul (i.e. without having a soul as a part). (If you find this absurd, that's understandable; please reserve judgment until the final section.)

## 3. What Are We?

Of the many questions we can ask about body and soul, I will focus on this question: what's *our* relationship to each of these things? In particular: do we have a body? And do we have a

[1] The requirement of immateriality is inconsistent with, e.g. a Stoic position on the soul; the requirement of mentality is inconsistent with (at least one way to understand) Aquinas' position on the soul (before death). Again, these definitions are somewhat stipulative, although I think they reflect widespread usage. See Zimmerman 2007:20-22.

soul? Since each of these two questions can be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no', they together generate four possible views on what we are:

1. Immaterialism: we each have a soul, but no body
2. Materialism: we each have a body, but no soul
3. Dualism: we each have both a soul and a body
4. Nihilism: we have neither a body nor a soul

Nihilism is so-called because by far the most natural way to develop the view that we have neither a body nor a soul is simply to deny that we exist at all. That is, to accept that strictly speaking you and I don't exist. (At least not if 'you' and 'I' are taken to be singular referring terms. Maybe I could collectively self-refer to a bunch of particles, or organs, muscles, and bones, arranged in humanoid form. But there'd be no single thing there made up of all of them.) Otherwise, how could we fail to have a body *or* a soul?[2]

My questions and answers were formulated using the first-person plural, 'we'. Who are 'we', about whom I'm asking? I'm talking about us human beings–about you, dear reader, and about me. (I'll be lucky if other human beings read this essay; I certainly don't expect people *other* than human beings to read it.) To be even more specific: I'm talking about us human beings during the Earthly period of our existence. We might have existed before we began our Earthly sojourn; we might exist after our Earthly sojourn; and the answers to what we were or will be during those other periods might be different from the answer to what we are at this stage. I'm talking about you, dear reader, *right now*. (Again, I'll be lucky if *Earthly* human beings read this essay; I certainly don't expect human beings in other realms to read it.)

Now, that's a rather bare description of the subject of my question. It's enough to get the question off the ground. But given certain background assumptions that are at the core of the Jewish tradition, we can say more to specify our target subject. This will help us when we try to figure out what various Jewish thinkers have answered. The background assumptions include these: God created human beings in God's image, instructed those human beings on how to live and called upon them to devote themselves wholeheartedly to God, and will hold them accountable for how well they live up to this calling. I take these assumptions on board. My question, then, is about the nature of *those* beings, who are made in the divine image and are responsible to heed God's instructions. I want to know which of the four views is the correct view about *those* beings. But I take myself, and you, to be among those beings. That is, I take those beings to be *us*. Which is why I can just ask, "What are We?"

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[2] Truth be told, the view can be developed so as to be consistent with our existence. Perhaps each of us has a bunch of sub-human-body material parts, but these parts don't all by themselves compose anything; rather, they're all parts of something–a complete human being–that *also* has an *unthinking* immaterial part, like a form. Since the immaterial part is unthinking, it doesn't qualify as a soul. Since the material parts don't compose anything, there are no human bodies. This may in fact be a standard neo-Aristotelian hylomorphic view about human beings. In spirit it's just like materialism, though; in fact, if we use 'a human body' as a plural predicate, to collectively pick out human-body-parts (roughly: things that would compose a human body if they composed anything at all), then this view would actually be a version of materialism. Feel free to read 'human body' throughout in that way.

## 4. A Range of Answers

As I indicated, Jewish tradition is far from univocal on the question of what we are. In fact, *each* of the four views has some support in Jewish texts–although not all to the same degree. For ease of exposition, I'll proceed roughly in chronological order.

### *4.1 The Bible*

Begin with the Hebrew Bible. It's become a commonplace of contemporary Biblical scholarship and philosophy of religion that by and large, the Hebrew Bible has no notion of a soul, as we've defined it (see summary in Steiner 2015: Introduction; van Inwagen 1995). When in the book of Genesis (2:7) we hear of God breathing into Adam's nostrils '*nishmat hayim*', the plain meaning of the verse seems to be that God thereby *animated Adam*. There's no indication that there's some very different kind of *thing* that God implanted within Adam. And more generally, the words *'ruah',* '*nephesh*' and '*neshama*'--all of which later came to mean 'soul'--are often used in a way interchangeable with '(human) life', or 'living (human) thing', or 'the respiratory organ'. Given these linguistic facts, many scholars contend that dualism (and, *a fortiori*, immaterialism) is foreign to the world of the Bible.

Some scholars (see Di Vito 1999) go even further and find a strand of Biblical literature that effectively endorses Nihilism. Not only is there no soul, there is *nothing at all* to "hold the pieces together"–and so there is no integrated human being. Individual organs, rather than whole human beings, are the loci of activity and responsibility (Proverbs 12:19, 12:22; Nehemiah 9:8; Jeremiah 5:23). As Di Vito (ibid: 228) puts it, "the biblical character presents itself to us more as parts than as a whole". But the evidence for this sort of Nihilism seems to be rather thin on the ground, and in any case such a conception didn't exert much influence on later Jewish thought.[3]

More significantly than whether there's Nihilism in the Bible is the question coming from the other direction: is the soul really so foreign to the world of the Bible? Matters seem more complicated than materialist interpretations would have it. There are at the very least Biblical *intimations* of there being souls (see Barr 1993, Steiner 2015, Cooper 2018). First, there are verses that seem to directly contrast one's *nefesh* with one's body, as if they were two different things: "God, you are my God, I search for you, my soul thirsts for you, my body yearns for you…" (Psalms 63:1) Second, there are verses that seem to assume *both* that the *nefesh* 'departs at death and returns with life' *and* that it has a definite location: "the *nefesh* of the child came back inside him [lit., to his inside] and he revived" (1 Kings 17:22) The former assumption is consistent both with its meaning 'soul' and with its meaning 'life'; but the latter assumption makes little sense if *nefesh* means something as abstract as 'life' (Steiner 2015:69). Admittedly, given the contemporary assumption that anything located is material–and hence

[3] The later Kabbalistic and Hasidic idea of *bitul ha-yesh*–the recognition that everything but God is ultimately nothing–of course *entails* that *we* are ultimately nothing, but we are no more nothing than livers or kidneys (see *Likutei Amarim* ch. 43). We're not *especially* nothing. And as far as I can tell, their general view nowhere draws on a Biblical fragmentation of human beings.

that a soul is by definition without location–the verse would be equally hard to understand if *nefesh* meant soul. But that contemporary assumption is actually historically idiosyncratic (Pasnau 2013: sec. 16.3).) Third, there are verses that seem to use *nefesh* to mean something like an 'inner thinker', a *thing* inside each of us that is the primary subject of our mental lives: "Why so downcast, my soul, why disquieted within me?..." (Psalms 42:6)

And there might be even more than intimations. Richard Steiner painstakingly and compellingly argues that the word *nefashot* in Ezekiel 13:18 unequivocally refers to *disembodied souls*. It also behooves us to pay attention to recent discoveries about the Bible's Near Eastern context, in light of which Steiner remarks, "if 'the Hebrew could not conceive of a disembodied *nefesh*,' he must have been a rather sheltered soul, oblivious to beliefs and practices found all over the ancient Near East" (2015:9).

*4.2 Philo*

At any rate, the Bible wasn't so unequivocally materialist as to preclude later traditionalist Jewish thinkers from heading in a dualist direction. And there's no question that Jewish thought and practice–across Rabbinic, philosophical, and kabbalistic literature–from the late Second Temple period all the way through the twentieth century, tended to be dualist to one degree or another.

Philo, the first-century BCE Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, followed Plato in thinking that there is such a thing as a soul, that in the here and now the human being is embodied, and that when a human being dies she goes on existing as a soul, unfettered by bodily needs and desires. What's less clear is whether he also endorsed the view that a human being, even while she is embodied, is *identical* with a soul–the body being nothing more than an appendage, rather than a part. That is, it's unclear if he was a full-fledged immaterialist. On the one hand, some of his most plainspoken formulations are clearly dualist, not immaterialist. Thus, in his allegorical interpretation of Genesis 2:3 he says (*Allegorical Interpretation* Bk. 2, sec. 1), "God is alone, a Unity, in the sense that His nature is simple not composite, whereas each one of us and of all other created beings is made up of many things. **I, for example, am many things in one. I am soul and body**." (emphasis mine) In the here and now, Philo is saying, each of us has a soul *and* a body.

On the other hand, Philo holds a view about our survival that by his own lights entails immaterialism. He speaks in a number of places about individual human beings surviving their deaths and the disintegration of their bodies as souls (see Wolfson 1947: 202-203). That is, it's not just the *soul* that sometimes survives the death of "its body"; it's *human beings*, like Elijah, Enoch, Moses, and other pious people, who themselves survive. Though dualists throughout the centuries have accepted this, Philo of all people should have recognized that this combination of views is inconsistent. Philo is, in fact, our only source for the ancient Stoic puzzle of Dion and Theon (*The Eternity of the World* §48-49): Dion being a whole man, Theon being the whole of Dion 'minus' one of Dion's feet. If Dion loses that foot, what happens? On the one hand, it doesn't seem like Theon should go out of existence, since he never had that

foot to begin with. It doesn't seem like Dion should go out of existence, at least if it's possible in general for things to survive the loss of parts. (Losing a foot isn't fun, but it's not like losing a brain.) But Dion and Theon can't *both* survive: two distinct things can't become identical with one another, nor is it plausible that they can come to overlap one another perfectly.

Chrysippus, according to Philo's report, held that in fact Theon goes out of existence–despite being intrinsically unaffected–his place being taken by Dion. Philo evinces little patience for this view. It smacks "more of paradox than of truth". "For how can one say," Philo asks, "that Theon the unmutilated has been made away with while Dion whose foot is amputated has suffered no destruction?" Philo doesn't come right out and say it, but he seems to maintain that it's Dion that goes out of existence. If that's so, and if individual human beings like Elijah and Moses have souls as proper parts, then, like Dion, *they* can't survive the loss of their bodies–only their souls can. So, if individual human beings *do* survive, and if they have souls as parts, then they must have those souls as *improper* parts–i.e. they must be identical with their souls. They'd be embodied, but without having a body (= immaterialism). The bottom line is that I don't know how to square what Philo says explicitly (dualism) with what his own views commit him to saying (immaterialism).[4]

*4.3 Rabbinic Literature*

When we turn to the Rabbinic literature of the Midrash and Talmud, we find a range of views, which (especially in later strata) accept the existence of a soul, but differ from one another with regard to the exact relationship between the human being and the soul. Take for example this passage in Leviticus Rabbah (4:6):

> [Passage 1] Rabbi Hiyya [told a parable]...Likewise, in the Days to Come, the Holy One Blessed Be He will say to the soul, "Why did you sin before Me?" and the soul will say "Master of the Universe, the body and I sinned as one, why are you taking me to task and leaving alone the other [the body]? God says to the soul, you are from the upper world, a place where there is no sin, and the body is from the lower world, where there is sin. Therefore, I am taking you to task."

According to this Midrashic passage, the soul will bear the brunt of the ultimate divine judgment. Since to begin with I said that my question was about those beings whom (among other things) God would hold responsible for their behavior down on Earth, this Midrash holds one of two answers to our question:

(a) Immaterialism: the human being, even during its Earthly sojourn, just is the soul; the soul sinned, using the body as a tool; and so only the soul is judged

[4] I'm inclined to think that his statements about the survival of individual beings wasn't meant to be taken as strictly true. He comes close to saying this in at least one place (without the ideology of 'strict truth'): "we, who are here joined to the body, creatures of composition and quality, **shall be no more**, but shall go forward to our rebirth, to be among the unbodied without composition and without quality" (*On the Cherubim* 32:114)

(b) Dualism: the human being, during its Earthly sojourn, is a soul-body composite, and its two parts sinned together; but the body, unlike the soul, isn't essential to the human being; so the human being survives as a soul, and is judged as a soul

Ignoring the metaphysical subtlety that distinguishes between these two versions, this much is clear: "For all intents," as Max Kadushin puts it in his commentary on this passage, "the soul, not the body, is the individual self".

Contrast that with the passage immediately preceding it in the Midrash:

> [Passage 2] Rabbi Ishmael taught a parable…Thus, in the Days to Come, the Holy One Blessed Be He will say to the soul, "Why did you transgress before Me?" It will say to him, "Master of the Universe! I did not sin. The body is the one who sinned! From the moment I left it I have been like a pure bird bursting into the air. How have I transgressed before You?" God will say to the body, "Why have you transgressed before Me?" The body will say to him, Master of the Universe! I did not sin. The soul is the one who sinned! From the moment that she left me, I have been tossed like a rock, thrown onto the ground. How would I have transgressed before you?!" What does the Holy Blessing One do to them? …God will call to the heavens above to bring the soul and to the earth to bring the body, and judge them together.

Judging by God's response, it seems that each of the body and the soul was *right* to claim that he couldn't be held responsible; but that nonetheless the body-soul compound could be held responsible. Clearly enough, it was a body-soul compound that sinned, and it's that body-soul compound–only when again in the form of a body-soul compound, presumably after the general resurrection of the dead–that can be punished and rewarded.

Certain medieval developments of this view maintained that the human being persists as a pure soul in the intervening period between death and resurrection (e.g. Nahmanides *Torat Ha'adam*, on "those who deserve punishment [who] are judged in Gehinnom [the world of the souls, immediately after death]..." (1964: 288)), but that nonetheless the ultimate recompense is particularly fitting only when the person again has a body–indeed, *the same body it had*–so that every part of the person who sinned/obeyed would partake of the punishment/reward (Meir Abulafia, commentary on Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 90a). If we read this Midrashic passage in light of those later developments, we'd have yet another affirmation of the sort of dualism that sees the soul and only the soul as essential to the human being. (What we definitely don't have in this Midrashic passage, though, is immaterialism.)

But the plain sense of this Midrashic passage is that the human being goes out of existence when body and soul are separated. (Presumably, the 'separation' is a matter of severing a causal connection, which in turn makes it the case that nothing at all is composed of the body and soul.) That human being comes back into existence only when that body and soul are reunited.[5] In the interim, the soul kind of just hangs out–it's not a human being at that point, and

[5] The medieval philosopher, Hasdai Crescas, also argues that the human being goes out of existence when the body and soul are separated (2018: 298, 300), but he maintains that, unlike the plain meaning

it's not identical to any human being who once roamed the face of the Earth (Finkelstein 1951: 216). This gives us a different version of dualism from the one we saw in the previously cited passage. The different versions argue about the *persistence conditions* for human beings. According to *this* Midrash, any human being that has a certain soul and a certain body as parts exists *when and only when* it has that soul *and* that body as parts. According to the previous midrash, by contrast, a human being can survive the loss of his body.

To summarize: we've seen indications of three views, all of which accept the existence of the soul (and the body), but which differ over the relative centrality of the soul in defining who and what a given human being is:

(A) Immaterialism (with embodiment): a human being (even in the here and now) just is a soul (although it is sometimes embodied) (perhaps Philo, perhaps Passage 1)
(B) Dualism + Essential Soul: a human being (in the here and now) is a compound of a body and a soul, but while it can survive the loss of that body (and it can even become disembodied), it cannot survive the loss of that soul (perhaps Passage 1, perhaps Passage 2)
(C) Dualism + Essential Soul & Body: a human being is a compound of a body and a soul, and it cannot survive the loss of either that body or that soul (perhaps Passage 2)

I could go on to trace these conceptions through the medieval and early modern Jewish philosophers and kabbalists. What we find, in the main, are developments of (B). Rather than discuss these developments in detail, I will turn now to what I think is a distinctive and underexplored view, with deep roots in Rabbinic literature and Jewish liturgy. The view comes in two forms, which nicely fill out the list above:

(D) Dualism + Essential Body: a human being (in the here and now) is a compound of a body and a soul, but while it can survive the loss of that soul (and it can even become "unensouled"), it cannot survive the loss of that body
(E) Materialism (with ensoulment): a human being just is a body (although it is sometimes ensouled)

## 5. I Have a Soul, But I'm Essentially a Body

### *5.1 Liturgy, Homily, and Halakha*

According to the traditional Jewish liturgy, the first thing a Jew says upon waking up in the morning is the Modeh Ani prayer: "I give thanks before you, King living and eternal, for You have returned within me my soul with compassion; abundant is Your faithfulness!" We seem to be talking as if we were around without a soul, and very grateful to have our soul back. A similar idea is expressed in the famous Adon Olam poem, customarily recited at the end of morning prayers: "Into His hand I commit my spirit When I sleep, and I awake". We seem to be talking as if we ourselves will be around without a soul, and then get our soul back.

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of this Midrash, she comes back into existence as soon as she has *some body or other*–even if it's not identical with the body she had before death (ibid. 301).

This idea–that we persist through the loss and regaining of our souls–is expressed rather clearly, albeit homiletically, in a parable in the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 152b):

> The Sages taught: "And the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7), give it to Him as He gave it to you, in purity, you too [give it back] in purity.
>
> A parable of a king of flesh and blood who distributed royal garments to his servants. The wise ones folded them and placed them in a box, the foolish ones went and worked in them. After a period of time the king requested his garments. The wise ones returned them to him pressed, the foolish ones returned them dirty. The king was happy to greet the wise ones and angry to greet the foolish ones…
>
> The Holy One, Blessed be He, also. With regard to the bodies of the righteous, it states: "He enters into peace, they rest on their beds…" (Isaiah 57:2). And with regard to their souls, it states: "And the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord your God" (I Samuel 25:29). And conversely, with regard to the bodies of the wicked, it states: "There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21), and with regard to their souls, it states: "And the souls of your enemies He shall sling out in the hollow of a sling" (I Samuel 25:29)

Our soul is like a deposit that we receive, and which we are expected to return. It's as essential to us as an article of clothing; which is to say, not essential at all. Note well that the prooftexts about the *bodies* of the righteous and the wicked refer to the human being as such ('he enters…' and 'no peace…for the wicked'), while the prooftexts about the souls of the righteous and the wicked refer specifically to their souls.

One might suggest that these prayers and homilies are too poetic to bear metaphysical weight. I disagree. Poetry no less than prose can be used to express our convictions about ultimate reality. But for those who are more wary, I would add that there is a striking consilience between these poetic sentiments and the hard nosed stuff of Jewish legal (*halakhic*) discussions. While the question of 'human ontology and identity in halakha' merits a much longer treatment, we can make a start on it.

Begin with my beginning: how far back in time do *I* go? Was I ever a fetus? Was I ever an embryo? (Distinguish this as we must from the question of when, if at all, a fetus/embryo has "moral status"--a being whose interests are to be taken into account in moral deliberation. These issues cross-cut one another. I might have started my existence as a being with no moral status, only to develop later–perhaps only upon my birth–into one with moral status. Conversely, I might go back only as far as my birth (say), but I replaced a distinct being who indeed had moral status already.) Here's one way *halakha* speaks to that question. The rule is that Shabbat prohibitions are set aside in order to save a human life. What about in order to

save a fetus? The *halakhic* consensus (*Shulhan Arukh* OC 330:5) is that those prohibitions are indeed set aside to save a fetus; and even to save an embryo (Nahmanides 1964: 28-29). This consensus, especially regarding the embryo, is prima facie problematic, since the halakha doesn't accord an embryo the status of a human *person.*

Nahmanides (ibid.) provides the resolution: it is based on the principle that "we violate one Shabbat for him so he can keep many Shabbats". That is, an embryo is saved even at the expense of Shabbat observance because *that embryo* will one day grow up to observe many Shabbats. This very plausibly requires that there be genuine identity between the embryo and the adult human being who will one day observe Shabbat. After all, suppose it's Shabbat, and some human sperm is "on its way" to fertilize a human egg. Suppose further that the sperm is in danger, and that we can save the sperm only by violating the Shabbat. There'd be no *halakhic* grounds in that case to violate Shabbat, even though doing so would lead to the keeping of many Shabbats down the line. Presumably, what's missing in that case is the present existence of some being who would, if we were to violate Shabbat on her behalf, be identical with a later being who would then keep many Shabbats.

Now, it *could* be that right at conception a person's soul comes into existence; or that the soul existed beforehand, but that right at conception it comes to be "conjoined" with the conceived embryo. It's difficult to know these things. (The Talmud (Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin 91a*) does record a discussion between Rabbi Judah the Prince and one Antoninus, in which Rabbi Judah comes to agree with the view of Antoninus that upon conception a (pre-existent) soul gets conjoined with the new embryo. However, it's hard to understand what this "conjoining" can mean, and what the soul is supposed to be *doing*, given that a fresh embryo is incapable of any mental activity. More on that soon.) But in any case, what's interesting is that no such facts about the soul seem to figure into the *halakhic* determination of how far back *I* go, and which beings will one day be adult humans. Halakha treats personal identity in purely biological terms. A human being goes as far back as the life it's been living.

The same goes for the end of life. While there is much discussion in the halakhic literature about when exactly a human being ceases to exist, all sides of the debate assume *some* biological, rather than psychological, criterion. Crucially, no serious halakhic authority maintains that mere *cortical* brain death ends a human being's existence (Angel 1992); this despite the fact that a person who has suffered cortical brain death is incapable of any mental activity, and is presumably no longer a human *person*. Again, it *could* be that the soul stays conjoined to the human body even after cortical brain death, until whatever stage we say the human being ceases to exist. (Although, again, it's hard to understand what this continued "conjoining" can mean, and what the soul is supposed to be *doing*, given that a post-cortical-death human being is incapable of any mental activity.) But in any case, what's interesting is that no such facts about the soul seem to figure into the *halakhic* determination of how long I will last. Again, halakha treats personal identity in purely biological terms. A human being lasts as long as the life it lives.

*5.2 Two Versions*

I think the convergence of homiletical, liturgical, and legal material gives us good reason to think that this metaphysical view has serious Jewish bona fides. But what is the metaphysical view, exactly? At the very least it's a view that recognizes the existence and importance of the soul, but nonetheless sees the body, not the soul, as *essential* to the human being as a whole.

Now, we could take this to the extreme: materialism, with ensoulment. This would be a mirror image of immaterialism, with embodiment. Each of us just is, at every moment we exist, a human body. But we are sometimes *ensouled*–we are entrusted with an invaluable tool, which allows us to think and feel, and whose proper deployment is the awesome responsibility we've been given.

But in addition to being extreme, this view is prima facie crazy. The major problem is that it would mean that I don't and can't think. It's not just that I only think derivatively–the way the dualist says I think in virtue of having a thinking part–it's that I don't think *at all*. At least not strictly. Maybe I think in the same sense that the immaterialist says I weigh 150 lbs. That is, in some loose and popular sense. But not really. And that's just crazy.

There might be some maneuvers that a materialist-with-ensoulment can make. One would be to say that while I don't think all by myself, neither does my soul; we think *together*, by cooperating. But how does that work? If material things can be involved in the production of thought, what do they need the soul to cooperate for? It's hard to say. (See Olson 2023: section 1.15.)

Another would be to say that my first-person pronouns, in thought and speech, usually refer not to *me*, but to the soul with which I've been gifted. (Other philosophers (Noonan 1998) have suggested that the standard use of a first-person pronoun need not always and for all beings serve as a vehicle of self-reference. For criticism, see Olson 2007: sec. 2.7.) So I can correctly say and think, "I am a thinking thing", because I'd be referring to my soul (not a soul I *have*, to be sure), and it thinks. Nonetheless, I can stipulate (explicitly or in virtue of context) that I'm going to self-refer, and then it'll be correct to say, "I am just a body". The trouble, then, is that I can only put forward the proposal of materialism-with-ensoulment if I'm not thinking. (More carefully: *either* the proposal I'd be putting forward is straightforwardly false, or I'd not be thinking.) The last four paragraphs would have to have been written without any thought at all. That's not good news for their contents!

So I suggest instead that the liturgical, homiletical, and *halakhic* sources we saw reflect a slightly less extreme option: Dualism + Essential Body. This view says that our *essence* is bodily–but that in the here and now we are composites, with a soul as a part, just like the various other versions of dualism. So it's in no deeper trouble regarding our thinking than any of those other versions. And it's far from the only view that says that the part that is responsible for our thinking is nonetheless inessential to us. That's the natural thing for an animalist to say about her cerebrum (Olson 2007: sec. 2.8).

*5.3 Idiosyncratic Dualism Motivated*

But one might suggest that this sort of dualism is at the very least *unmotivated*, because the Essential Body component is inconsistent with the motivation for dualism in the first place. However, that depends on what the motivation for dualism *is*. The objector might be assuming the dualist motivation is the *dispensability* of the body: that I could have existed without this/any body (Descartes 1641), or that I can persist when my body doesn't, or that I can and maybe even sometimes do go somewhere my body doesn't (as in a near-death experience), or that I can go somewhere where there's no fact of the matter whether my body does (Swinburne 2019). It's true: all of these claims are incompatible with any version of dualism that makes our bodies essential to us.

Alternatively, the objector might be assuming the dualist motivation is the *metaphysical inhospitality* of the material world: the material world is perhaps too fuzzy or too much in flux to be home to stable and precise things such as ourselves (Segal 2023). It's true: if that's so, then we can't even have a body as a part, let alone an essential part, let alone our *only* essential part.

But there's another dualist motivation that *is* consistent with this version of dualism: what we might call the *functional inadequacy* of the body. Here the idea is that there is some important capacity that we human beings have, which (claims this dualist) no material object could have. The suggested capacities include the ability to think (Leibniz 1981), the ability to take a unified perspective on the world (Hasker 1999: ch. 5), the capacity to be in states with propositional content (Plantinga 2006), and the ability to choose other than what we actually choose (Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne 1996). All this motivation requires is that human beings have souls (and that these capacities can be "inherited" from a thing's parts), no more and no less. It doesn't require that human beings have their souls essentially, or their bodies inessentially. The functional inadequacy of the body motivation is as compatible with any version of dualism as it is with immaterialism.

But still: what could motivate us specifically to endorse Dualism + Essential Body, as opposed to the much more standard Dualism + Essential Soul (or Immaterialism)? Well, for one thing, the standard view is in much bigger trouble with Dion/Theon (as we noted above regarding Philo) than is the Essential Body version. According to the standard version, you have the soul as a proper part, and then you can become identical with the soul. This requires that the original soul go out of existence, or the existence of co-substantial souls, or temporal parts, or temporary identity, or something even worse (see Olson 2006). This problem is much more easily avoided according to the Dualism + Essential Body view, as long as we sharpen that view: instead of saying we have *a human body* and a soul as parts, we can say more exactly that we have *human-body-parts* (these are the things that *would* and *do* compose a human body when they're not parts of an ensouled human being) and a soul as parts. We can lose our soul, at which point we become composed of all and only those human-body-parts; but that raises no special metaphysical problems as long as there *was* nothing previously composed of those human-body-parts. When those human-body-parts were parts of an ensouled human

being, they're no more of a distinctive single unit than the whole of a human animal minus his cerebrum (according to animalism).[6]

To be sure, *the argument from Dion/Theon* might rule out the standard version of dualism, but it's consistent with both immaterialism and Dualism + Body & Soul Essentialism. So, even if it's conjoined with the functional inadequacy motivation for dualism, it doesn't force us to accept Dualism + Essential Body. But there is another argument that does: *the argument from personal identity*. This argument is simply that all adult human beings were once embryos, and some human beings become human vegetables. Each of us was around months before we had any mental capacities; and some of us will survive the loss of our mental capacities. It's not just Jewish law that says this, it's common sense (Olson 1997). But presumably we have both souls and bodies as parts only when they are *conjoined*–a matter of a certain two-way causal connection between their states. (The only non-arbitrary alternative would be that *any* body and soul–whether conjoined or not–would compose something. But then there'd be far too many body-soul composites about, especially since each would presumably be thinking whatever its soul part was thinking!) And it's not plausible to think–it's not clear what it would even *mean*–for my soul and body to have been *conjoined* before my body had any nervous system.

So: I was around with an embryo as a part, but no soul as a part. This rules out all forms of dualism except Dualism + Body Essentialism. When the argument from personal identity is conjoined with the functional inadequacy motivation for dualism–and I see no tension between these two things–we are left with no choice but to accept Dualism + Body Essentialism.

This underexplored view–which emerges from a variety of Jewish sources–deserves much more attention than it's received.

## Related Topics

Afterlife and Eschatology
The Problem of Evil
Free Will and Providence

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[6] As Dean Zimmerman pointed out to me, we could in principle defend Dualism + Essential Soul in a similar way, as long as we're prepared to countenance "soul parts". Then we could say we have *soul-parts* (these are the things that *would* and *do* compose a soul when they're not parts of an embodied human being) and a human body as parts. We can lose our body, at which point we become composed of all and only those soul-parts. To be sure, this version of dualism is inconsistent with some of the traditional motivations for dualism (such as those having to do with the unity of consciousness, or our natural immortality), but so is my own view.

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**Further Reading**

Richard Steiner's *Disembodied Souls: The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), is a detailed, careful, and iconoclastic discussion of the soul in the Hebrew Bible; Jon Levenson's *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), chapter 6, is a more accessible and less iconoclastic treatment of the same subject; Ishay Rozen-Zvi's *Body and Soul in Ancient Jewish Thought* (Moshav Ben Shemen: Modan Publishing House, 2012) is a nice overview (in Hebrew) of early Rabbinic approaches to the body and soul, and includes a brief discussion (106-107) of the idiosyncratic dualism that I develop here; for a more detailed discussion of medieval Jewish philosophical approaches to the soul, you might see my paper, "Immortality: Two Models," in *Jewish Philosophy Past and Present: Contemporary Responses to Classical Sources* (New York: Routledge, 2017); finally, the view I develop here would seem to allow not only persistence through the loss of one's soul, but also the swapping of souls or the having of more than one soul: this calls for a discussion of spirit possession in Jewish thought, the topic of J.H. Chajes' fascinating *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).