Monism, dichotomism, and trichotomism are three theories attempting to biblically explain the nature and makeup of man’s being. They each try to explain what it means for a person to have a body soul and spirit. As the names suggest: trichotomy thinks that man has three constituent parts (body, soul and spirit), dichotomy only accepts a dualism between body and soul, proposing that spirit is basically synonymous with soul. Monochots do not believe in a spiritual essence called the "soul" at all, they see man as a unified singularity.

Trichotomy is probably the most popular within Evangelical circles. Modern teachers such as John Woodward, author of Man as Spirit Soul and Body along with classic dispensational teachings of men like Lehman Strauss and Clarence Larkin make a case for trichotomy. My thesis and this essay will agree with a triune composition of humans. However, I have a couple of issues with the traditional mechanics and approach and have arrived at a slightly different arraignment in the meaning of body, soul and spirit from many trichotomists. Furthermore, Mono and Di also have excellent points that cannot be ignored or glossed over. My objective in this paper is to synchronize all three viewpoints by gleaning the most biblical aspects of each and recombining them into a symbiotic theory in agreement with all the biblical evidence.

Monists are correct that man was originally created and intended to be a unified, non-divisible creature. The fall is why we do not “see” spiritual things clearly. Dichotomists are correct that humans today only display 2 phases. And Trichotomists are correct that three separate and ontologically distinct natures of humans are identifiable.

Let’s start with a few definitions. As used biblically, soul (nephesh, psyche) means person, life, or being. The soul is the thoughts, mind, and emotions of a person. This is the real you. The soul is everything that makes you into you. We share a soul with higher animals (vertebrates). The Scripture ascribes nephesh and psyche to the animal world in Gen 2:19, 30, and Rev 8:9. Pet owners will immediately agree that a dog has personality, will for actions, emotions of love and fear, and the ability to think and learn. The difference between a living person and a dead corpse is the presence of soul. When life vanishes the body becomes non-responsive and non-cognitive. The dead have no thoughts, no power, no volition, no will, no emotions. Ecclesiastes 9:5 tells us the obvious that the dead know nothing. The dead have no power of thought. They have no mind, no soul (nephesh). Life is the best understanding of soul.

Some bible verses at first glance may be confusing: for instance speaking of Jacob’s wife in childbirth, Gen 35:18(NKJV): “And so it was, as her [Rachel’s] soul was departing (for she died).” ‘Soul’ is an unfortunate and confusing mis-translation of the Hebrew nephesh. This verse simply means that her life departed with no metaphysical implications. Rachel’s personality, thoughts and emotions ceased.

Monists are incorrect that humans in a fallen world are still a simple unitary structure. Jesus said in Matthew 10:28(NKJV) “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Notice the clear distinction between body and soul. Our human enemies cannot kill the soul, which is the true life, nature and being of a person. All that they can do is kill the vessel of the body. This verse, from the lips of Christ himself, clearly indicates that man is at least two ontologically distinct parts.

The body, of course, is the physical flesh, bones, blood and organs that we all agree is
the physical structure of humans. Animals and plants both have a body. Notably, plants do not appear to have a soul as they do not have thoughts, personality, willpower, emotions, etc. Plants are purely physical. The body is a vessel. It contains the soul. Think of the body as a wine amphora. It is made from clay as Adam was formed from dirt. The body is an earthen vessel (2 Cor 4:7). Vessels hold or carry a product. Our product is soul. Our bodies and those of animals too, are filled with life.

Spirit is unique to humans. Man was created in the image of God, and since God is a spirit, man and woman also received a spirit. Trichotomists agree that spirit is an ontologically distinct aspect from soul and body. Plants and animals do not share a spirit; it is unique to God, man and angels (including fallen angels). The spirit is a structure of the 4th dimension, just as the body is a structure of the tangible dimensions. Angels and demons are spirits. They are real living creatures within an unseen (but very real) spiritual dimension. The spirit of man is of this same realm and essence. The spirit exists within the 4th dimension of the spiritual realm.

The spirit gives an individual’s personality (soul) access to the immaterial 4th dimension, just as the body provides access to the material 3d world. The soul is the control panel for the body and the spirit.

Dichotomists are incorrect (I believe) to lump spirit and soul as synonymous without real distinction. The Apostle Paul specifically mentions the triune parts-

1 Thes 5:23: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul's Corinthian epistles especially display the ontological difference between the soul and the spirit. Unfortunately our English translations are not always clear.

1 Cor. 2:14-15 says: "But a soulish [psychikos] man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God... but the spiritual [pneumatikos] man discerns all things..."

1 Cor. 15:44 says: Our body "is sown a soulish [psychikos] body, it is raised a spiritual [pneumatikos] body. If there is a soulish [psychikos] body, there is also a spiritual[pneumatikos] one."

Soulish is the cognate adjective of soul from the Greek word psyche. We have already established by definition that in the Bible the word soul [nephesh and psyche] should be understood as life force or being. So this adjectival form would mean lively or beingful. In these verses the characteristic of the soul is directly shown in opposition to the characteristic of the spirit. They are not the same thing. Unbelievers have only beingful life (along with animals); believers have both beingful life and spiritual life.

Finally the author of Hebrews makes a distinction between soul and spirit. Hear the Word-

Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”
God alone wields a filet knife that can separate spirit from soul. My point being that they are not the same thing. Dichotomy does not adequately answer the biblical data.

John Woodward agrees and does a superb job of explaining the ontological reality of body, soul and spirit. For this reason, I highly recommend his book. However, I have a difference with Woodward’s understanding of spirit. He claims that spirit is an aspect of soul; that together soul and spirit make up the immaterial side of man. He implies that man is half material and half immaterial, another words we are 50% body and 50% soul and spirit. This would mean that we are approximately 50% body, 25% soul and 25% spirit. He does not give these exact proportions, that is my interpretation of his presentation; but he does call the spirit an “organ” of the soul (p91). Organs are vital components of a greater anatomy. They are small systems that play an important role. His description of the spirit as an organ definitely claims that the spirit is a subdivision of the soul. Apparently this is an organ absent in the soul of animals. The spirit is a part or subdivision of the human soul. The soul contains the spirit.

This is almost exactly backwards from my understanding and interpretation of trichotomy. Instead I would say that the spirit contains the soul. Instead of the spirit being an organ of the immaterial soulish nature (which is never claimed in Scripture), I would describe the spirit in parallel language to the body. If the body is the material vessel that contains the soul (mind or life), then the spirit is the immaterial vessel that likewise contains the very same soul.

Instead of using language implying man is half physical and only a quarter spiritual, (or something less than half since Woodward, and many traditional trichotomists, describe the spirit as a component or particle of the soul), I think man is 50-50. The spirit is just as big and important as the body. The spirit is a vessel, parallel to the body, which contains the life, thoughts and emotions of the person. In a balanced holistic approach to body and spirit, I believe that in the resurrection we will achieve a holistic union of body and spirit, not an imbalanced supremacy of either one over the other.

Before the resurrection, we live with a fallen body. The flesh is prone to sin, sickness and death. "For the flesh sets its desire against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another" (Gal 5:17). As the flesh is fallen, the spirit of believers is godlike in man and not prone to evil. 1Pet 1:23 and 1 John 3:9 exemplify that sin does not come from the spirit. However, this is only applicable for believers, because only believers have a living spirit as a new creation. The spirit of the rest of humanity is literally dead.

Natural man is only partially whole. He is missing an entire segment of his original creation, the spirit. He has no spiritual life/existence at all. The spiritual vessel is absent, not just darkened. There is no life outside of Christ. God is the author of our existence.

Scripture says that upon the same day that Adam sinned he surely would die. The spirit was the locus of this death. Since Adam did not bodily keel over dead, it was a spiritual death. His spirit, a real separate, ontologically distinct nature, died. Paul tells us in Eph 2:5 and again in Col 2:13 that we were DEAD in our sins. How can people who have a beating heart and expanding lungs be accurately described as being dead, unless it is referring to the triune spirit vessel with which man was created? I believe that we should take Pauline passages literally. The spirit was dead.

The Greek text of Jude 19 literally says that the natural man does not have spirit. This is of course a point in my favor, the spirit of man is totally and unequivocally dead. The spirit’s death at the fall of Adam logically corresponds to the spirit’s being made alive at
regeneration by the Holy Spirit in the new birth.

Many traditional Christians claim that this "death" should be understood metaphorically as "separation." Separation? When they say 'the human spirit is dead to God', they mean the word 'dead' metaphorically. It is not really dead, it is separated. This is a common misunderstanding. Frequently they appear to be drawing from Ephesians 4:17-18 (NIV): "That you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."

Those darkened, separated ignorant gentiles in Ephesus were still physically alive in Paul’s day. Their thinking is futile. Their mind is darkened. Their life is separated. Their knowledge is ignorant. Their heart is hard and stubborn. Paul is not talking about darkened spirits, he is speaking of darkened minds. The Greek word for 'spirit' is never even used. Paul is speaking of the mind/soul/life of people.

I do not think the Bible uses death to mean separation. I propose dead means dead. Take the Word literally and straight forward. An analogy: If I take kittens from a mother cat and put them in a cardboard box, then the kittens are separated from the mother. The kittens are ignorant of the mother. The kittens are not dead, they are separated. This language appears in Scripture in reference to the mind and thoughts, but never the spirit.

If death means separation, than what exactly is separated at the death of a dog? We agree that animals do not have a spirit. So what is separated? According to Webster, dead means 1): not alive 2): lacking power to move, feel, or respond 3): unresponsive, inanimate, inert, extinct.

When Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of knowledge of good and evil their spirit died, but their mind gained knowledge.

My interpretation of Adam dying when he sinned is very literal. His spirit, which had a real existence in a spiritual world, died. It was dead as a doorknob, not just hidden in a cardboard box. Dead corpses have no thoughts, vitality, action, volition, abilities or faculties. The spirit of man died in Eden and every human born ever since has received the congenital disorder of what my book coins 'dead soul syndrome.' My book’s study has not attempted to distinguish the ontological distinctions between soul and spirit, maybe a future edition will rectify. Perhaps my book should be called Dead Spirit Syndrome, because it is the spirit that died. However, in modern colloquial English we speak of the soul of man as a synonym for spirit. Frequently the words in modern English are used interchangeably, although incorrectly with biblical vocabulary.

My understanding is holistic in the nature of the spiritual world. Originally, at creation, God made man with a body and spirit of equal size, authority and capabilities. They were fully intertwined and overlapped. The body had control of spiritual faculties and the spirit had control over bodily faculties. Body and spirit were united in marriage. It was in perfect harmony that they worked together, separate and distinguishable aspects but with complete unity. The complete unity and perfection of the original creation before the fall is the status to which the resurrected saints will return to in the eschaton.

Adam walked with God. In his body with a perfect living spirit, Adam could actually and physically with eyeballs, “see” God. They took evening strolls through the garden together (Gen 3:8), yet we know from Scripture that God is spirit (John 4:24). Thus before the fall physical man could literally “see” spiritual things. With a vibrant living spirit and a healthy lively body, Adam had full access to the spiritual dimension. Similar
to the risen Christ, I believe Adam would have been able to walk through locked doors, appear and teleport at will. Adam before the fall, I think, would have had angelic powers of instant transport including to purely spiritual dimensions like the celestial heaven of God’s abode. Although some of that is clearly speculative, my point is that the original make up of humans had complete access and power within the spiritual world. This union of physical and spiritual will ultimately be restored in the New Heaven and New Earth (NHNE) after the resurrection. Our glorified bodies are promised to be like Christ’s risen body. Whatever powers we are granted in the resurrection, will be a restoration of powers that Adam would have originally have had in the garden, since the resurrection is a reversal of the curse. Thus my theory that Adam would have been able to walk through locked doors.

Before the fall, Adam’s body and spirit were vibrantly alive and full of soul. Body and spirit were holistically merged in perfect union as an inseparable indivisible unitary person. The soul of Adam consisted of his thoughts, personality, emotions, etc. Soul filled up the vessels of body and spirit to the brim. If body and spirit are the vessels, than soul is the wine. A liquid without any real shape of its own, it takes on the form of the vessel. As long as the vessels are intact, the soul is indwelling. Adam had only one soul, Adam did not have a soul indwelling the body and a different soul indwelling the spirit. That would be silly. Adam was a single man. The same personality, thoughts, and emotions of soul filled up both vessels simultaneously, because those two vessels were overlaid in perfect harmony.

Note: my diagram above shows body and spirit almost overlaid with a small unique zone of each so that both drawing lines are visible for clarity. In reality they would be perfectly overlaid with no un-overlapped areas.

The holistic union of body and spirit is the truth that monists have picked up on. Man was originally created and intended to be a unitary monad structure without separation, as god is a perfectly united Trinity. Many monists are also soul sleepers, because they think that the soul cannot live apart from the body. They are correct (sort of). The soul cannot live apart from the body and/or spirit. At least one of those vessels must be living for the soul to exist or else the wine leaks out gushing from the damaged vessel and is lost.
When Adam sinned his spirit died. The spiritual vessel was smashed and crushed. The spirit could no longer contain soul. As wine falls out of a broken vessel and falls upon the ground without ability to be regathered (2 Sam 14:14, Ps 58:7), so the life and personality of man dropped out of the spirit world and ceased to exist. As a dead corpse is not responsive, does not talk, think, or do anything, so the spirit of Adam and all humans to follow him became dead without any sentient reality within the spiritual dimension. We became blind to God. We became literally dead to spiritual truth and reality.

The majority of traditional Christianity pays lip service to the total and utter death of the spirit, but in the end they usually deny the unconsciousness, non responsiveness, and non sentient state of the human spirit. This is where my Dead Soul Syndrome theory (using "soul" as colloquial English for the more correct technical understanding of "spirit") varies with the majority of Tricotomists. Dead things have no thoughts, no volition, no ability, no nothing, because they are dead. Christians should start taking death of the spirit literally.

As well as dying within the spiritual world, as part of the curse, God also separated the spiritual world from the physical world. Sin brought this schism into the nature of the cosmos. This separation did not exist before the fall. After the fall, Adam could no longer “see” God. Walking with him became impossible. Angels became invisible. The spiritual and physical became divorced. Human understanding of spiritual realities became very dim and clouded. The curse will be entirely reversed at the restoration of all things, but in the mean time we live in a fractured world wherein the spiritual dimension is totally hidden and mysterious. It is unavailable for man to enjoy and understand. This was not God’s original plan. Ultimately, God will heal the astral planes of the cosmos so that He is plainly known to all creation. Then we will know Him as He knows us (1Cor 13:12). Then the knowledge of the LORD will cover all men as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14).

When a human is born today, they have no spirit. The broken vessel of spirit has after thousands of years since the fall turned to dust from which it was formed. Similarly a body of flesh decomposes and decays after a time period, I suspect that the dead spiritual body has totally decayed, rotted and ceased to exist. A new born baby and all natural born humans have no spirit, so it is impossible for a human to have soulish life (emotions, thoughts, volition, etc.) within the spiritual world.

This has implications not thoroughly discussed in my book. Before you ask, I’ll volunteer
an explanation. I don't believe that dead babies immediately go to heaven as a dead Christian does. Dead babies have no operable body and no functioning spirit vessel. They cannot contain soul. They have no life. With no life holding vessel after mortal death, dead babies only go to the grave and await the resurrection. However, I do think that dead babies, non cognitive retarded people, and others disadvantaged to make a decision for Christ will be resurrected like all people and I trust that they will receive mercy and grace for eternal life in the kingdom. The only way to go to heaven when you die as a spirit for the intermediate period is to experience the new birth. You must have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. However, that does not preclude God from granting eternal life in the resurrection to all who have not directly cursed Him. It is my belief that this understanding helps clear up an oft argued soteriological issue between exclusivism and inclusivism.

The dead spirit syndrome is the current phase of most humans. Dichotomists correctly observe that man is a two part being with no third element in existence. Dichotomy has an element of truth, but they have not understood the big picture of spiritual existence outside of soulish life.

Woodward claims (along with Watchman Nee) that the faculties of the spirit are conscience, intuition and communion (p22, 138). I respectfully disagree. Like the body, spirit is a shell. Life giving thoughts of all types are in the soul. All types of thoughts and faculties reside exclusively in the soul. The spirit is only a vessel as the body is only a vessel. When the body dies, the faculties of thought and emotion vanish; likewise when Adam’s spirit died all spiritual faculties or senses ceased.

Conscience is that little voice inside your head telling you right from wrong. Conscience is the knowledge of good and evil. This ability was bestowed upon Adam when he ate the forbidden fruit. Adam gained the knowledge of good and evil when he sinned. Conscience happened AFTER the spirit died, so conscience cannot be part of the spirit. It must come from the soul. Further evidence that conscience comes from the soul is the observed fact the non Christians frequently have an active conscience. I personally know Muslims and Hindus who adamantly deny that Jesus is the Christ or that he died for our sins, yet they have a strong sense of morality. I also know many non-believers, just secular Americans that are not religious or spiritual in anyway. They are probably agnostic in that they are too consumed with this life to bother paying attention to God. I have no reason to suspect that they could be spirit filled believers. Yet these people clearly understand right from wrong. They may deny that God’s word applies toward them personally; but on a social level they clearly have a conscience.

I believe that conscience is primarily an activity of the Holy Spirit. The mind of both unbelievers and believers alike is stimulated, pricked and motivated by the Holy Spirit toward repentance. This is what we call conscience. The conscience is not perfect. Even Christians do not have a perfect conscience. I humbly and repentantly speak from personal experience. I have at times done a rude behavior that hurt someone. I didn’t even know that I had hurt them until later when it was pointed out to me. Of course then, after the fact, I felt bad. But my point is that my own conscience missed the insult. It is imperfect. Since the Holy Spirit is absolutely perfect and since my inner saved spirit is in perfect standing with God and without condemnation, I conclude that my conscience must be within the soul/mind realm, which is still (before the resurrection) imperfect and flawed.

Intuition is a premonition or foreknowledge. By its very definition, intuition is KNOWING something before it happens. By its very definition, since intuition includes knowledge and thoughts, a priori, it must come from the soul. Again case examples are plentiful of nonbelievers exhibiting intuition. Even animals are reported to have some level of
intuition, as rats are seen migrating before a storm and dogs travel cross country to their owners. Being a born again believer is not a prerequisite for intuition. Since it is impossible to possess a living spirit apart from Jesus Christ and since the Scripture repeatedly claims that man is DEAD in his sins, intuition must come from the soul, not from the spirit.

Conscience and intuition are not a ‘faculty’ of the spirit as sometimes claimed. They are a thought. They come from the mind, which is only possessed by the living. Instead of focusing on which faculties separate humans from animals, we should focus on which faculties distinguish us from non-believers since Scripture is clear that their spirit is dead. Unsaved people have no functioning spirit, so if a trait is ever exhibited by non-believers then it cannot come from the spirit. It must be from soul.

The final “faculty” of the spirit as mentioned by Woodward and Nee is communion. I agree but would not call it a faculty. I prefer to call communion a ‘sense’ of the spirit. The spirit and body are parallel vessels. The body has 5 senses that allow it to relate to its environment (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell), so in parallel fashion the spirit has the sense of communion. Communion relates to the spiritual realm, as the 5 physical senses relate to the earthly realm. Communion means to have a relationship with God and to know God, to understand God, to listen to God, to obey God. In unregenerate man communion is lost because the spirit is absolutely, without wordplay, dead.

Communion is renewed at the new birth. This is the beauty of the trichotomist view. It fully addresses the three ontologically different aspects of human constitution. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that all humans have the same make up. Christians alone have a living spirit. Christians alone are a triune creature. There are two species of humans: those filled with the Holy Ghost and alive spiritually and those not filled with the Holy Ghost and dead within the spirit realm.

Jesus said “You must be born again” (John 3:7). Paul said that we are a “new creation in Christ” (2Cor 5:17). The Holy Spirit “quickens us with Christ” (Eph 2:5). When a person comes to repentance and accepts Jesus as personal savior, a miracle of creation REALLY, ontologically, happens. The spirit that had originally died is reborn. A new spirit is created and placed within the new Christian. We are “quickened”, or brought to life and start to move and wiggle. This is not just a figure of speech for a heightened emotional state. Something actually happens within the spiritual realm. The Christian’s spirit vessel is made whole. The spirit vessel is resurrected as Christ was resurrected.
and made suitable for the filling up of soul. Of course we already have a soul, it is the nature of life (our thoughts emotions, willpower, etc). So our current life force is poured into the brand new spirit vessel. This is more than a healing or repairing of our spirit. Those words imply that the spirit was previously alive but sickly and limping along, the more Scriptural description is that the spirit is made new and fresh from scratch, a new creation, born again, a new life. The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit makes man’s spirit alive. Of course, this indicates that before this new work of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of man was truly dead.

Scripture also says that when a person submits to God their soul is washed, cleansed, healed, and repaired. The soul is the thoughts and personality. It existed in evil vitality before conversion. Our thoughts were dirty, but God can change our mind/heart/soul/life. At the new birth, the soul/personality/life force is given realignment toward godly behavior and actions.

Since a Christian has a reality of existence within the spiritual realm, at death our soul (personality) does not cease to exist. When the body vessel succumbs to corruption and is destroyed by disease and old age, then the body vessel can no longer contain the soul. Life vanishes in the body. Life is the evidence of soul, life is soul. Christians, however, have another working vessel, the spirit. Since the spirit is parallel with the body and of equal significance, life is still resident within the spirit after physical death. Christians go to heaven in the spirit to be with Jesus after bodily death. Our soul is our thoughts, personality, and emotions. It still exists within the spiritual realm. I am me and you are you. Your personality does not change after death.

A spiritual existence is however, not the destiny of mankind. We were created as bodily creatures and a bodily physical existence was deemed as “very good” after the 6th day of creation (Gen 1:31). Our hope is in the resurrection. A spiritual only existence after death is a fringe benefit but this is not the promise of eternal life.

Notice on my diagram above that body and spirit are totally separated and do not overlap. This is because even though as believers we have been given a new vessel in the spirit realm, we still dwell in a fallen unredeemed cosmos. The spiritual dimension is still divorced and disjunct from the tangible bodily dimensions. 1 Cor 13 is speaking to a Christian congregation of born again believers in Corinth, Paul says that today we (believers) see spiritual truth darkly as through a dim mirror with a bad reflection, but in the resurrection we shall see face to face. Today even though Christians have a restored sense of communion in the spirit, we do not have full unlimited spiritual understanding. Good Christians, spirit filled and alive in Christ, can honestly and earnestly disagree with each other on the nature and meaning of spiritual topics. Clearly we do not yet know as we are known by God and we do not see face to face. That promise awaits to be fulfilled in the resurrection at the end of days. We live in a world of inaugurated eschatology, but still not perfectly fulfilled.

In the end, at the resurrection, paradise will be regained. The curse will be lifted and the spiritual realm will be merged, synthesized and holistically wrapped together with the bodily realm as it had been in the beginning before the fall of Adam. The recipe for the resurrection is equal measures of body and spirit. A materialistic world wherein the body dominates must be rejected, for God is a spirit and we will be much like God in New Heaven-New Earth (NHNE). A spiritualistic world where the physical dimensions are absent or minimized must also be rejected by the bible student, our eternal existence is not a platonic, heavenly, wispy world of spirits. We are promised a glorified resurrected body to dwell on earth forever in harmony with our Creator.

Several bible verses appear at first reading to claim that non-spirit filled people still have...
a vital cognitive spirit. These are frequently misunderstood. If true that would blow my entire theory and book out of the water. However, I think all of these verses are best translated as "breath", not "spirit."

Ecc 3:21 (NKJV) : “Who knows the spirit [rauch] of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit [rauch] of the animal, which goes down to the earth?”

When read in context don’t forget verse 19-20 (NKJV):

“For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath [rauch]; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust.”

Notice that NKJV translates the Hebrew word rauch differently in verse 19 than in verse 21. I prefer the NASB which translates verses 19 and 21 consistently. All animals and people have breath. Breath and/or wind is the primary and basic translation for the Hebrew word rauch. Why does NKJV change the translation of the same word rauch from breath to spirit half way through the stanza of this poem?

Jay’s midrashic targum (ancient interpretive paraphrase popular during the 2nd temple period) would say something like this:

Men and animals all have the same breath of life for we were all formed from the dust by haShem. Men and animals both die the same death. We both go to the same rotten grave with stench and maggots. The same fate of sheol (poetic for 'grave') befalls both me and my flock of sheep (Ps 49:14). The animal's breath goes down into the earth, never to be seen again; However, man’s breath during these ancient days has the hope for a Savior to redeem us from the grave. Today, of course 2800yrs later, that Savior has come. What was expectation for Qoheleth (author of Ecclesiastes) is a reality for us.

Similarly other verses mentioned using rauch have been mistranslated (mostly by KJV and corrected with modern translations) as "spirit" when it should read the simple understanding of breath or wind. Dan 7:15 “I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit [rauch] within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.” Notice the parallel: breath of my body and visions in my head were hurting the poor confused Daniel.

Deut 2:30 God hardened the rauch of Sihon king of Heshbon and made his heart obstinate. Again notice the parallel. Breath is hardened and heart is obstinate. Rauch in Deut 2:30 should be translated the breath of Sihon. Sihon, the Amorite, did not possess a working triune spirit of a born again believer.

Psalm 78:8(NKJV) Asaph encourages his people to not “be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not set its heart aright, And whose spirit [rauch] was not faithful to God.” Once again, as so common in Hebrew poetry, notice the parallel. The heart and the breath are metonyms for the life of the soul. This is not a doctrinal verse for the trichotomy of human constitution. It is declaring that the ancestors of Israel were stubborn and rebellious, a characteristic of soulish thoughts not of the spiritual dimension.

Ecc 12:7(NKJV) "And the spirit [rauch] will return to God who gave it.” Again this should read that the breath of life comes from God. In context read verse 6 and 7 together: “Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain,
Or the wheel broken at the well.
7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,
And the spirit [rauch] will return to God who gave it.

At death, the vessel of the body is broken, and the breath of life evaporates. Numerous verses translate rauch as spirit, when they should more correctly be translated simply as breath. You will not find language of vitality and life within the trichotomous spirit for the pre Pentecost believers or the unsaved.

Similarly NT authors used the Greek word pneuma (literally wind/breath, sometimes spirit or Holy Spirit) in the same fashion as their Hebrew culture used rauch.

James 2:26 “For as the body without the spirit [pneuma] is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Luke 1:46-7” And Mary said: “My soul [psyche] glorifies the Lord And my spirit [pneuma] has rejoiced in God my Savior.”

James is simply stating the obvious: a corpse without breath is a cadaver. It is simply not true that a person’s physical body without a living spirit is dead. Wicked people are evidence to the contrary. The young virgin Mary in the magnificat canticle is proclaiming that every part of her life and breath worships God. “Breath” is a better translation for this genre of verses that appear to claim vitality and life within the non-resurrected spirit vessel of humans. OT saints (like young Mary) did not yet have a resurrected spirit, because Jesus is the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18, Rev 1:5). For details about the important doctrine of Jesus being the first human to receive an afterlife, see my book Dead Soul Syndrome.

Wrapping up, my proposal is that man is best described as body, soul and spirit as trichotomist studies suggest. One of the first reasons to consider this theory is that it mimics the trinity of God Himself. Remember, man was created in the image of God. God’s trinity is best expressed and understood as three persons or aspects of the Divine nature that work in perfect unity and non-separable cohesion. It is inappropriate to attempt to dissect the character of God. It is impossible to thresh the Father from the Spirit or the Son. The Trinity works and exists as a monad unity. It is far more important to acknowledge the manifesto of the Shema “Our God is One”, then to attempt to understand the dynamics of the individual personalities of God’s internal makeup. Likewise it is a grave mistake to amputate a single aspect of humanity- eg: soul from body, body from spirit or spirit from soul. Monists are absolutely correct that we must deal with man as a unified structure and appeal to all facets in synchronicity. Just as it would be wrong to elevate the Son above the Father or the Spirit above any other facet of the Godhead, or even the Father above His cohorts, so too it is a mistake to elevate the human spirit or soul above the body. That practice leads to dualism and Gnosticism.

NT Wright and others have expressed biblical anthropology in terms of ‘differentiated unity.’ Although Professor Wright neither denies nor confirms trichotomy, I very much like his endgame. Our world and created being are holistic. Isolating one facet of the created order, especially the spiritual, leads to disproportionate regard within platonic forms and usually a neglect of physical needs.

In conclusion, I suggest that Adam had been created body, soul and spirit. The three facets are ontologically distinct, yet holistically merged into a single man. The body is the flesh and blood which serves as a vessel to contain mind and personality, which is the biblical definition of the soul. Our modern English words have become confused so that today 'soul' typically means the immaterial aspect that communes with God. More correctly, that is the third aspect of trichotism, the spirit. However, upon the fall, the spirit died. Unlike God, man is finite and destroyable. From the fall till Messiah came,
humans limped along under the curse of sin with death reigning over all. Even righteous Jewish saints, although fully forgiven, were not resurrected from spiritual death before Jesus. The New Birth brought the baptismal power of the Holy Spirit to believers. After Pentecost believers became once again whole and trichotomously perfect with a living spirit. Today, Christians have a real ontological power base within the heavenly angelic dimension. This is not just emotional hype. Heaven is a real place geographically. It exists within a spiritual, currently unseen, dimension. It is within this realm that all believers have an existing presence of spirit dwelling before the throne of God. Ultimately in the resurrection all things will become seen. Heaven and earth, spirit and body will merge in glorified power. Our eternal life will be within a physical resurrected body with amazing spiritual power. For complete details of everything discussed, please see my book.

I hope this essay helps to answer some of the similarities and differences between monism, dichotism, and trichotism and my proposed synthesis of them all. With this background and vocabulary of biblical anthropology, I pray that a careful reading of my book, Dead Soul Syndrome, will result in agreement on the major points. If you have additional questions or observations please do not hesitate to contact me.

May God our Father bless your bible study effort and reveal Himself to you by the glorious power of His Spirit, and may the breath of Christ be upon you (John 20:22),

Jay Altieri, Columbus, TX

www.deadsoulsyndrome.com

Sources:


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