THE BIBLE AND THE SOUL

WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT SOULS, SPIRITS, HEARTS, MINDS, LIVERS, BODIES, HEAVEN AND OTHER THINGS (INCLUDING THE INTERMEDIATE STATE)

BILL WILDER
The Big Questions
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Monism or Dualism?
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Body

Soul?
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Soul?

Where’s Life?
The Big Questions

Monism or Dualism?

Body

Soul?

Where's Life?
Cooper, p. 43: “...the Old Testament picture of humanity positively seems to rule out dualism. Soul and spirit, *nephesh* and *ruach*, seem either to refer to the whole psychophysical person or otherwise to the energizing life-force given by God. Neither refers to an immaterial entity. And regarding the division of labor among the various capacities of human nature, there is no systematic distinction between physical and spiritual organs whatsoever.”
What about Sheol: Monism or Dualism?

How should one interpret Sheol in these passages?

- **Ps 6:6** “For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can praise you?
- **Ps 30:10** “What profit is there in my blood, when I descend to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?
- **Ps 88:10-12** “Do you show your wonders to the dead (rephaim)? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Is your love declared in the grave (Sheol), our faithfulness in Destruction (Abaddon)? Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?”
- **Ps 115:17-18** “…it is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to silence; it is we who extol the Lord both now and forevermore.”
- **Isa 38:18** “…the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.”
1 Samuel 28:11-16

11 The woman replied, "Who is it that I should bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up for me Samuel."

12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out loudly. The woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!"

13 The king said to her, "Don't be afraid! What have you seen?" The woman replied to Saul, "I have seen one like a god coming up from the ground!"

14 He said to her, "What about his appearance?" She said, "An old man is coming up! He is wrapped in a robe!"

Then Saul realized it was Samuel, and he bowed his face toward the ground and kneeled down. 15 Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" Saul replied, "I am terribly troubled! The Philistines are fighting against me and God has turned away from me. He does not answer me – not by the prophets nor by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what I should do." 16 Samuel said, "Why are you asking me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and has become your enemy?"
Isaiah 14:9-10

9 Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come; it rouses the shades to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth; it raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations. 10 All of them will answer and say to you: 'You too have become as weak as we! You have become like us!'

Isaiah 14:11

Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps; maggots are laid as a bed beneath you, and worms are your covers.

Isaiah 14:18-19

18 All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own tomb; 19 but you are cast out, away from your grave, like a loathed branch, clothed with the slain, those pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit, like a dead body trampled underfoot.
Cooper, p. 54-55: “In terms of location, it is at the bottom or lowest level of Hebrew cosmology, down in or under the earth. It is ‘the Pit’, reached by going into the earth, usually through the grave. It is the great subterranean chamber into which all graves eventually merge. Deep down, it is as far away as one can get in the Israelite world-picture from the heaven of heavens, the dwelling place of God.

And it is hidden from the green earth, the realm of God’s dealings with humankind. Not surprisingly, it is a place of deep darkness and gloom, cut off from the light. Its atmosphere is damp and dank, slimy and foul. Sheol has gates and bars which prevent those who enter it from escaping. It is a prison with many rooms and beds. A number of scholars have pointed out its similarities with the Greek underworld, Hades.”
Ratzinger, p. 80-81: “Part of this widespread primitive conception of death, to which Israel has not yet made any distinctive contribution of her own, is that death is not simply annihilation. The dead man goes down into Sheol, where he leads a kind of un-life among the shades. As a shade, he can make an appearance in the world above, and is thus perceived as dreadful and dangerous. Nonetheless, he is essentially cut off from the land of the living, from dear life,”

banished into a noncommunication zone where life is destroyed precisely because relationship is impossible. The full extent of Sheol’s abyss of nothingness is seen from the fact that Yahweh is not there, nor is he praised there. In relation to him too, there is a complete lack of communication in Sheol. Death is thus an unending imprisonment. It is simultaneously being and nonbeing, somehow still existence and yet no longer life.”
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The Old Testament is resoundingly this worldly. The fullest possible existence for a human being is to live an earthly life as God created it to be lived. Health, sufficient material goods, enjoyment of marriage and family, meaningful work, standing in the community, freedom from one’s enemies, and above all, walking in integrity with the God of the covenant—the Israelite who enjoyed these blessings could exclaim, ‘It doesn’t get any better than this (Cooper, p. 37).’"
In the Old Testament, human life is physical and earthly. Old Testament anthropology is typically synthetic and holistic. The conception of Sheol in the Old Testament is evidence for existence (if not exactly life) after death.
Ezek 37:1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. 2 And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. 3 And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, Thou knowest." 4 Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'" 5 "Thus says the Lord God to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 6 'And I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'" 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew, and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life."'" 10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Isa 26:19 Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

Dan 12:2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.
Intertestamental Literature
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- Sirach
  - Written by Jesus, son of Sirach, in ~200 B.C.
  - Also known as *Wisdom of Sirach, Ben Sira, Ecclesiasticus*
  - Accepted
    - as of full divine authority by the Roman Catholic Church
    - as useful for “example of life and instruction of manners” but not “to establish any doctrine” by the Anglican Church
    - and as not “to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings” among Presbyterians.
Sirach 14:16-19
16 Give, and take, and indulge yourself ("your soul/psyche"), because in Hades one cannot look for luxury. 17 All living beings ("all flesh/sarx") become old like a garment, for the decree from of old is, "You must die! 18 Like abundant leaves on a spreading tree that sheds some and puts forth others, so are the generations of flesh and blood: one dies and another is born. 19 Every work decays and ceases to exist, and the one who made it will pass away with it.

Sirach 17:27-28 27 Who will sing praises to the Most High in Hades (Sheol) in place of the living who give thanks? 28 From the dead, as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving has ceased; those who are alive and well sing the Lord's praises.

Sirach 38:20-23 20 Do not give your heart to grief; drive it away, and remember your own end. 21 Do not forget, there is no coming back; you do the dead no good, and you injure yourself. 22 Remember his fate, for yours is like it; yesterday it was his, and today it is yours. 23 When the dead is at rest, let his remembrance rest too, and be comforted for him when his spirit has departed.

See Cooper, p. 76; Wright, pp. 136-137.
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2 Maccabees

- Written as a summary of a larger work by Jason Cyrene in ~100 B.C. or later
- Accepted
  - as of full divine authority by the Roman Catholic Church
  - as useful for “example of life and instruction of manners” but not “to establish any doctrine” by the Anglican Church
  - and as not “to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings” among Presbyterians.
2 MACCABEES 7 It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, "What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors." Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."

10 After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands. And said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit ("soul"/psyche), for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

20 The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath (pneuma), nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath (pneuma) back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws."

37 I, like my brothers, give up body and life ("soul"/psyche) for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation. So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord.

21 After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They . . . asked him, "Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, "No." Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. When he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!"

33 After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. When he was near death, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."

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