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Steffaniak, Jordan L.

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Retrieving Reformed Philosophy of Mind

Herman Bavinck's Eclectic Harmonism as Gateway to Neo-Aristotelianism

Jordan L. Steffaniak | ORCID: 0000-0002-0102-1511

PhD Student, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom

jlsteffaniak@gmail.com

Abstract

The Philosophy of Mind is an ever-burgeoning field of research, yet there are few contemporary confessionally Reformed examples of serious philosophical engagement. I argue that Herman Bavinck is a worthy candidate for theological and philosophical retrieval. I argue that while Bavinck attempted to ward off the growing popularity of materialism in his day, his own philosophical commitments provide a gateway to several versions of it. In so arguing I attempt to retrieve his insights and formulate them into a coherent structure that is both theologically serious and philosophically interesting. I argue that he provides several conceptual resources that would be of value to those committed to various non-reductive physicalist proposals such as hylemorphic animalism.

Keywords

Animalism – hylemorphism – reformed – Bavinck – anthropology

1 Introducing Herman Bavinck as a Worthy Conversation Partner

While the philosophy of mind is a burgeoning field in contemporary philosophy and theology, rarely does one consult theologically 'Reformed' voices for companionship. As Paul Helm has lamented, 'there is very little in print on human nature in Reformed thought.'¹ Contemporary Reformed thinkers appear

¹ Paul Helm, *Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), xi.

to be preoccupied with doctrinal loci outside of the metaphysics of human persons. What, after all, does Geneva have to do with Athens? Indeed, many modern Reformed thinkers happily ignore ontology altogether since the Bible ‘never thinks in such categories.’² They work from ‘a different set of questions and presuppositions.’³ And oftentimes this has resulted in charges of having a low appreciation of the human being in general.⁴

But this has not historically been the case. Reformed thinkers of ages past were on the cutting edge of philosophical theology and related metaphysical areas. A prime example is the towering Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck. He invested significant resources into the metaphysics and psychology of human persons that has remained largely untouched despite the current explosive growth in research on his thinking. He has even been called a ‘pioneer in psychology’ which gives even more reason to consider his insights.⁵ Due to this lack, I hope to modestly begin filling a void in Bavinck scholarship and retrieve several of his most interesting insights for contemporary appropriation and consideration. While Bavinck does not traffic in the contemporary terminology, and there is always the tendency to be anachronistic, I will argue that his methodological program and metaphysical claims serve as a gateway to contemporary versions of Neo-Aristotelianism such as emergent dualism, Thomistic hylemorphism, animalism, and constitutionalism.⁶ For those seek-

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- 2 Michael S. Horton, ‘Image and Office: Human Personhood and the Covenant’, in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, ed. by Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 45–69 (181, 198); Helm, *Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards*, 31. There likely is historical precedence for rejecting philosophical contemplation on the nature of the person, depending on who primarily influences these thinkers. For example, Helm notes that Calvin is ‘somewhat ambivalent with respect to the value of philosophical discussions about the soul.’
- 3 Kelly M. Kapic, ‘Anthropology’, in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 165–93 (166). Surely it is natural and appropriate to focus on the ‘image of God’ when it comes to thinking theologically about the human person. But to assume it is the only doctrinal matrix necessary to understand humanity is shortsighted. Even those who nod toward the metaphysical regarding the image apparently find it acceptable to ignore contemporary and ancient philosophical thought on the human person.
- 4 Gijsbert van den Brink and Aza Goudriaan, ‘The Image of God in Reformed Orthodoxy. Soundings in the Development of an Anthropological Key Concept’, *Perichoresis* 14/3 (2016), 81–96 (87), <https://doi.org/10.1515/perc-2016-0017>.
- 5 James Eglinton, *Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), xvii.
- 6 See Christopher Hauser, ‘Persons, Souls, and Life After Death’, in *Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics and the Theology of Nature*, ed. by William M. R. Simpson, Robert C. Koons, and James Orr (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 245–66 (245). Hauser categorizes all four of these as ‘Neo-Aristotelian’.

ing historical dialogue partners for such anthropological programs, Bavinck stands as a serious resource.

My argument follows three broad steps. First, I argue that Bavinck's methodological program is given to contemporary advancement and appropriation. His theological and philosophical eclecticism serve the contemporary thinker well. Second, I argue that the resources Bavinck provides are ripe for support of Neo-Aristotelian proposals—even those traditionally categorized as non-reductive physicalism. This section includes a summary of his key metaphysical insights followed by their mapping onto contemporary philosophy of mind discussions. Third, I attempt to ward off various objections to Bavinck's construction since this will serve to clarify the resources he provides for the contemporary thinker.

For the sake of clarity, my goal is *not* to advocate Bavinck as the perfect solution to the contemporary philosophy of mind debate. He is not without his share of quandaries and frustrations. Nor is this essay *primarily* historical in nature. Its goal is *not* to reconstruct Bavinck in his own socio-historical context and perfectly represent a systematized version of the entirety of *his* beliefs. Rather, the goal *is* to provide a retrieval of Bavinck as a historical dialogue partner worth consulting for contemporary appropriation.

2 Methodological Eclecticism and Modern Theology

As a retrieval project, the end goal of examining Bavinck's ideas is *not* restoration or reprimination. The end goal *is* a creative usage for the present.⁷ So, while Bavinck functions as a resource to receive he also functions as a resource to inspire. And while Bavinck himself is a robustly and distinctively Reformed confessional thinker his methodological program is amiable and amendable to such visions of retrieval that include robust appropriation and application of modern theological and philosophical insights. For Bavinck, modern insights and appropriations are not diametrically opposed enemies.⁸

Cory Brock has argued at length, through examining Bavinck's usage of Friedrich Schleiermacher, that Bavinck is 'orthodox yet modern'. While Bavinck is resolutely committed to his orthodox and confessional tradition, modern

7 See Gavin Ortlund, *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals: Why We Need Our Past to Have a Future* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 17–18, 25, 45, 71.

8 Cory C. Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Use of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 5.

theology is given space to advance dogmatic theology, so long as it refrains from contradicting the tradition.⁹ He blends, as Brock and Sutanto put it, ‘principled orthodoxy and irenic learning’.¹⁰ He is able to blend these two worlds because there is no pristine era of theology. Repristinication of any specific era of theology is a fool’s errand. The goal of the dogmatic thinker is re-appropriation, and, thus, modern insights and modifications are *necessary*.¹¹ As Brock puts it, ‘Dogmatics looks back but pays attention above all to today.’¹² This vision of dogmatics fits well with Bavinck’s own claims regarding retrieval:

With Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli we differentiate that which is essential and truly reformed, from that of the spirit of the age. We do not return to them after the fact, to repristinicate them and their work as much as to respect their value in general ... but through their teaching, better than even they, to hold fast to and speak out a reformation principle ... not to return to them but to go forward from them is our motto.¹³

Herein Bavinck is clear that the goal is *not* repristinication—not a return—but a going forward. Thus, Bavinck’s own methodology encourages such contemporary retrieval. Recounting Bavinck’s own methodological program is important to show that attempts at retrieving him would be encouraged by Bavinck himself.

But it is not only Bavinck’s posture toward modern retrieval that is amiable to my goal of reaping his anthropological insights. It is his theological and philosophical eclecticism. Because Bavinck is not beholden to a single philosophical tradition, he is especially amendable to contemporary appropriations that have different philosophical presuppositions. Consider his claim on the need for a specific tradition of philosophy for the Christian faith:

Theology is not in need of a specific philosophy. It is not per se hostile to any philosophical system and does not, a priori and without criticism, give priority to the philosophy of Plato or of Kant, or vice versa. But it

9 Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 19, 267.

10 Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, ‘Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Eclecticism: On Catholicity, Consciousness and Theological Epistemology’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70/3 (2017), 310–22 (311), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S003693061700031X>.

11 Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 54; Brock and Sutanto, ‘Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Eclecticism’, 312.

12 Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 270.

13 Quoted in Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 132.

brings along its own criteria, tests all philosophy by them, and takes over what it deems true and useful. What it needs is philosophy in general.¹⁴

Thus, a retrieval of Bavinck's insights is not only pragmatically useful for current thinkers but is in harmony with Bavinck's own theological and methodological vision.

3 The Metaphysical Insights of Herman Bavinck

Bavinck has several metaphysical commitments regarding human persons that I intend to sketch here before showing how one might retrieve them in service of Neo-Aristotelianism. Now, it is not overly novel to categorize Bavinck as a hylemorphist.¹⁵ And while Bavinck explicitly denies 'materialism', which I take to mean *reductive* materialism, and often relies on classical Aristotelian, Augustinian, and Thomistic categories, I suggest that his exposition lays the groundwork for other metaphysical schemes besides hylemorphism such as emergent dualism, animalism, and constitutionalism.¹⁶

Before explicating his view in full I need to briefly clarify Bavinck's usage of 'body' and 'soul' versus the technical usage of 'body' and 'soul' in hylemorphism. Technically for hylemorphism the 'body' as we think of it (e.g., the human organism) is both corporeal 'body' and incorporeal 'soul' *together*. However, Bavinck and other theologians often use 'body' to denote *only* the corporeal aspect in contrast to the incorporeal soul. I will use Bavinck's preferred terminology as much as possible, but it is important to note this distinction as I explain his position. He does not use the technical vocabulary of contemporary philosophers of mind.

3.1 *Bavinck's Unified Essentialist Harmonism*

Bavinck's bedrock assumption of anthropology is that humans are animals that are soul and body together.¹⁷ This is what he calls 'Harmonism'. It is the belief that soul and body together form the human organism. So, Bavinck says, 'Human beings are animals, sensual animal like beings.'¹⁸ Both body and soul

14 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. by John Bolt, trans. by John Vriend, 4 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:609.

15 For example, see Helm, *Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards*, 253.

16 Herman Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', ed. by John Bolt, trans. by Jack Vanden Born, Nelson D. Kloosterman, and John Bolt, *Bavinck Review* 9 (2018), 22–24.

17 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 49.

18 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 49.

are essential to the person because together they are the human organism *simpliciter*.¹⁹ In explicating the role of the soul and body, Bavinck says:

The soul is the form, the moving power, the foundation of the body; and the body is the matter, the material, and the possibility of soul. They are as intimately united as the wax and its printed image, as the statue's marble and its figure.²⁰

The printed image cannot exist without the wax, nor can the statue's figure exist without the marble. Therefore, the human person is a *unified* whole made of two differing essential aspects—body and soul. But it is also an *essentialist* approach. Neither the body nor the soul can exist apart from the other. They are essential to the human person.

Bavinck also grounds his unified essentialist approach to body-soul in the image of God. He claims that the person does not *have* but *is* the image.²¹ Considering that Bavinck thinks the whole person is the image, including body and soul, the fact that he explicitly says the person *is* the image rather than *has* the image is crucial.²² The body is not something the human merely has or inhabits. It is essential to who he is. Bavinck says, 'the body is an organism of the soul which inspirits, spiritualizes, eternalizes, and governs it'.²³ And the soul for Bavinck 'must, by virtue of its nature, inhabit a body', thus showing his commitment to a material substantial form—humans are not essentially immaterial and accidentally material. For example, he says that the union between body and soul 'is so intimate that one nature, one person, one self is the subject of both and of all their activities'.²⁴ Elsewhere he suggests the body and soul union actually constitutes a 'third nature', that is human nature.²⁵ Again he elaborates on this, claiming that 'the joining of dust and breath does not cause the two to exist dualistically next to each other but produces something new, a living unity, a living soul'.²⁶ Consider a fuller section from Bavinck making a similar claim:

19 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:599.

20 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 49.

21 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:554.

22 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:561.

23 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, ed. by John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 46.

24 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:559.

25 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 48.

26 Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, 46.

We take 'soul' to mean the inner life-principle of an organic being, the basis of its existence and its movement. Angels are spirits (Heb. 1:14). God is also a spirit (John 4:24). But people are souls. In them the spirit is organized as a soul—that is, the life-principle of a material organism. When the Scriptures tell us that 'the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature,' [Gen. 2:7] they cut off every Platonic or Cartesian dualism. The person as soul cannot be outside of the body. This applies to his essence as well and, thus, to the image of God. Spiritualism and asceticism must be rejected no less than materialism.²⁷

While Bavinck does say that people 'are souls' he is not predicating an identity relation between the person and the soul. Persons are not identical to souls in a Leibnizian fashion. This is clear from the remaining portion of the quote. The soul is but a 'life-principle of a material organism' and his understanding cuts 'off every Platonic or Cartesian dualism'. Indeed, the person cannot exist outside the body. What Bavinck intends to communicate is that the soul animates the matter of the organism and is essentially united to it. He is not intending to advance a vague property dualism or the 'holistic dualism' of John Cooper.²⁸ For Bavinck humans just are animals which are composites of matter and form. The soul is the 'life-principle' of the material organism. And the Scriptures for Bavinck (e.g., Genesis 2:7) cut off every Platonic or Cartesian dualism.²⁹ Given these claims, Bavinck appears to support a form of dualism but denies any form that allows for natural separability of body and soul.

3.2 *Bavinck's Unity of Consciousness Argument*

Bavinck's second core contribution is the argument from consciousness for an immaterial part of the human person (e.g., the soul). Bavinck rejects a purely reductive materialism because it cannot account for consciousness. Bavinck repeatedly explains that the unconscious cannot be the root of consciousness, likewise what is lifeless cannot be the root of life.³⁰ Specifically, he argues that self-consciousness *cannot* be physically explained.³¹ Such consciousness can-

27 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 48.

28 *Contra* Thiago M. Silva, 'Herman Bavinck's Anthropology and the Recent Body-Soul Debate', *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9/2 (2017), 226–40 (227, 238).

29 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 48.

30 Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. by John Bolt, trans. by Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 168.

31 Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, 44.

not be explained by the physical because humans are only able to know the external world through our own consciousness.³² Since consciousness is not purely physical, cannot be reduced, and cannot be grounded in the unconscious, something non-physical and conscious must be postulated—hence, the soul.³³

The argument at bottom is that mereological aggregates are not the right sort of things to ground consciousness.³⁴ So he posits the soul as the faculty and potency that produces psychic phenomena.³⁵ Even today there is robust debate on the unity of consciousness. Here Bavinck is ahead of his time in arguing for non-reductive arguments based on consciousness. Now, it is important to note that Bavinck does not think the soul is identical to consciousness. Consciousness is but a property of the soul. The soul is an agent, not a being. Therefore, his understanding is a return to an older theory of powers and habits that would take us too far afield.³⁶ It is sufficient to say that Bavinck provides resources for those that seek to refute reductive physicalism and for those that desire to articulate a robust argument for the unity of consciousness.

3.3 *Bavinck's Theology of Mortality*

Another insight from Bavinck is his argument that the whole person dies at death. Therefore, the only hope in death is the resurrection of the body. Bavinck says, 'after death, soul and body also remain connected, albeit in a different way. The soul does not die nor does the body, but the person dies and remains a ghost and shadow of their former manner of existence.'³⁷ Such a claim may sound odd given intuitions about death likely assuming the body *does* die and dualist intuitions that likely assume the soul *does not* die since death is supposedly only a biological event. But even in contemporary medical philosophy, while there is lively debate as to *when* death occurs, whether that be biological, psychological, or sociological, there is no debate that whatever death is and whenever it happens it is *irreversible* (at least, physically irreversible in all normal cases apart from a divine miracle).³⁸ Bavinck's thought fits well with

32 Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, 175.

33 Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, 169.

34 J. P. Moreland, 'Substance Dualism and the Unity of Consciousness', in *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, ed. by Jonathan J. Loose, J. L. Menuge, and J. P. Moreland (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 184–207 (188).

35 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 66.

36 Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, 196.

37 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 36.

38 D. Alan Shewmon, 'The Brain and Somatic Integration: Insights Into the Standard Biological Rationale for Equating "Brain Death" With Death', *Journal of Medicine and Philoso-*

this accepted claim. It is the *irreversible* brutality of death that rings true. No physical or metaphysical part is left untouched by the cold and ghastly hands of death.

For example, Bavinck says, ‘there is no room for a view that permits only the body to die and comforts itself with the immortality of the soul. The whole person dies Not only his body but also his soul is in a state of death and belongs to the underworld.’³⁹ What then survives death in the intermediate state? His thoughts appear reminiscent of Christina Van Dyke, who claims that ‘in the case of separated souls, I think the right thing to say is that I wholly cease to exist at death, although something interestingly related to me persists.’⁴⁰ Death is the destruction of harmony between body and soul—cutting the person off from nature.⁴¹ In death, the person is deprived of the body—not liberated. Bavinck thinks, ‘this incorporeal existence is not, as dualism must hold, a gain but a loss, not an increase but a diminution of being, inasmuch as the body is integral to our humanity.’⁴² It is only by hope in the resurrection that the person is truly liberated from death—death being the prison rather than the body.⁴³ He says that ‘Scripture teaches us not a naked immortality of spectral souls but the eternal life of individual persons.’⁴⁴ Therefore, the grace of the glorified state does not undo nature by removing bodies but sets its hope on the resurrection to bring renewal and consecration of nature.⁴⁵

3.4 *Bavinck’s Supernatural Separability*

The fourth aspect of significance is that Bavinck believes the soul is separable from the body at death only due to God’s omnipotent work. While such a claim generates *prima facie* worries for his essentialist harmonist approach, my aim here is positive presentation. Whatever worries arise will be considered in the final section. For Bavinck, the doctrine of the intermediate state, where body and soul are separate, is difficult to understand and leaves many unanswered

phy 26/5 (2001), 457–78 (458); David DeGrazia, ‘The Definition of Death’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/death-definition/>.

39 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:600.

40 Christina Van Dyke, ‘I See Dead People’, in *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy, Volume 2*, ed. by Robert Pasnau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 25–45 (38), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198718468.003.0002>.

41 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:614.

42 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:641.

43 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:606.

44 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:640.

45 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:598.

questions.⁴⁶ He is content holding loose ends at this crucial juncture. But he continues to profess the natural essentialism of the body for the human person, though he appears to advocate for a supernatural anti-essentialism in the travesty of death which violently tears at the creation of man, separating body and soul. Bavinck argues that:

If the soul continues to exist, this can only occur by virtue of God's omnipresent and omnipotent power. The soul is a created entity and therefore limited, finite, relative, never exempt from all passivity and composition, from change and variation Dependent on the body.⁴⁷

Therefore, Bavinck does affirm the ability of the soul to exist apart from the body despite its utter dependence, but this is unnatural, not the full human, and only by the work of God.⁴⁸

There is no natural immortality and substantial character to the soul that allows it to continue to exist apart from the body naturally. What is naturally impossible is only possible through supernatural work. Such claims likely sound contradictory on their face and will be addressed more fully in section six. But reflect on several examples at this point. Consider any one of the myriads of medical advances over the last century. Take the medical heart surgeries that implement heart pacemakers to control the heartbeat. These are not natural elements. Without their addition, many would die. But with their addition, many are given extended life spans. A closer example is the resurrection of the dead. Naturally all die and remain dead. It is only by supernatural power that anyone rises from the dead. In a similar way, the soul without the supernatural work of God would not continue to exist beyond death.

3.5 *Bavinck's Material Dependence*

Fifth and finally, Bavinck argues that the entirety of the soul is dependent on the body. Bavinck markedly departs from Aristotle and Thomas at this point. According to Thomas and Aristotle, the intellect of the soul can act apart from the body. Aristotle's soul is organless and eternal.⁴⁹ Thomas's intellect 'is a

46 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:614.

47 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:595.

48 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:556; 4:617.

49 Christopher Shields, 'Theories of Mind in the Hellenistic Period', in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 33–51 (35).

power that does not use a corporeal organ'.⁵⁰ Edward Feser in a Thomistic defense agrees, saying, 'our intellectual powers are immaterial in a strict sense that entails that they are not the powers of any bodily organ, not even the brain'.⁵¹ Such a view is fairly standard Thomistic hylemorphism.⁵² On their view, while the lower parts of the soul (sensation and nutrition) cannot function apart from the body the higher part of intellect can.⁵³ But for Bavinck, the soul—even its intellectual capacity—is dependent on the body. He comments at length:

And though human persons are not merely physical beings, all their activities are bound to the body and dependent on it, not just the vegetative and animal functions but also the intellectual ones of thinking and willing. Although our brains are not the cause of our higher faculties of knowing and desiring, they are nevertheless the bearer and organ of these faculties. Every malfunction in the brain results in the abnormal functioning of the rational mind. Inasmuch as the body is not the prison house of the soul but belongs integrally to the essence of our humanity⁵⁴

Consider several other claims from him that follow this logic: 'the intellect is bound to the body and thus to the cosmos ...'⁵⁵ Again, 'the human soul is built on a body and is designed for this. The body is not the soul's prison but its natural organ. Life varies, depending on the organs of the body, in which the soul is active.'⁵⁶ And once more, 'The soul depends on the body ... It depends on the senses'⁵⁷ Therefore, his anthropology is markedly more physical and amendable to contemporary non-reductive physicalist proposals. Bavinck believes that thinking is dependent and bound to the brain.⁵⁸ The brain is the physi-

50 Thomas Aquinas, *The Treatise on Human Nature: Summa Theologiae 1a*, 75–89, trans. by Robert Pasnau (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), I 84.7c.

51 Edward Feser, 'Aquinas on the Human Soul', in *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, ed. by Jonathan J. Loose, J. L. Menuge, and J. P. Moreland (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 88–101 (93).

52 See for example, Jason T. Eberl, *The Nature of Human Persons: Metaphysics and Bioethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 25; Hauser, 'Persons, Souls, and Life After Death', 248.

53 Aristotle, *De Anima: Books II and III with Passages from Book I*, trans. by D. W. Hamlyn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), II.2, 413b27.

54 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:616.

55 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:225.

56 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 23.

57 Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, 44.

58 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:617.

cal instrument of the soul. As Bavinck says, ‘the phenomena of the soul’s life do not float in the sky, but are functions of organs ...’⁵⁹

These claims from Bavinck are in stark contrast to Thomas and Aristotle who claim that the intellect acts apart from the body without the use of an organ. In fact, this is really a break from scholastic thinking in general.⁶⁰ However, Bavinck does remain consistent with scholastic metaphysics by keeping the causal agent as the soul rather than the body, but he certainly expands his view of the dependency of the soul. In his view, the soul is bound to the sensory and external faculties.⁶¹ He says, ‘nothing happens in the psyche in which the body does not participate, nor vice versa.’⁶² Because of this, Bavinck has a very high view of the body. He says, ‘the body is not a prison, but a marvelous piece of art from the hand of God Almighty, and just as constitutive for the essence of humanity as the soul.’⁶³ The human soul, therefore, is not bound to a body as a prison but joined to a body as a benefit for proper function.⁶⁴ Bavinck’s linking of the intellectual faculty of the soul with the brain as the organ of understanding is likely his most interesting insight.⁶⁵ Such a view is more materialistic in nature but is more consistently anti-Cartesian than someone like Thomas.

But it might appear that the soul remaining the causal agent for Bavinck despite it being ‘dependent’ on the body confuses what dependency means. However, I suggest that what Bavinck means to say is that the intellectual capacity (and all other capacities) causally originate within the soul but cannot function apart from the body. Indeed, the body is part of the essence of humanity—we are essentially made to be corporeal and sentient.⁶⁶ Therefore, it is only right to think that *every* causal power of the soul functions through the body. There is no biblical or philosophical reason for the bold assertion that the intellect can function apart from the body.⁶⁷ There is no causal agent that can function with-

59 Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, 170.

60 Roger Ariew, *Descartes among the Scholastics* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 130; David S. Oderberg, *Real Essentialism* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 252.

61 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:556.

62 Bavinck, ‘Foundations of Psychology’, 23.

63 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:559.

64 Robert Pasnau, ‘Philosophy of Mind and Human Nature’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. by Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 348–70 (358, 363).

65 Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, revd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 146.

66 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:559.

67 *Contra* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two: Creation*, trans. by James F. Anderson (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1975), 11.81.11. Thomas says

out an organ. The body is dependent on the soul to originate the act and the soul is dependent on the body to fulfill the act. But Bavinck does note that the brain does not causally originate thinking or willing. Now, his understanding of organs as mere bearers of activities rather than originators may detract from the originality of his claim. But the fact that he is willing to pursue the necessity of the brain for thinking in such stark terms is an innovation from traditional hylemorphism and is a launching pad for further contemporary development if one is so inclined.

While I suggest this is a break from the scholastic tradition in general, it is not clear that it is a break from his Reformed confessional identity. For example, consider the 1625 Leiden disputation that defines orthodoxy on the human person for the Dutch over against Cartesian dualism.⁶⁸ A short perusal of the disputation quickly highlights many of Bavinck's strongest points and potentially unoriginal insights. But it explicitly foreshadows Bavinck's thought on the intellect and brain, saying 'we are of the view that the soul exercises its powers within the body, and in fact by means of its appropriate instruments, just as understanding is conducted through the brain.'⁶⁹

4 Neo-Aristotelian Accounts of the Human Person: What Are They?

I argue that Bavinck's thought is amendable to various Neo-Aristotelian models of the human person such as emergent dualism, animalism, and other non-reductive physicalist proposals, though I think it most closely aligns with a form of Thomistic hylemorphism. Therefore, contemporary thinkers averse to substance dualism that desire to retrieve from the Christian tradition for the sake of renewal have a worthy interlocuter in Bavinck. To best support this I need to define what I mean by non-reductive physicalism, animalism, hylemorphism, and the like. I leave it to the reader to consult other reference works specifically devoted to unpacking the aspects of these views for a more robust explanation. Therefore, the dense unpacking of concepts like form and matter, act and potency, substantial and accidental forms, the nature of the soul, and the vari-

that understanding and willing operate apart from organs. Bavinck argues that everything operates through organs.

68 Aza Goudriaan, 'Descartes, Cartesianism, and Early Modern Theology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600–1800*, ed. by Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller, and A. G. Roeber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 533–49 (539).

69 *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae: Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, ed. by Roelf T. te Velde and Willem J. van Asselt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 13.22, 35.

ous interpretations of Aristotle and Thomas are not necessary for my purposes and will not be discussed in full.

Non-reductive physicalism is the thesis that while we are identical to our bodies (e.g., we lack a non-physical soul or spirit) broader ideas such as consciousness, personal responsibility, and a spiritual life are not *reducible* to the physical alone.⁷⁰ Mental states are dependent on the physical yet distinct.⁷¹ Humans are capable of ‘downward causation’ wherein they can modify their own goals and are not captive to brute physical determinism.⁷² Underneath this umbrella are various other non-reductive proposals such as emergent dualism wherein consciousness (e.g., the mind) *emerges* from the proper functioning of the brain and nervous system.⁷³ Another example is the constitution view where human persons are *constituted* by bodies but are not identical to human bodies. For example, the statue is constituted by various materials such as bronze but is not identical to the bronze. The bronze must be shaped and formed into a statue. So, there is more to the statue than the element of bronze.⁷⁴

Animalism maintains that the human person is numerically identical with an animal. This means that the human person is identical to a certain human organism.⁷⁵ While there are various views within animalism, I only intend to take this broad thesis as representative: Humans are biological organisms.⁷⁶ Therefore, our ‘bodies’ are necessary for our identity. When animalism is defined in this thin way it is theoretically compatible with various theses like non-reductive physicalism, emergent dualism, and hylemorphism.⁷⁷

The chief distinctive of hylemorphism is that human persons are a compound of soul and body (or form and prime matter). It does not consider the

70 Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ix.

71 John Heil, *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction*, 3rd edn (New York: Routledge, 2013), 183.

72 Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*, 85, 90.

73 William Hasker, *The Emergent Self*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion 48 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 171.

74 Kevin J. Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 65–66.

75 Eric T. Olson, *What Are We?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24; Patrick Toner, ‘Hylemorphic Animalism’, *Philosophical Studies* 155/1 (2011), 65–81 (65), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-010-9522-3>.

76 Olson, *What Are We?*, 23.

77 Joshua Mugg and James T. Turner, Jr., ‘Why a Bodily Resurrection?: The Bodily Resurrection and the Mind/Body Relation’, *Journal of Analytic Theology* 5/1 (2017), 121–44 (138), <https://doi.org/10.12978/jat.v5i1.153>.

human person as merely an immaterial soul (or in Aristotelian and Thomistic language, ‘form’). For example, Thomas says, ‘the soul and the body make up one single being, and they have not each a distinct being’.⁷⁸ Again, Thomas says, ‘body and soul are not two actually existing substances; rather, the two of them together constitute one actually existing substance’.⁷⁹ Therefore, in hylemorphism, the soul alone does not constitute the person. It is only part.⁸⁰ The body-soul composite is, properly speaking, what exists.⁸¹ Therefore, the joining of matter and form together creates a new ontological entity called the person.⁸² As Thomas says, ‘My soul is not I.’⁸³ The soul (or substantial form) of the human organism on its own, according to David Oderberg is the ‘intrinsic incomplete constituent principle in a substance which actualizes the potencies of matter and together with the matter composes a definite material substance or natural body’.⁸⁴ In other words, as J. T. Turner says, it is the thing ‘*by which* a thing exists’.⁸⁵ Now, I must be clear here that hylemorphism as I understand it does not view either the body or soul (form or matter) to be *proper parts* that make up the person. They are *sui generis* constituents—the hylemorphic compound is grounded in them—that is, they are the fundamental and inseparable parts of the whole.⁸⁶

For ordinary organisms then, the soul is the actualization of a living or organic body.⁸⁷ It is not an existing substance in its own right. The soul acts as a life principle that invigorates and structures the previously unformed prime matter. Therefore, on hylemorphism, the living body is not a distinct substance apart from the soul—it is the human substance itself—the effect of the soul and prime matter interaction as formal and material causes. Thus, it is the prod-

78 Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two: Creation*, II.57.6.

79 Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two: Creation*, II.69.2.

80 Aquinas, *The Treatise on Human Nature*, 1.q.75.a4.ad2.

81 Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two: Creation*, II.43.4.

82 Eberl, *The Nature of Human Persons*, 22.

83 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. by Fabian R. Larcher, (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 1 Cor. 15.2.924.

84 Oderberg, *Real Essentialism*, 65.

85 James T. Turner, *On the Resurrection of the Dead: A New Metaphysics of Afterlife for Christian Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 145.

86 Ross D. Inman, *Substance and the Fundamentality of the Familiar: A Neo-Aristotelian Mereology* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 85, 100–01; Robert Koons, ‘Staunch vs. Faint-Hearted Hylomorphism: Toward an Aristotelian Account of Composition’, *Res Philosophica* 91/2 (2014), 151–77 (158), <https://doi.org/10.11612/resphil.2014.91.2.1>.

87 Aristotle, *De Anima*, II.1, 412a27; Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes: 1274–1671* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 552.

uct of soul and body together which can be called an ‘ensouled thing’ or the human organism.⁸⁸

5 Retrieving Bavinck’s Philosophy of Mind

Given this summary of Bavinck’s view and the brief definitions for several Neo-Aristotelian accounts of human persons like animalism, hylemorphism, and non-reductive physicalism, I claim that Bavinck provides resources for those searching for historical partners. While his eclecticism and vagueness on defining the metaphysics of human persons is generally useful for any Neo-Aristotelian account, differing models will find certain aspects of his thought more useful than others. I will focus primarily on animalism, hylemorphism, and constitutionalism—though there are certainly resources available for other models. But since my goal is not to classify Bavinck rigidly as a purveyor of a particular metaphysic, I only intend to show his general usefulness for Neo-Aristotelian accounts.

First, I suggest that Bavinck’s acceptance of human beings as *animals* is especially amendable to animalism (whether of the hylemorphic variety or more standard materialist strands). Bavinck believes that humans are related to both plants and animals and are also animals themselves. Humans are organic beings and are ‘cut off from every Platonic or Cartesian dualism’.⁸⁹ But consider further Bavinck’s view of death and its similarity to some forms of animalism.⁹⁰ For some forms of animalism death is a substantial change. While many Christians have thought that the person ceases to be an embodied animal at death, on these versions of animalism, the animal remains at death. Animalism of this sort denies what is commonly called the ‘Termination Thesis’ and seems to see persons as phases or modes that animal bodies go through. It is argued that there is no clear entailment from death to ceasing to exist. There are all sorts of ways one can properly speak of a dead object that continues to exist.⁹¹ For

88 Aristotle, *De Anima*, II.2, 414a14.

89 Bavinck, ‘Foundations of Psychology’, 48.

90 It is important to note that animalism *per se* is not committed to any particular view of animal persistence. Animalism is an identity claim. It makes no claims for persistence conditions. Therefore, animalism is consistent with any theory of persistence. Paul Snowdon, ‘Animalism and the Lives of Human Animals’, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 52 (2014), 171–84 (172), <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjp.12074>.

91 Snowdon, ‘Animalism and the Lives of Human Animals’, 179; David Mackie, ‘Personal Identity and Dead People’, *Philosophical Studies* 95/3 (1999), 219–42; Fred Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

example, I can move the dead raccoon from my garage to the dumpster. It very much exists despite being dead. Therefore, animals *can* persist through death.

Therefore, Bavinck's claim that, 'after death, soul and body also remain connected, albeit in a different way. The soul does not die nor does the body, but the person dies and remains a ghost and shadow of their former manner of existence' may fit rather well with such an animalist understanding of death.⁹² While it is true that what Bavinck is proposing here—survival of what appears to be some sort of consciousness beyond a person's death by divine aid—is not what the animalist is claiming. The animalist that denies the Termination Thesis is only suggesting that whatever the corpse is remains identical to the animal until it is sufficiently destroyed. Therefore, it may appear that there is no real fit of any interest at this point.⁹³

However, the inner logic and even the language of Bavinck appears quite amendable to contemporary animalists that find the Termination Thesis false. Animalists could echo the logic of Bavinck that there is some sort of substantial change at death. While there is persistence of the animal it takes a different mode or phase. It is not a perfect match but the motivating ideas for Bavinck here appear to be sufficiently analogous to what the animalist desires to say—beyond the basic agreement that we *are* animals. I take it that a project of eclectic retrieval, like Bavinck's own, would have little problem pillaging such theological and philosophical logic in service of distinct contemporary ends. Remember that Bavinck's theological project is not one of repristination. That is a fool's errand. The goal is re-appropriation, and, thus, modern insights and modifications are *necessary*.⁹⁴ Therefore, the contemporary animalist in search of theological forebearers could simply say that Bavinck was inconsistent with the belief that we are animals and still follow his logic in the nature of death while rejecting certain aspects of his more substantially dualist claims.

Second, Bavinck also supports contemporary hylemorphism—including that of the classical Thomistic variety—in various ways, such as when he suggests that 'The soul is the form, the moving power, the foundation of the body; and the body is the matter, the material, and the possibility of soul.'⁹⁵ This definition alone should be sufficient evidence that Bavinck's view is at minimum a species of hylemorphism and offers conceptual resources for those committed to its metaphysical thesis. But Bavinck goes further. The soul for Bavinck 'must,

92 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 36.

93 My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this suggested critique.

94 Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 54; Brock and Sutanto, 'Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism', 312.

95 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 49.

by virtue of its nature, inhabit a body', thus showing his commitment to a *material* substantial form—humans are not essentially immaterial and accidentally material. He says that the union between body and soul 'is so intimate that one nature, one person, one self is the subject of both and of all their activities'.⁹⁶ Therefore, rather than supporting an immaterial substantial form which is an immaterial substance in a 'strict sense' containing the fullness of the species in itself, Bavinck follows a material version where forms cannot exist apart from the corporeal composite entity as a whole.⁹⁷ Bavinck's thinking thus offers historical precursors to this hylemorphic debate. He may even lend support to the 'metaphysical amphibian' stance of those like Eleonore Stump who suggest that humans are material composites but can exist apart from the material composite.⁹⁸ Suffice to say that Bavinck offers insights into these contemporary debates that have yet to be realized or fully retrieved.

Finally, consider Bavinck's suggestion that the body and soul are 'intimately united as the wax and its printed image, as the statue's marble and its figure'.⁹⁹ Such language is similar to many contemporary constitution views. While contemporary constitution views do not usually make use of 'soul' language, believing the human person to be made completely of matter, they do posit a first-person perspective and frequently liken their view to a statue and its figure.¹⁰⁰ Bavinck's examples of what he means by his metaphysical thinking suggests that had these contemporary viewpoints been conceptual categories for him, he likely would have found them consistent with classical confessional Christianity which lends support to those pursuing these metaphysical schemes. And while constitutionalism may be at odds with segments of confessional Reformed Christianity such as the Westminster Confession of Faith which posits an immortal subsistence which is far different than a first-person perspective, it remains consistent with the Leiden Synopsis and Belgic Confession, which is no small matter. Thus, even non-reductive physicalist proposals like constitutionalism can find resources within Herman Bavinck.

96 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:559.

97 See Turner, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, 162–63.

98 Eleonore Stump, 'NonCartesian Substance Dualism and Materialism Without Reductionism', *Faith and Philosophy* 12/4 (1995), 505–31.

99 Bavinck, 'Foundations of Psychology', 49.

100 Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul*, 66–69.

6 Objections to Retrieving Bavinck's Philosophy of Mind

Finally, there are several potential objections that arise from Bavinck's contributions and my attempts at retrieval that may count as stumbling blocks to those looking for dialogue partners. I intend to interact with the three primary objections I find as most pressing—specifically as they relate to my goal of retrieval for Neo-Aristotelian accounts like animalism, hylemorphism, and constitutionalism. I suggest that addressing these objections will shed further light on retrieving Bavinck's anthropology given that part of retrieval includes explaining various vexed philosophical puzzles. If Bavinck can offer solutions that are either unique or better than many contemporary answers, he is especially useful for those seeking retrieval.

First, given Bavinck's argument on consciousness, wherein it requires something non-physical, how could this anticipate a non-reductive physicalism or emergent dualism since they argue the opposite (e.g., a sufficiently complex material object can account for consciousness)? I think Bavinck's views on the soul being bound to the brain are instructive here. While Bavinck does not affirm reductive materialism—instead, maintaining that the soul is an immaterial constituent that is the causal locus of consciousness—he does move in a strikingly materialist way by binding thinking to an organ. Given his historical context that did not have the various non-reductive physicalist proposals on offer today, I suggest that Bavinck likely would find these, *at minimum*, consistent with Christianity. While he may not have subscribed to their theses himself, his own movement toward a more materialist understanding of the human person than his forebearers suggests a willingness to entertain scientific advancements and adjust them to being consistent with classical Christian theism.

Second, if the soul can exist apart from the body, how does this not collapse back into substance dualism? Does this not mean the soul is a substance, or at least an immaterial substantial form, in its own right?¹⁰¹ How is Bavinck offering something unique if this is the case? If he is a substance dualist because of the afterlife, then bringing Bavinck into dialogue with contemporary Neo-Aristotelian accounts—especially those like constitutionalism or animalism—appears fruitless. There is no real agreement between them except a perceived rejection of substance dualism—at least prior to the afterlife. Whatever slender basis of intellectual fellowship Bavinck had originally is undermined by his acceptance of substance dualism beyond the grave. Trying to retrieve from

¹⁰¹ Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul*, 39.

Bavinck for Neo-Aristotelianism then is like trying to mix proverbial oil and water. Anything unique Bavinck might have offered us can be had in any number of other figures, such as Thomas.¹⁰² Even more, Bavinck's insights might square better with contemporary neo-Cartesians that argue for a functional dependence of the soul on the brain. As Joshua Farris has argued, 'bodies contribute powers to souls, become causally necessary for souls to function, and bring about a novel emergent property—allowing for new powers'.¹⁰³ He even says 'Souls depend on brains. In order for souls to function properly, they do so dependent on brains'.¹⁰⁴

This is not an objection unique to Bavinck and while I think his answer is instructive, I should reiterate two aspects of Bavinck's program. First, even if he does collapse back into a version of substance dualism despite his claims to the contrary elsewhere, he can remain a useful resource for Neo-Aristotelian accounts. They need not re-pristiniate and accept every claim from Bavinck to find him useful. They can accept the various claims that coincide with their preferred metaphysic and seek to construct a coherent and systematic system that revises the areas of Bavinck that are inconsistent. Of course, one must be careful not to revise the entire program lest there be nothing left of Bavinck or the project of retrieval. Retrieval is not revolution. But it is not inconsistent with the program of theology to seek new advances where necessary. Second, Bavinck's view is relevantly dissimilar to neo-Cartesian accounts that argue for a functional dependence because Bavinck argues that the soul, even in its intellectual powers, is dependent on the brain. What neo-Cartesian thinkers like Farris argue is dependent is primarily sensational in content. Experiences like pain remain dependent on the brain. The intellect, however, remains independent though it may gain additional powers or knowledge.¹⁰⁵

Now, for Bavinck's own proposal, I suggest his answer flows from his flexible metaphysic: The non-substantial soul exists after death by virtue of God's omnipotent work. There is no natural answer for how the soul can exist on its own. The only answer is *supernatural*. The human remains essentially body and soul together and the soul cannot naturally exist apart from the body and vice versa. Therefore, this is not substance dualism. A soul without a body

102 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for underlining this worry and pushing me to articulate the differences and use for Bavinck more clearly.

103 Joshua R. Farris, 'Creational Problems for Soul-Emergence from Matter: Philosophical and Theological Concerns', *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 60/3 (2018), 406–27 (423), <https://doi.org/10.1515/nzsth-2018-0023>.

104 Farris, 'Creational Problems for Soul-Emergence from Matter', 424.

105 Farris, 'Creational Problems for Soul-Emergence from Matter', 423.

is an incomplete person and cannot constitute human identity. However, by God's mysterious work, he sustains the soul in the intermediate state without the body. Therefore, what is not possible naturally is possible supernaturally. Bavinck's motto is appropriate here: 'Mystery is the lifeblood of dogmatics.'¹⁰⁶ The intermediate state is an unsolvable puzzle. The only other option without denying the intermediate state is to create an inconsistency in the form-matter composite which does lead to the doorstep of substance dualism. Therefore, the only way to avoid the charge of substance dualism is to maintain the non-substantial nature of the soul. And the only way for a non-substantial thing to exist is by supernatural sustainment. Either we cease to exist (which Bavinck cannot accept), we need to be identical to a soulish substance that persists (which Bavinck also cannot accept), or God miraculously preserves the severed human.¹⁰⁷

But if this is so then Bavinck's claim that the soul 'must, by its nature, inhabit a body' appears to be false. No amount of divine power or assistance could change the nature of the human being. This would be tantamount to a substantial change such as becoming a crocodile after being a human. It is thus a major inconsistency in Bavinck to argue as such. But two comments should be made at this point. First, whether one is comfortable with the claim that humans are essentially animals and yet the soul can exist postmortem apart from the body or not, this is standard hylemorphism.¹⁰⁸ As Jason Eberl has argued, 'a rational soul alone suffices to compose an animal because it possesses all the inherent capacities of life and sentience that essentially define animal nature'.¹⁰⁹ So, Bavinck is not uniquely 'inconsistent' by any means. Second, I think Bavinck provides the conceptual resources to provide a legitimate answer to this objection besides God's supernatural work. I think his brief work on psychology might offer potential creative pathways that would be of special interest to those partial to alternative metaphysics like non-reductive physicalism.

Bavinck says in commenting on consciousness, 'take, for example, dreams. When we sleep the "I" loses its supremacy; intellect, reason, self-consciousness, attention, awareness all withdraw into that which is hidden ...'¹¹⁰ He explains

¹⁰⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:29.

¹⁰⁷ Trenton Merricks, 'How to Live Forever without Saving Your Soul: Physicalism and Immortality', in *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons*, ed. by Kevin Corcoran (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 183–200 (200).

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Eberl, *The Nature of Human Persons*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Eberl, *The Nature of Human Persons*, 20.

¹¹⁰ Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, 190.

that there is a difference between the self and the 'I'. For example, when someone has amnesia or is a madman, the 'I' is removed but not the self.¹¹¹ So maybe there is a pathway to maintaining personal identity in the intermediate state with the metaphysical self but not the psychological 'I' or vice versa. Of course, this is vague and speculative, but nearly every theist appeals to divine fiat at some point on the doctrine of the resurrection. The resurrection of a dead, disintegrated, and dispersed body that maintains identity is just as much 'metaphysically impossible' as a separated soul. The belief in an afterlife with persisting identity is going to be impossible if death is true. No one gets a free pass. So, can God do the metaphysically impossible? God certainly cannot make contradictions true and tautologies false. But since this is not a logical impossibility, I think the answer is yes. It is not something that is logically necessarily true. It is only something true by virtue of God's creative design. Therefore, he can work in supernatural ways apart from his creative design if he so desires. Or maybe we only assume God's creative design is always like this—maybe his design is alternative, and we just are not privy to those details yet. Now, this does assume a host of theses about divine action and natural laws that would take this article too far afield. Suffice to say, if this rebuttal fails, there might be another way to counter it through Bavinck's distinction between the person and human nature that I explain below.

Third and finally, and closely related to the first objection: if the body is truly essential for human identity, how can identity persist in death? It appears that an affirmation of the intermediate state means that no form of non-reductive physicalism will be sufficient. I believe this is the most challenging question to answer from Bavinck's thought because this is where he is most elastic—remaining silent and restrained. Therefore, any defense of his view at this point is speculation. Fear of conjecturing aside, there are many solutions available to the person committed to hylemorphism, though most defend identity through the soul. While I think this is a possible interpretation inside Bavinck's paradigm, I do not think it is consistent with Bavinck's overall thought. Besides, such a version of hylemorphism does seem to collapse into substance dualism.¹¹² And it is likely that hylemorphism can only maintain true consistency

111 Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, 192.

112 See Feser, 'Aquinas on the Human Soul', 98. He argues that the substantial form is the substance which has corporeal and incorporeal properties. So, at death the substance does not cease to exist—only the incorporeal properties do. So, at death the person is an incomplete substance but remains a substance. But this seems to be just a more sophisticated form of substance dualism.

if disembodied states are denied in some way.¹¹³ But before I present a speculative answer, I must be clear. I think the ultimate answer for Bavinck on personal identity in death is the same as given for the second objection—God’s supernatural work maintains identity despite the brokenness of the composite. Identity would not be maintained apart from God’s work. While I understand the frustration with this answer—particularly from those inclined to the analytic tradition—it is part of Christianity to affirm God’s omnipotence and to require it at times, so it is not necessarily out of bounds to hide within its cleft.

Now, speculatively, I think Bavinck shies away from a ‘survivalist’ view that thinks the persistence of the soul is sufficient for the persistence of the human being. I think he leans toward a ‘corruptionist’ view. For the corruptionist, while the soul continues to exist, the soul alone is not sufficient to maintain the human.¹¹⁴ Since the human person is body and soul essentially, it is inconsistent to say that the human person survives death if the human person is two principles essentially on earth yet in death only one principle remains.¹¹⁵ So, what does this mean for identity in a separated state for Bavinck? If neither soul nor body alone can constitute me as a human person, how can I still be me? And even if we lean on the survival of my soul, it is not an individual substance (even if it is the substantial form). Therefore, my soul by itself cannot be a full human person—even if it maintains some sort of psychological unity.¹¹⁶ While the soul is an ontologically significant component of the person that *might* stand in a sort of proxy relationship for the person during this state, it does not constitute the human person alone. The composition of body and soul is necessary for me as a human person. As Bavinck reminds, it is the *whole* person that dies at death.¹¹⁷ But death is not a ceasing of existence. It is a separation of nature. Death cuts the person off from their humanity, not from their existence.¹¹⁸ In fact, Bavinck even claims that ‘The soul does not die nor does the body, but the

113 Mugg and Turner, Jr., ‘Why a Bodily Resurrection?’, 136.

114 Patrick Toner, ‘On Hylemorphism and Personal Identity’, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 19/3 (2009), 454–73 (455); Hauser, ‘Persons, Souls, and Life After Death’, 246.

115 *Contra* Oderberg, *Real Essentialism*, 256. He says, ‘X can exist without Y if and only if X can operate without Y.’ But this solution is not open to Bavinck because the rational soul cannot operate without the body.

116 Toner, ‘On Hylemorphism and Personal Identity’, 465.

117 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:600.

118 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:614; Oderberg, *Real Essentialism*, 258; Christina Van Dyke, ‘Human Identity, Immanent Causal Relations, and the Principle of Non-Repeatability: Thomas Aquinas on the Bodily Resurrection’, *Religious Studies* 43/4 (2007), 373–94 (384); Jeffrey E. Brower, *Aquinas’s Ontology of the Material World: Change, Hylomorphism, and Material Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 262.

person dies and remains a ghost and shadow of their former manner of existence.¹¹⁹ Therefore, there are no gaps in existence. ‘Gappy’ existence is ruled out of bounds, as is my soul for constituting my identity, yet, ‘I’ somehow exist before death and after death, even if it is as a ‘ghost and shadow’.

Despite the obvious problems for maintaining personal identity without a substance, I think Bavinck would theorize that the *human nature* is destroyed in death and God supernaturally maintains the *subject, person, or self*—the core of the identity. The person (i.e., the subject of the previously existing composite) continues to exist (albeit only supernaturally) but awaits his/her restoration as a full *human person*.¹²⁰ Maybe Bavinck would follow Peter Martyr Vermigli’s language that the person in death is ‘half’ a man. He is incomplete and broken. Yet, God mysteriously maintains their existence until the resurrection of the body. So, how can personal identity remain without either side of the composite? It cannot apart from the supernatural work of God.¹²¹ Maybe this works for Bavinck, but it does come with the serious cost of eliminating the intuitive nature of death as cessation of existence.

7 Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that Herman Bavinck offers a Reformed perspective on human nature that is philosophically serious and innovative enough for theologians and philosophers to consider adopting him as a conversation partner for theological and philosophical retrieval. Having argued this, I have claimed three primary things of Bavinck’s understanding. First, Herman Bavinck provides several unique contributions to philosophy of mind and psychology. For example, the soul is bound to the body in every way. It is not free floating in relation to the intellect. The mind functions through the brain. From these contributions, I have suggested several ways that hylemorphists, animalists, and other various non-reductive physicalists may make use of his insights. I have also defended Bavinck against several objections. While not all questions have been answered, I modestly contend that he provides several interesting and

119 Bavinck, ‘Foundations of Psychology’, 36.

120 Following such a definition of ‘person’ does appear to depart from the classical Boethian definition where a person is an individual substance of a rational nature. It also appears to cut against the entire premise of hylemorphism that the person just is the composite and if the composite is broken the person ceases to exist.

121 Again, I remind the reader that whether this rebuttal is successful or not is irrelevant for my thesis which is to defend historical Reformed understandings of the human person as philosophically serious and useful for contemporary retrieval.

creative ideas for the contemporary debate on the philosophy of mind. Even where he fails or is inconsistent, I suggest his thinking can help clarify the main metaphysical issues that need further research and debate. Therefore, my hope is that this essay encourages further discussion, debate, and research into the Reformed theologians of the past.