



THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

VOLUME 32

NEW SERIES 2015

ISSN 1937-8386

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Resurrection and Bodies

Dale C. Allison Jr.

Dr. Dale C. Allison Jr. delivered the Stone Lectures on October 6–9, 2014. The following lecture was Dr. Allison’s inaugural lecture as the Seminary’s Richard J. Dearborn Professor of New Testament. “Resurrection and Bodies” is chapter two of Dale Allison, Night Comes: Death, Imagination, and the Last Things (Eerdmans, 2015) and appears here by permission of the publisher.

“A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king,
and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.”

—Hamlet

“Often in such cases it is possible to see that the idea which is no longer a current belief is yet a representation (a kind of picture) of a conviction that is still held—something we believe to be true at the core; and we are right in pointing to that conviction as the ‘religious value’ of the old belief that has died out and been discarded.”

—J. F. Bethune-Baker

“The enemy here is system.”

—Michael Wyschogrod

My students didn’t always fret about cannibalism. That changed a few years ago, when I began lecturing on the resurrection of the dead.

On rare occasions, someone in the last straits of starvation will eat another human being. The repugnant fact generates a notorious and once-famous conundrum. If the flesh of one becomes the flesh of another, and if, on the last day, both eater and eaten arise, what will become of the particles belonging to both? To which body will God assign them?

Although always new to my students, the puzzle of shared matter has, in its various forms, long vexed many, beginning with the church fathers. What if a sailor drowns at sea and is devoured by fish, and what if the fish are in turn caught, cooked, and eaten? Or what if a tree in a cemetery sends forth its roots and gathers nutrients from a decaying corpse, nutrients that go into a ripening apple, which a hungry passerby plucks for a snack? Or what if, when you die, some of the water that makes up so much of your body evaporates, becomes rain, and enters the water table, so that others drink you? Or what if a body returns to the dust and the dust becomes topsoil and the topsoil nurtures wheat

and the wheat is turned into bread and the bread is distributed through the Eucharist?

These aren't, however, hypotheticals. They're rather facts of life on earth. We're all cannibals, feeding upon the remains of our ancestors.

Augustine solved the enigma of cannibalism by urging that consumed flesh, like many objects lost and found, will be returned to its first owners.¹ His verdict, however, hardly halted discussion. I once ran across a sermon preached before the king and queen of England in 1689, a sermon by Edward Stillingfleet, in which the Bishop contended that, when someone is eaten, only a smidgen of the devoured flesh becomes a permanent part of the diner's bulk. To this consoling fact the Reverend added that God will make up for any consumed and so missing pieces by collecting matter that belonged to the victim in better days, matter sloughed off long before the hapless party was digested. The same divine action will, Stillingfleet observed, take care of those who die emaciated because of consumption.²

This of course resolves nothing. The longer the world continues, the less likely it is that elements constituting one human being haven't belonged, at some earlier moment, to another human being. Worms and bacteria dissolve the dead, whose molecules re-enter the carbon cycle, the water cycle, and the nitrogen cycle, all of which supply our food and drink. Imagine, then, what would happen if, ten seconds from now, all the dead, beginning with those most ancient, were to rise and, like magnets, draw to themselves every atom they once possessed. The world as we know it would instantly be full of holes, and some things altogether gone, including lots of saints, for when God returns all matter to its original owners, how much will be left for the late-comers? It gets even more difficult if you want God to resurrect animals, because we eat them all the time. From conception on, all of us are recycled elements.

So what other solutions are on offer? It's possible—or rather was at one time possible—to contend that human flesh can't, by its nature, be assimilated, that it always passes, unaffected, through digestive systems. A few church fathers and medieval theologians imagined this, and the opinion wasn't wholly extinguished until the early 19th century. A closely related view is that, although the human body could in principle be assimilated, God intervenes to make sure this never happens. The great Hugo Grotius (d. 1645) thought this a good guess. I've also run across the fantastic view, of a certain George Hodgson, in a book published in 1853, that nothing we eat or drink—not just human flesh—joins the human body. Everything rather passes through. Food and drink are for us like gas is to the hot air balloon: the gas makes the balloon rise but is no part of it. According to Hodgson, Scripture teaches this very thing, for Jesus says in Matthew 15:17: "Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes

1 Augustine, *City of God* 22.20.

2 Edward Stillingfleet, *A Sermon Preached before the King and Queen of England* (London: Henry Mortlock, 1670).

out into the sewer?"³

There's also the option, tentatively forwarded by Humphrey Hody (d. 1707), and to my knowledge never seconded, that maybe a cannibal doesn't die until every particle of human flesh has, via Providence, exited one way or the other.⁴ This, to be sure, generates its own riddle. Might not a theologian who knows this, a theologian who loses his faith and turns evil, make human beings his only entree and so live forever?

* * * * *

At this point, my students, worrying that I might be serious, become incredulous and impatient. What does all this have to do with Christian faith? None of this is in the Bible, and none of this has troubled them before. Surely, they think, my introduction of obscure and irrelevant conjectures epitomizes the sort of unedifying, egg-headed nonsense they were warned about when they decided on ministerial studies. Didn't Calvin wisely condemn the "superfluous investigation of useless matters?"⁵ God, moreover, can do anything, so why think it a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead? Let's get on to something worthwhile.

I respond by asking my students what they're thinking when they utter the Apostles' Creed, which includes the line, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." To be sure, it may be that, when they're in church, they're not thinking anything. Nonetheless, shouldn't they hope that their recitation isn't empty, that their faith is more than vague and dreamy imaginings? And if so, what can their profession mean given that nature inexorably recycles everything, even corpses full of formaldehyde and sealed in bronze caskets? Or do we just throw up our hands and call it a mystery, because faith is where reason goes to die? That Jesus' tomb was empty may be good news. That so many other tombs are empty is a problem.

This settles them down for a bit, long enough for me to introduce more stuff that leaves them nonplussed. I inform them that some rabbis, recognizing that bodies inexorably disintegrate, posited that all we need for resurrection is the coccyx bone:

Hadrian—may his bones rot—asked R. Joshua b. Hananiah, "From what part in the body will the Holy One, blessed be he, make a person sprout up in the age to come?" He said to him, "He will make him sprout out of the nut of the spinal column." He said to him, "How do you know this?" He said to him, "Bring one to me, and I will explain it to you." He put it [the nut brought to him] into the fire, yet it did not burn up. He put it into water, yet it did not dissolve. He pulverized it between millstones, yet it was not crushed. He put it on a block and smashed it with a hammer. The

3 George Hodgson, *The Human Body at the Resurrection of the Dead* (London: John Mason, 1853).

4 Humphrey Hody, *The Resurrection of the (Same) Body Asserted: from the Traditions of the Heathens, the Ancient Jews, and the Primitive Church, with An Answer to the Objections brought against It* (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1694).

5 Calvin, *Institutes* 3.25.11.

block split, the hammer was cleft, yet it remained undamaged.⁶

Don't gardeners harvest a new plant from a twig or cutting? Didn't Eve come from one of Adam's ribs?

Christian tradition has tried out related ideas. One of the more poetically pleasing appears in a nineteenth-century book written by a Presbyterian minister, George Scudder Mott. He believed that, despite appearances, the earth never extracts all that constitutes a human body, that neither sunshine nor frost nor vegetation nor any other agency utterly undoes the human frame: some small part ever endures, and resurrection will begin with that. It's like a seed planted in the soil. The seed "sprouts, it grows, it blooms, it yields. Now where does it get material for all this? Not from the seed, for that was merely the starting point. Not alone from the soil, but also ... from the air, the rain, and the sun. Surrounding nature furnishes the supply." And if God does this for a mere plant, surely those created in the divine image can expect no less.⁷

Not as aesthetically pleasing is the well-known proposal of the modern Christian philosopher, Peter van Inwagen. Since he doesn't believe in a traditional soul and holds that human identity resides in bodies alone, his philosophy leads him, like the rabbis and Mott, to posit some solid, physical nucleus that never dissolves. He suggests that, "perhaps at the moment of each man's death, God removes his corpse and replaces it with a simulacrum which is what is burned or rots. Or perhaps God is not quite so wholesale as this: perhaps He removes for 'safekeeping' only the 'core person'—the brain and central nervous system—or even some special part of it."⁸ In this scenario, God furtively snatches the body or parts thereof for storage until the last trump. This is just another way of denying that bodies in their entirety really disappear. Yet surely they do, and if Christians are compelled to deny this, if we're obliged to hope that God runs something like a cryonics lab, which keeps heads in the deep-freeze for later revival, aren't we in trouble?

Physical Bodies in the Resurrection

That bodies share matter and that they cease to be are just two of many puzzles occasioned by belief in resurrection. Here, however, I introduce only one more.

Natural selection has designed us for life on earth. Teeth are for chewing food, and lungs are for breathing air, and all for the purpose of keeping us alive. Christians hold, however, that, once we rise, death will be no more. The exegetical justification is 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul foresees an imperishable body, a spiritual body, a glorious

6 *Genesis Rabbah* 28.3. Cf. *Leviticus Rabbah* 18.1; *Ecclesiastes Rabba* 12.5. I have read that some Jews instead contended that teeth never dissolve and so become the core for resurrection, but I have never run across this in a rabbinic text. Tertullian at one point, however, says something like this (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 34).

7 George S. Mott, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1867), 112–14.

8 Peter van Inwagen, "The Possibility of Resurrection," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 9 (1978): 121.

body. Mortality will put on immortality, so that death will be swallowed up in victory.

Why, then, with death passé, would resurrected saints need to eat? Or why would they need to breathe? If they're invested with immortality, death won't be able to touch them, so eating or not eating and breathing and or breathing should be matters of indifference. What could be the purpose, in an immortal state, of organs that evolved in the struggle for survival, organs designed to keep us alive on earth for a few decades?

Gregory of Nyssa inferred that, when Jesus rose, he didn't take his intestines with him and that, in the world to come, we won't need ours either. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:13: "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food—and God will destroy both one and the other." Gregory, like so many after him, answered the obvious objection—Doesn't Jesus, in Luke 24, eat a bit of fish after rising from the dead?—by arguing that the act was one of condescension, for the sake of the disciples, so that they'd know he wasn't a ghost.

It takes only a little reflection to hollow out resurrected bodies entirely.⁹ If, as Jesus teaches, we'll neither marry nor be given in marriage but will be like the angels in heaven, then we won't require ovaries or fallopian tubes, prostate glands or seminal vesicles. And if, as 4 Ezra avows, illness will be banished, we won't need white blood cells, antibodies, and the rest of the immune system. And if, as Revelation promises, we'll neither hunger nor thirst any longer, then we won't require kidneys to reabsorb water. Nor will we, if immortal, need blood, veins, arteries, and a pumping heart to circulate nutrients and remove waste products. One understands why Calvin proposed that plants in the world to come won't be for food but for pleasantness in sight, and why the eighteenth-century preacher, Samuel Johnson, argued that Jesus, after he lost all his blood on the cross, didn't need it back.¹⁰ The former things will pass away.

Everything about us has been fashioned for life on earth, so that we might grow, repair, and reproduce ourselves; but if, in the future, we no longer grow, repair, or reproduce, won't stomachs, intestines, and the rest necessarily be vestigial, so that glorified bodies will be, in their entirety, akin to our irrelevant tailbone, that is, eternal relics of a one-time utility? Or should we look forward to something like what biologists call "exaptation," the process by which a trait serving one function comes to serve another function, such as bird feathers evolving from temperature regulators into instruments for flight? Maybe teeth won't be for chewing but, at least for those in hell, for gnashing.

That sounds a bit like Tertullian, who did in fact hazard that maybe old organs might take on new functions. He asked: "What will be the use of the entire body when the entire body will become useless?" He answered by observing that organs may have more than

9 Thomas Burnet, *A Treatise concerning the State of Departed Souls, Before, and At, and After the Resurrection* (2d ed.; London: A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch, 1739), already made this argument effectively.

10 Calvin, *Institutes* 3.25.11; Samuel Johnson, *The Resurrection of the Same Body, as Asserted and Illustrated by St. Paul. A Sermon preach'd in the Parish-Church of Great Torrington, Devon, on Easter-Sunday in the Afternoon, March 25, 1733* (London: Lawton Gilliver, 1733), 32–33.

one function—the mouth, for instance, not only chews food but makes speech—and by affirming, rather cryptically, that “in the presence of God there will be no idleness.”¹¹

* * * * *

Despite conceding that, in the world to come, we won’t need what we need now, some nonetheless have, in their eschatological imaginations, refused to part with their current organs. One early apologist observed that, as celibates prove, one can have organs one doesn’t use. Others have insisted that, while our bodies may no longer serve biological purposes, they may nonetheless endure so that we’re able to behold and recognize one another. Matthias Earbery (d. 1740) averred that “Seeing is one branch of Coelestial Enjoyment,”¹² for which he thought eyes necessary; yet eyes in turn require “an organical Brain to receive the Impressions from the optick Nerves.”¹³ At least our heads won’t be empty.

There are, however, other options. You can distinguish, following the Book of Revelation, between the first and the second resurrection. In the first, at the beginning of the millennium, when Jesus comes to reign on earth, the righteous dead will arise, whereupon they will, like Adam in paradise, eat from the tree of life. To do so, they will need teeth, intestines, and so on. But then, after the millennium, there will be a second resurrection, when the rest of the dead will arise. Some will be thrown into the lake of fire. Others will become like angels and enter into the new heaven and the new earth. At that point people may finally abandon their corporal appliances with their animal functions. Maimonides, on the Jewish side, taught something like this.

The idea of a first resurrection to earthly life in the millennium neatly skirts all the indelicate questions about resurrected organs. It doesn’t, however, let anyone off the hook. We still have to wonder about the transition from the millennium to the eternal state. What will happen to human bodies once the first earth passes away and the sea is no more? The solution of two resurrections just punts the problem down the road.

There’s another difficulty, although we’ve learned of it only lately. The average human body harbors, according to recent estimates, at least ten thousand species of parasitic microbes. They’re about 46,000 of these tiny organisms under each fingernail. The total number of individual microbes in a human body is around one hundred trillion (which bests by a factor of ten the total number of cells we have). Many microbes, such as digestive flora, are required for healthy functioning. So if we’ll indeed need functioning intestines in the millennium, won’t our microbial ecosystems have to be resurrected, too? Without the bugs we host, the intestines won’t work.

11 Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 60.

12 Matthias Earbery, *De Statu Mortuorum & Refurgentium Tractatus*, vol. 1 (London: E. Curll, 1728), 214.

13 *Ibid.*, 217.

Beliefs about the Resurrection of the Dead

Enough of that. It would be tedious to continue piling up the obtuse questions that people have worried about and the apologetical tales they've spun when pondering resurrection. After a while I sympathize with my students, who hope that deliberations about intestines can't really have much to do with faith. So let's ask a different question. How is belief in the resurrection of the dead now faring?

Many years ago I asked my father, a sometime Presbyterian, to read Wolfhart's Pannenberg's *What Is Man?*¹⁴ This book argues that modern science has shattered the old metaphysics and slain the soul. Pannenberg thought this not bad news but good, for he took the Bible to teach resurrection, not immortality. My father was of another mind. After a few weeks, he returned the book, saying that he preferred New Age guru Shirley MacLaine and reincarnation to theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg and resurrection.

My father represents many. Recent surveys show little belief in bodily resurrection among Protestants and Catholics in Western Europe and the United States, even among those who recite the old creeds. Indeed, in some polls of North Americans, Western Europeans, and Australians, belief in resurrection is less popular than belief in immortality of the soul, belief in reincarnation, and belief in extinction.

This shouldn't be news. Here are three sentences from three nineteenth-century writers:

- From 1864: the resurrection of the dead "lingers in the minds of most people only as a dead letter."¹⁵
- From 1867: "The Resurrection of the Dead is a doctrine which has ... fallen out of notice."¹⁶
- From 1872: the resurrection of the body "is very generally rejected by the most intelligent, thinking, and inquiring minds of the age, both in the Church and out of it."¹⁷

One suspects that the undeniable decline in belief is reflected on our grave markers. For although my personal sampling has necessarily been circumscribed, I've seen enough to surmise that, were one to gather statistics regarding the sentiments carved on tombstones in Europe and North America over the last four hundred years, one would discover that resurrection is mentioned less and less as the centuries move forward.

The waning of literal resurrection belief is likewise reflected in the general public's growing acceptance, over the course of the last two centuries, of the dissection of the human body for anatomical instruction. (In nineteenth-century Britain the question

14 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Contemporary Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).

15 William Rounseville Alger, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life* (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1864), 494.

16 Mott, *Resurrection*, 5.

17 D. A. Dryden, *Suggestive Inquiries Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead, as Taught in the New Testament* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1872), 177.

wasn't whether dissection should be legal but whether the knife should carve executed murderers or the unmourned and "friendless poor."¹⁸) Also telling is the phenomenon, which has increased dramatically since World War II, of people bequeathing their bodies to "science." As our commodified corpses have become objects of physical study and items of medical utility, their traditional eschatological meaning has ebbed.

As illustration of the current moment, which includes unbelief even in conservative circles, consider the Roman Catholic theologian, John Michael Perry. Although at ease with the supernatural, he rejects resurrection. He believes that Jesus' soul triumphed over death and communicated with the disciples. And yet, according to Perry, Jesus' body, being unnecessary for life in the world to come, rotted in the tomb. In Jesus' time and place, however, most people mistakenly believed that survival required a body. Thus for the disciples to embrace the truth of Jesus' victory over death, God had to arrange things so that the tomb would be void. The deity worked this trick by hurrying up the natural processes of decay. The body remained where Joseph of Arimathea laid it, but its disintegration was so rapid that, when the tomb was entered shortly after Jesus' interment, it appeared that its occupant had vanished.¹⁹ Now I think it would've been easier for God just to have told the angel who rolled away the stone to hide Jesus' lifeless body behind the bushes. The point, however, is that while Perry is comfortable with miracles and life after death, resurrection is out.

These days, even many professing belief in resurrection don't really believe. I've spoken with several pastors who hope that God will fashion for them new, heavenly bodies. They anticipate not repair but replacement. They may preach resurrection, but they don't envisage bones being knit together in the graveyard.

* * * * *

This isn't the dominant Christian tradition. Jerome was convinced that "it is this very flesh in which we live that rises again, without the loss of a single member."²⁰ According to Augustine, God will revive and restore "bodies that have been consumed by wild beasts, or by fire, or those parts that have been disintegrated into dust and ashes, or those parts that have dissolved into moisture, or have evaporated into the air."²¹ Canon 1 of the Fourth Lateran Council declared that all "will rise with their own bodies which they now bear about here." Sir Thomas Browne wrote: "Our estranged and divided ashes shall unite again ... our separated dust, after so many pilgrimages and transformations into the parts of minerals, plants, animals, elements, shall at the voice of God return into their primitive shapes and join again to make up their primary and predestinate forms."²²

18 For this miserable bit of history see Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (2d ed.; Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

19 John Michael Perry, *Exploring the Identity and Mission of Jesus* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996), 176–213.

20 Jerome, *Apology against Rufinus* 2.5.

21 Augustine, *City of God* 22.20.

22 Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (ed. F. L. Huntley; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), 59.

Until recent times, most theologians and preachers taught this. The idea is reflected in our religious art, where bodies sometimes climb out from the ground, or in the old church cemeteries, where the feet of the dead are laid toward the rising sun, so that, when Christ returns, like lightning from the east, everyone will stand up facing the right direction.

Why did people believe such things? Why did some even wonder what happens to clipped hair and cut nails when the dead rise on the last day?²³ Part of the answer is: the Bible. Jesus' tomb, the gospels report, was empty. They also tell us that he displayed his scars to his disciples, presumably for the purpose of proving that the body which was buried was the same body which arose. John 5 says that "the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." This is a prophecy about burial places. Matthew 27 purports that, when Jesus died, "the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many." 2 Maccabees 14 tells of a certain Razis, an elder of Jerusalem, who died like this: "with his blood ... completely drained from him, he tore out his entrails, took them in both hands and hurled them at the crowd, calling upon the Lord of life and spirit to give them back to him again." Such texts inevitably move minds in a certain direction. In short, the Bible itself occasioned the now unfashionable debates about entrails and cannibalism.

Literalism and its Discontents

When did the traditional doctrine begin to lose favor? Surely there was always some popular incredulity, maybe a lot of popular incredulity;²⁴ but if we're considering major theologians, the first large blips of doubt show up, as far as I've been able to learn, in the seventeenth century. John Locke, picking up on the work of Thomas Hobbes, stressed that personal identity lies in continuity of consciousness, not in physical stability. He may have been the first to speak of "resurrection of the person." He in any case preferred that expression over "resurrection of the body." Locke found support in Paul, who on his reading taught the reception of new heavenly bodies, not the gathering of dispersed particles.²⁵

In the century after Locke, literalism, although still loudly defended, was being revised. David Hartley (d. 1757), obviously influenced by the biological preformationism of his

23 See Julian of Toledo, *Prognosticum Futuri Saeculi* 3.31, with quotations from Augustine on the subject.

24 Already in the early seventeenth century, John Moore, *A Mapp of Mans Mortalitie* (London: T. S. for George Edwards, 1617), 246, refers to "natural incredulitie" respecting the resurrection, and Paul's apology in 1 Corinthians 15 show that such incredulity goes back to earliest Christianity.

25 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (2 vols.; New York: Dover, 1959), 2:439–70; idem, *Paraphrase and Notes of the Epistles of St. Paul* (ed. A. W. Wainwright; 2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 686–68.

day, inferred that there may be “an elementary infinitesimal body in the embryo,” a body invulnerable to death, and just as it directs development in the womb, it will later be the “vegetating” power or organizing center of the resurrection body.²⁶ Charles Bonnet (d. 1793) forwarded a related idea: within the visible brain is an invisible, indestructible brain, a “little ethereal machine” that will be the nucleus of glorified bodies.²⁷ Variants of this notion—always supported by appeal to Paul’s remark that a sown body is like a bare seed—are all over the 18th-century literature.

It’s telling that, around this time, few any longer worry whether every human being who has ever lived could be raised and, in accord with Joel 3, squeezed together for judgment in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (identified with the Kidron Valley). The problem, once discussed by such luminaries as Aquinas and even, incredibly, Leibniz, just goes away.²⁸

By the middle of the nineteenth-century, books on resurrection with “same body” in their titles ceased to appear. Edward Hitchcock could then write: “If only a millionth part, or a ten thousand millionth part, of the matter deposited in the grave, shall be raised from thence, it justifies the representations of scripture, that there will be a resurrection of the dead.”²⁹ A bit later, the influential Charles Gore insisted that belief in resurrection “does not mean that the particles of our former bodies, which were laid in the grave and which have decayed and passed into all sorts and forms of natural life, will be collected together again.”³⁰ That was “the old view,” not “the new view.”³¹

In 1911, William John Sparrow Simpson documented how theologians had, in the previous hundred years, steadily moved away from the literalism of Tertullian and Augustine toward the more ethereal understanding of Origen.³² The latter disbelieved in a millennium, stressed the radical otherness of transformed, eschatological bodies, and posited within us a life principle from which, as from a seed, future lives will sprout.

A decade after Sparrow Simpson, the Anglican H. D. A. Major, founder of *The Modern Churchman*, promoted personal survival unfettered by an earthly body. “I do not hold,” he wrote, “in the mode of the resurrection of the dead which has been held by the Catholic Church for eighteen centuries.”³³ Although charges of heresy were brought against Major,

26 For Hartley’s views see Richard C. Allen, *David Hartley on Human Nature* (Albany: SUNY, 1999).

27 Charles Bonnet, *Contemplation de la Nature* / 2 (2d ed.; Amsterdam: Rey, 1769), 87–88; idem, *Essai analytique sur les facultés de l’âme* (1760), 451–93.

28 For Aquinas see his *Summa Theologica* supplement to the third part, question 88, article 4. On Leibniz see Lloyd Strickland, “Taking Scripture Seriously: Leibniz and the Jehoshaphat Problem,” *Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011), 40–51.

29 Edward Hitchcock, *Religious Lectures on Peculiar Phenomena in the Four Seasons* (Amherst, Mass.: J. S. & C. Adams, 1850), 17.

30 Charles Gore, *The Creed of the Christian* (4th ed.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1898), 92.

31 See J. H. Kellogg, *Harmony of Science and the Bible on the Nature of the Soul and the Doctrine of the Resurrection* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Review and Herald, 1879).

32 W. J. Sparrow Simpson, *The Resurrection and Modern Thought* (London/New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 378–401.

33 H. D. A. Major, Letter to the Lord Bishop of Oxford, in *The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body*:

the Bishop of Oxford exonerated him: "I am satisfied that Mr. Major's teaching does not conflict with what Holy Scripture reveals to us of the Resurrection of the Body."³⁴ Soon enough the Archbishop of Canterbury's commission on doctrine declared that "we ought to reject quite frankly the literalistic belief in a future resuscitation of the actual physical frame which is laid in the tomb."³⁵ Emil Brunner, not long thereafter, showed himself to be of the same mind: "The flesh will not rise again The resurrection has nothing to do with that drama of the graveyard pictured by medieval fantasy."³⁶ The same opinion has been held by those Christian thinkers, such as B. H. Streeter, Ladislaus Boros, and Gerhard Lohfink, who've argued that resurrection takes place at the moment of death, when the body is still in plain sight.³⁷

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The move away from literalism hasn't been reversed. I remember a dinner with N. T. Wright. Given that he has been so insistent that Jesus' tomb was empty and that God will raise the dead for life on a refurbished earth, I asked him what he makes of all the old riddles, such as the puzzle of shared matter. Unruffled, he opined that Origen long ago had solved most of the issues. So the great modern apologist for resurrection turned out to be less than a full literalist. His view wasn't that of Jerome. He was rather closer to a church father who minimized material continuity and thereby secured for himself widespread condemnation.

Wright's judgment stands for a dramatic change in Western Christianity. Locke has won, which means Origen has won. Even those who still defend resurrection no longer fret about diffused particles. There is, for example, the theory which posits that, at death, the so-called "simples" that make us up will fission into two spatially segregated sets of "simples" with different causal paths. One will be a corpse. The other will be a body in heaven.³⁸ This is akin to splitting the planarian flatworm: if the worm is cut in two, the head half grows a tail and the tail half grows a head. In the resurrection, however, one half never makes it.

Then there's the idea—sponsored recently by John Polkinghorne and, a century before

Documents Relating to the Question of Heresy raised against the Rev. H. D. A. Major, Ripon Hall, Oxford (ed. H. H. Burge; London/Milwaukee: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1922), 48.

34 Hubert M. Oxon, Letter to the Rev. C. E. Douglas, in Burge, *Doctrine*, 61.

35 *Doctrine in the Church of England: The Report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922* (London: SPCK, 1938), 209.

36 Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (London: Lutterworth, 1954), 149.

37 B. H. Streeter, "The Resurrection of the Dead," in B. H. Streeter et al., *Immortality: An Essay in Discovering co-ordinating Scientific, Psychological, and Biblical Research* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 120–21; Ladislaus Boros, *Living in Hope* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970); Gisbert Greshake and Gerhard Lohfink, *Naherwartung, Auferstehung, Unsterblichkeit: Untersuchungen zur christlichen Eschatologie* (Quaestiones Disputatae 71; Freiburg: Herder, 1975); Gerhard Lohfink, *Death is Not the Final Word* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 21–43. Historically this has also been the view of most Spiritualists.

38 Dean Zimmerman, "The Compatibility of Materialism and Survival: The 'Falling Elevator' Model," *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (1999): 194–212.

him, John Harvey Kellogg, the inventor of breakfast cereal³⁹—that the soul should be conceptualized as an information-bearing pattern. Someday God will remember you and will upload your pattern into a new environment. That'll be your resurrection. This way of understanding resurrection is unsurprising in a world of computers, where information is conceived of as separate from the physical states that carry it.

I don't like either of these theories, although they're philosophically entertaining. I'm especially unconsolated by the idea of God implanting my memory pattern into some future frame. That won't be me but a duplicate, so what do I care? God could've done the same thing five minutes ago, and I wouldn't take the other guy to be me. Moreover, it's not clear that it takes omnipotence to work this trick. Some modern transhumanists, such as Ray Kurzweil, already dream about future technology making us immortal by uploading cellular brain maps into supercomputers.⁴⁰ The only point here, however, is that all such proposals leave our bodies in the ground, which is indeed and emphatically a "new view."

A Doctrinal Revolution

What then happened? Doctrinal revolutions, like all other revolutions, have manifold causes. In the nineteenth century, some Jewish prayer books substituted language about immortality for language about resurrection; and in 1869 and 1885, in Philadelphia and in Pittsburgh respectively, liberal Jewish authorities issued statements that dismissed, as antiquated, belief in bodily resurrection. These developments had something to do with the desire to sunder religion from politics. Historically, resurrection was a collective event for the Jewish people. It was indeed to take place in the Land of Israel and to inaugurate the Messiah's reign from Jerusalem. Many modern Jews, wanting to be good citizens in America and Europe, didn't like the nationalistic associations. Immortality, by contrast, wasn't sectarian. It was cosmopolitan.

As is obvious by now, however, unbelief in old-fashioned resurrection wasn't confined to Judaism. Further, politics wasn't everything. Of direct relevance for Christianity as well as Judaism was the rationalism of the Enlightenment, which generated in educated quarters so much suspicion about miracles. To hope for resurrection is to hope for a miracle, indeed a miracle beyond all others. This didn't, as the old debates over the resurrection of Jesus show, suit a deistically-inclined age. The skeptics, such as Thomas Woolston (d. 1733), protested that bodies are law-governed, and that resurrection would break all the laws. Impossible.

39 J. H. Kellogg, *The Living Temple* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Good Health Publishing, 1903), 467–74. Kellogg speaks of God's memory holding a person's "organization," that is, form and structure, for the day of resurrection. Polkinghorne has presented his view in several places, one of them being "Eschatological Credibility: Emergent and Theological Processes," in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* (ed. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker; Grand Rapids, Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2002), 443–55.

40 Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005).

While the deists gave up resurrection, which belonged exclusively to revealed religion—as Robert Boyle wrote: “If God had not in the scripture positively revealed his purpose of raising the dead, I confess I should not have thought of such a thing”⁴¹—many of them retained immortality, which required neither the Bible nor divine intervention. Hadn’t Pythagoras and Plato, as well as Hindus, believed, without benefit of Scripture, in a self inherently immune to death? In addition, some thinkers, such as Moses Mendelssohn (d. 1786), thought immortality to be, unlike resurrection, the conclusion of a sound argument. Kant, eschewing all natural theology, disagreed, yet he nonetheless posited immortality on the basis of practical reason. He didn’t posit resurrection.

Deistic predilections worked their way into much of nineteenth-century German theology, so much so that major figures such as Ritschl, Harnack, and Bousset didn’t entertain resurrection for a second. Immortality, by contrast, was still on the table.

In addition to qualms about miracles, disbelief in the historicity of Genesis—a disbelief fostered in part by geological discoveries—had its effect. The end has always been correlated with the beginning, so when scholars began to question the literal sense of the Bible’s early chapters, second thoughts about the literal sense of its final chapters followed. If the opening is theological projection, maybe the conclusion is no different.

We should remember in this connection that comparative religion was arising when deism was thriving, and comparison of what the Bible teaches about the end with what other religious texts have to say raised tough questions. Charles Daubuz (d. 1717) found Egyptian and Chaldean materials in Revelation, and when the Zend Avesta—a collection of old Zoroastrian texts featuring a lot of eschatology—was translated into German in the eighteenth century, the parallels with the Bible were obvious. The eventual upshot of such discoveries was the conviction that resurrection stemmed not so much from the Old Testament but from later Judaism, and that Judaism in turn derived its hope from other cultures. In short, resurrection turned out to be like other ideas, that is, it had a human history. It wasn’t a doctrine invented by God and spoken from heaven.

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More recently, cremation and organ donation have played their roles in distancing us from old-fashioned resurrection. Of course, the causation is bidirectional. On the one hand, the decline of the old doctrine emboldened some rationalists in the 18th century, some Protestants in the 19th century, and some Roman Catholics in the 20th century to tolerate or even promote cremation. On the other hand, the growing acceptance of cremation—the British Cremation Society was founded in 1874; Parliament officially allowed crematoria in 1902; the influential Charles Gore gave his blessing in 1924; and

41 Robert Boyle, “Some Physico-Theological Considerations about the Possibility of the Resurrection,” in *Selected Philosophical Papers of Robert Boyle* (ed. M. A. Stewart; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), 192.

the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, was cremated in 1944⁴²—must in turn have made the resurrection of the flesh seem less instinctively plausible to many. How important can our remains be if we scruple not to reduce them to ashes? The British sociologist Tony Walter has written that the crematorium may be a setting “in which the materialist belief that death is the end makes sense and in which reunion of the immortal souls of lovers makes sense, but any recognizably Christian belief in resurrection does not.”⁴³ The psychology of organ donation must be similar: leaving our organs to others is proof that we won’t need them back.

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I’ve wondered about another possible factor. It has to do with modern mobility. There was a time when most people died and were buried near their place of birth, so they lived out their lives not far from the graves of their beloved. In such a setting, attachment to physical remains was possible. One could, and people often did, reminisce and weep above bones. What’s happened, however, as more and more of us have failed to stay put for long? Today we often bury our dead, move away, then mourn and remember them from afar. In such a context, continuing ties must be unrelated to burial plots and tombstones. If we recall the dead, it’s because we carry them around in our hearts and minds, not because we visit their remains. Graves and bones are irrelevant.⁴⁴ Might this not be another circumstance that has nudged us away from finding religious meaning in corpses?

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To this point, I’ve discussed resurrection faith as though it were an isolated belief. It’s not. It’s rather part of a traditional complex, part of the web of Christian eschatological expectations. It’s only one event in a sequence of end-time events: Jesus returns, then the dead are raised, then they are judged, then they enter heaven or depart to hell. Now this entire scenario has, in the last two to three centuries, fared poorly—above all, perhaps, because the old-style hell has become, for reasons to be reviewed in a later chapter, about as unfashionable as any belief could be. One guesses, then, that insofar as resurrection has been associated with that beleaguered, widely-despised doctrine, to that extent its credibility has suffered. In other words, as hell has sunk, it’s dragged allied expectations, including resurrection, down with it.

42 For all of this see Peter C. Jupp, *From Dust to Ashes: Cremation and the British Way of Death* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

43 Tony Walter, *The Eclipse of Eternity: A Sociology of the Afterlife* (London/New York: Macmillan/St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 111. Cf. Stephen Prothero, *Purified by Fire: The History of Cremation in America* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2001), 75: cremation rendered “less convincing the popular beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and metaphors that created and sustained the credibility of the resurrection of the body.”

44 Some sociologists have offered an analogous argument: the killing fields of World War I, which turned bodies into scraps, made attachment to and the memorialization of corpses impossible in countless cases, and in that situation resurrection of the body made less sense to many.

Resurrection and the New Testament

Notwithstanding everything said so far, resurrection hasn't been banished; it isn't universally held in low repute. It retains stout defenders, even if they don't champion the old literalism. In the middle of the twentieth century, Oscar Cullmann famously urged that the Bible teaches not immortality of the soul, a Greek idea, but resurrection of the dead, a Jewish idea.⁴⁵ More recently, philosopher Nancey Murphy and biblical scholar Joel Green, among others, have similarly advocated resurrection and depreciated immortality, or at least the traditional conception of an immortal soul.⁴⁶

This camp repeatedly makes two points. First, the Bible doesn't sponsor a dualistic anthropology but is rather holistic. Second, modern science makes talk of immaterial souls obsolete.

At the risk of being both unbiblical and unscientific, I'm not on board.

In several important respects, to be sure, we should be sympathetic, or rather more than sympathetic. It'd be beyond inane to close our eyes to the irrefragable results of modern science, and it'd be thoughtless to sponsor an easygoing immortality that makes light of death, of the fear and pain that can attend the dying, and of the grief and loneliness that can afflict survivors. Furthermore, it'd be intolerable to say anything that denigrates material bodies or the physical world—although we should admit, when we take our perfunctory swipes at Platonism, that modern medicine makes it much easier to celebrate bodies. Our progenitors didn't have Novocain, C-sections, or sodium pentothal. The burden of the flesh was much heavier upon them.

Still, I'm not on board.

One problem is the Bible, or at least the New Testament. Although a few have taken it to teach soul sleep, and although William Tyndale (d. 1536), long before Cullmann, held the biblical idea of resurrection and the Hellenistic idea of immortality to be mutually exclusive, the New Testament doesn't anticipate modern physicalism. Matthew, Mark, the author of Luke–Acts, John, and Paul as well as the authors of Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Revelation all believed that the self or some part of it could leave the body and even survive without it.

When Jesus, in Matthew and Mark, walks on the water, his disciples fear that he may be a φάντασμα, a ghost; and when, risen from the dead, he appears to his own in Luke, he denies that he is a πνεῦμα, a spirit. The concept of a disembodied spirit wasn't foreign to first-century Jews.

In accord with this, Matthew's Jesus exhorts his followers not to "fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul (τὴν ψυχὴν); rather fear him who can destroy both soul

45 Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

46 Nancey C. Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

and body in Gehenna." Implicit is the notion that body and soul are separated at death and joined later for the last judgment. Similarly, Luke's Jesus promises the so-called good thief, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Wherever this paradise is, it's not on Golgotha, and they're not going to get there on foot. (Incidentally, the old comeback, sponsored by, among others, Milton, that we should move the comma—"Truly, I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise"—so that the reunion might be put off until the end of time, is far-fetched. It's true that a few Byzantine manuscripts place the comma after "today," but the tendentious punctuation was likely designed to obviate the puzzle of how Jesus could be in heaven when he was supposed to be harrowing Hades.)

Paul's letters hold more of the same. Despite his hope to see the second coming and his insistence on resurrection, his true home is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), and he desires to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better than remaining in the flesh (Philippians 1:23–24). The apostle also relates that he was once caught up to the third heaven, to paradise, and that he may not have been in his body at the time (2 Corinthians 12:2–3). Paul even, at one point, sounds a bit Platonic: "we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

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In more than one place, then, the New Testament takes for granted that the inner person or spirit is potentially independent of the body and isn't inert after death. This shouldn't surprise. By the first century, all of Judaism was Hellenized, and Greek ideas about immortal souls had been assimilated. This explains why some old Jewish texts plainly speak of souls being separated from bodies at death while others teach that, when the righteous die, they return to God and adore the divine glory. There're even books in which souls exist before taking bodies. In accord with all this, one pseudepigraphon—the so-called Apocryphon of Ezekiel—features a story in which, at the great judgment, the soul excuses itself by blaming the body while the body excuses itself by blaming the soul. Although this book is all about resurrection, it's thoroughly dualistic.

The old Jewish cemetery at Bet She'arim contains some inscriptions that speak of immortality, others that refer to resurrection. They're all from the same community, and some of both kinds of inscriptions are from the same hand. It's also telling that, unlike many moderns, the church fathers, with very few exceptions, didn't take immortality of the soul to be pagan, resurrection of the body to be biblical. Nor, with the exception of Aphrahat, an early fourth century Syrian, did they countenance soul sleep.

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Calvin wrote a short treatise entitled *Psychopannychia*, which is Greek for "falling asleep all night." The splendid subtitle is: A Refutation of the Error Entertained by Some Unskillful Persons, who Ignorantly Imagine that in the Interval between Death and the Judgment the Soul Sleeps, together With an Explanation of the Condition and Life of the

Soul after this Present Life. In my judgment, Calvin—who reviews the same texts I’ve cited and more—got it right. The New Testament teaches neither the sleep of the soul (psyschopannychism) nor the death of the soul (thnetopsychism), and it doesn’t hope only for resurrection. New Testament anthropology remains, in certain respects, dualistic.

For Calvin, this settled what we should think. I’m not like-minded. For me, things are more complicated. I doubt that the New Testament instructs us about brains and minds. Its dualism is naive and unreflective, not dogmatic. To think otherwise, to attempt to distill from the New Testament a metaphysical scheme that directly addresses the on-going scientific and philosophical debates regarding human nature, human brains, and human consciousness, is like hunting for science in Genesis. We don’t do that anymore. Whether we should be monists or dualists or pluralists or idealists or whatever can’t be resolved by appeal to chapter and verse.

Materialism and its Alternatives

So how do we make a decision? Here’s where the Christian materialists are confident. Modern science, they believe, has established that human beings are physical objects. Neurobiology, for instance, demonstrates that everything once attributed to a soul is instead the product of complex brain organization. So the traditional soul is superfluous, a myth, and if Christians are to hold any credible hope for an afterlife, physical resurrection is the only option. To contend otherwise is to kick against the scientific goads.

The opinion is startling. Materialism was defended by ancient skeptics such as Democritus and Lucretius, and by modern rationalists such as Diderot and Feuerbach. The reduction of human beings to a contingent collection of atoms has typically been coupled with the view that our universe is a meaningless, mechanistic, apathetic drama, and that death is oblivion. In Wisdom 2:2, it’s the skeptics who proclaim that “reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts.” Their modern counterparts are Owen Flanagan and Stephen Hawking. The former weds materialism to naturalism and deems belief in “non-natural things,” including souls and God, to “stand in the way of understanding our natures truthfully and locating what makes life meaningful in a nonillusory way.”⁴⁷ For the latter, the brain is “a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.”⁴⁸ It’s no wonder that Pope John Paul II declared materialism to be, for Catholic theology, out of bounds.

Observation about the company one keeps isn’t, however, an argument. Neither is

47 Owen Flanagan, *The Problem of the Soul: Two Visions of Mind and How to Reconcile Them* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 167.

48 Interview with *The Guardian*, May 15, 2011; available online at: www.theguardian.com/science/2011/may/15/stephen-hawking-interview-there-is-no-heaven (accessed Jun 6, 2014).

my suspicion that the new Christian physicalism is a way of making the best of a bad situation, a rationalization to reduce cognitive dissonance, a strategy which enables “climbing on the bandwagon of modern progress.”⁴⁹

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Yet what if one has reasons for being ill at ease with the totalizing claims of scientific materialism, whether reductive or nonreductive? My personal library contains books with these titles: *After Physicalism*, *Beyond Physicalism*, *Objections to Physicalism*, *The Waning of Materialism*, and *Irreducible Mind*.⁵⁰ Each is a volume of collected essays whose contributors—philosophers, neuroscientists, psychologists—contend that physics-based materialism is a simplification that doesn’t cover all the evidence. I also own books with less aggressive titles that nonetheless come to related conclusions. Some of their authors qualify as highly informed critics—Wilder Penfield, the neurosurgeon who first mapped the sensory and motor cortices; Sir Karl Popper, the great philosopher of science; Sir John Eccles, the Nobel Prize-winning brain scientist; Thomas Nagel, one of America’s most famous living philosophers; Alvin Plantinga, the eminent analytical philosopher; and Raymond Tallis, the distinguished polymath and Emeritus Professor of Geriatric Medicine at Manchester.⁵¹ In the cases of Popper, Nagel, and Tallis, one can’t attribute their views to religious sentiment. Popper was an agnostic. Nagel and Tallis are atheists.

One might respond that I’ve been reading the wrong books, and that equally prominent authorities, in far greater number, affirm that varied configurations of matter explain everything. But I have read what I have read. Some arguments, moreover, stay with me. This, of course, isn’t the place to introduce them. All I can do is insist upon this: not being a materialist doesn’t entail being philosophically or scientifically illiterate. It’s not like being a young-earth creationist. There’s a large literature on materialism, and not all of the erudite contributors come down on the same side.

Scientific materialism may be an extraordinarily productive working hypothesis, as far as it goes in the lab. That’s not far enough, however, to make it a metaphysical principle that decisively settles the truth about everything, including human nature. A scientific

49 James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 99: “Much in the turn against immortality of the soul was not a return to the fountain-head of biblical evidence but a climbing on the bandwagon of modern progress—the very thing that was at the same time being excoriated when it had been done in liberal theology.”

50 Benedikt Paul Göcke, ed., *After Physicalism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); Edward Kelly, Adam Crabtree, and Paul Marshall, eds., *Beyond Physicalism: Toward Reconciliation of Science and Spirituality* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Howard Robinson, ed., *Objections to Physicalism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Robert C. Koons and George Bealer, *The Waning of Materialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Edward F. Kelly et al., *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

51 Wilder Penfield, *The Mystery of the Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); Karl R. Popper and John C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1985); Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Raymond Tallis, *Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinitis and Misrepresentation of Humanity* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011).

program—Newtonian mechanics, for instance—can reveal much without revealing everything.

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But to deny isn't to affirm, and although I'm dubious about materialism, I've nothing to offer in its place. Maybe there's truth to the hypothesis of William James and neuroscientist Mario Beauregard, that flesh-and-blood brains don't manufacture consciousness but rather regulate, limit, and restrain it—sort of like a TV deciphering electromagnetic waves.⁵² Or maybe some part of the self exists in a higher dimensional space, so that our world is like E. A. Abbott's *Flatland*, and we're four or five dimensional beings living in a three- or four-dimensional world.⁵³ The neurobiologist, John Smythies, has defended an experimentally grounded version of this thesis, arguing that phenomenal space is ontologically distinct from physical space, and that conscious perception exists in a parallel slice of our multidimensional hyperspace.⁵⁴

But then maybe some part of the mind is, following physicist Henry Margenau, a nonmaterial field, analogous to a quantum probability field.⁵⁵ Or maybe there's something to the theory of Sir Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff, that consciousness is a quantum phenomenon, and that it could, theoretically, exist independently of its current biological home, as a collection of "entangled fluctuations" in quantum space-time geometry. Hameroff has even speculated about a "quantum soul."⁵⁶ Or maybe, as the late philosopher, C. J. Ducasse, insisted, some part of us is indeed an extraordinarily subtle, supersensible substance, more elusive than neutrinos, and we each "carry a future Ghost within" (Thomas Carlyle).⁵⁷ One recalls that Hilary of Poitiers and other church fathers, like traditional Hindu metaphysicians, took the soul to be like an exceedingly very thin or diaphanous substance.

I neither believe nor disbelieve any of these hypotheses. I'm neither a dualist nor a pluralist nor a dual-aspect monist but rather, on this subject, an agnostic, intrigued by various possibilities, committed to none. For all I know, matter is congealed spirit. My only conviction is this: despite all our scientific progress, matter remains a profound mystery, consciousness remains a profound mystery, and the self remains a profound mystery,

52 William James, *Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine* (2d ed.; Boston/New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1900); Mario Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary, *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul* (New York: HarperOne, 2007).

53 Edwin A. Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (New York: Dover, 1952).

54 John R. Smythies, *The Walls of Plato's Cave: The Science and Philosophy of Brain, Consciousness and Perception* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1994).

55 Henry Margenau, *The Miracle of Existence* (Boston/London: Shambhala, 1987).

56 Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff, "Consciousness in the Universe: Neuroscience, Quantum Space-Time Geometry and Orch OR Theory," in *Quantum Physics of Consciousness* (ed. Subhash Kak, et al.; Cambridge, Mass.: Cosmology Science Publishers, 2011), 223–62; Stuart Hameroff and Deepak Chopra, "The 'Quantum Soul': A Scientific Hypothesis," in *Exploring Frontiers of the Mind-Brain Relationship* (ed. A. Moreira-Almeida and F. Santana Santos; New York: Springer, 2012), 79–93.

57 C. J. Ducasse, *Nature, Mind and Death* (The Paul Carus Lectures Eight Series 1949; La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1951).

so their relationship remains a profound mystery. One sympathizes with Colin McGinn who, although a naturalist, has argued that consciousness lies forever beyond human understanding.⁵⁸ Whether or not he's too pessimistic, I haven't a clue. In the meantime, however, I don't feel compelled to cast my lot with the materialists.

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This conclusion, I confess, comes as a relief, for if I were obliged to infer that my self is essentially what I've eaten—I'm a pure biological byproduct—I'm not sure what I'd do. The problem is this. If the strict materialists are right, I don't see how, once dead, we can ever live again.

If you leave home and later return, those who welcome you back unthinkingly presume that you continued to exist during your absence. If instead they learn that, after you left, you ceased to be, then they'd regard the thing at the door as an imposter. The return of what doesn't exist makes no sense.

This matters because resurrection is our return, the continuation of our lives. So must there not be continuing selves of some sort between death and resurrection? And if that's so, don't we have to be something more than what the undertaker handles? If you're instead your body and only your body, and if that body disintegrates, aren't you gone for good?

You might respond by waving the magic wand of divine Omnipotence: God can do what we can't imagine. Yet who believes that God can do absolutely anything? Can God make $2 + 2 = 5$, or give Lee the victory at Gettysburg after the fact? Even if you hold that the deity can do such things, because with God all things are possible, should you be sanguine about contradictions between your faith and what you otherwise deem credible? If there are mysteries, there are also absurdities. Maybe believing that we're nothing but matter and that we'll nonetheless live despite death is simply nonsense. What if I were to observe that, according to scientists, the world is about 4.5 billion years old, but that its age in Scripture is about 6,000 years, after which I urged assent to both estimates, because we have here a great mystery, beyond understanding—like Jesus being divine and human at the same time? You'd decline to go along. In like fashion, I decline to go along with the notion that, without a soul or some functional equivalent, eternal life is nonetheless possible. Some things just can't be.⁵⁹

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I've another reason for hoping that materialism isn't compulsory. This one's not philosophical but pastoral.

58 Colin McGinn, *The Problem of Consciousness: Essays toward a Resolution* (Oxford/Cambridge, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1993).

59 See further Mark Johnston, *Surviving Death* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1–125. His conclusion is that “Christian eschatology does stand or fall with the legacy of Plato, namely the immaterial soul, which could carry the identity of the deceased to the Last Judgment. The removal of the Platonic and Aristotelian legacy from Christianity ... looks to be an operation the patient cannot survive.”

A Presbyterian minister once shared with me that, when he attended seminary in the 1950s, he was taught that immortality is unbiblical and bad, resurrection scriptural and good. Trusting his teachers, he took their claim to heart. So when, after getting his first church, a grieving widow asked him where her husband had gone, he told her: your beloved is in the ground, dead to himself and the world, awaiting resurrection. Other mourning parishioners received the same news. In each case, the pastor perceived, they took no comfort. On the contrary, their anguish was augmented. His people wanted to hear that their loved ones were in heaven, or with Jesus, or in a better place. Imagining them cold in the dirt didn't console.

This occasioned much reflection on the pastor's part. He eventually decided that, if the gospel is good news, and if his doctrine was bad news, something was amiss. Souls, heaven, and immortality returned to his ministerial vocabulary.

I'm with the pastor on this one. Shouldn't we comfort those who mourn? Shouldn't we tell the grieving that nothing can separate them or those they cherish from the love of God? Yet how does such encouragement comport with teaching that we all rot in the ground for ages untold?

There's also a psychological issue. A recent experiment showed that, when you ask people whether they believe in an afterlife, there's a bit of a falloff if the question comes with a foot massage.⁶⁰ Now this seems silly to me, and I wonder how the researchers won funding. But they did, and when their work was finished, they inferred that, the more people are reminded of their embodiment, the harder it is for them to imagine a life beyond this one. If they're right, won't preaching materialism make it harder for pew-sitters to hope for more? Maybe we have here a recipe for the further decline of the mainline churches.

The Symbol and the Hope of Resurrection

Even if one agrees with me that Christian materialism is unnecessary and unattractive, our creeds speak of resurrection, so the question of meaning remains. What then, finally, given all that we know, might we think?

Interpretation is potentially unbounded. One can, for instance, turn resurrection into a political metaphor, as in Ezekiel 37. Or one can make it an effective symbol of personal, existential renewal, as in so many Easter sermons. It'd also make sense for a Christian who believes that God has given us only this life to construe resurrection as a symbol of the circumstance that our molecules will, after we're gone, pass into the ecosystem and be resurrected as vital parts of other living things. What, however, might we make of resurrection if one hopes that death isn't extinction?

60 Nathan A. Heflick, "Why and How Afterlife Belief Occurs," *Psychology Today*, published online Sept. 27, 2009, at: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-big-questions/200909/why-and-how-afterlife-belief-occurs>; accessed June 7, 2014.

Surely part of the answer is that the old literalism must be scrapped. As the convoluted debates attest, there's no adequate solution to the problem of shared matter; and it's mighty hard to fathom that bodies designed for earthly life are, with only modest revision, equally designed for life eternal. The discontinuity between now and then must be extreme.

The New Testament isn't all against us here. Jesus, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, gets after the Sadducees for their slavishly literal and unimaginative critique of resurrection; and Paul, when defending resurrection in 1 Corinthians, doesn't write about bones in the ground. He rather draws an analogy involving seeds and plants, after which 'e calls the whole thing a mystery. The Bible itself isn't consistently literalistic here.

One can of course retort that Jesus' tomb was empty, and that if our fate is akin to his, then our flesh must also be taken up. Since the body of Jesus that rose was the same that was spit upon and crucified, won't we too rise in the same body in which we suffered and died?

The argument isn't hollow. Nonetheless, substantial discontinuities between his resurrection and whatever awaits us are undeniable. His body, as Acts 2:31 puts it, saw no corruption. Our bodies will decay. He rose on the third day. We'll be in the ground longer than that. And so it goes. Christ's victory over death can't be the blueprint for our victory. 1 John says that we'll be like him, but that's the end, the goal, and maybe there's more than one means of getting there. As Aquinas put it, "Christ's resurrection is the exemplar of ours as to the term 'whereto' but not as to the term 'wherefrom.'"⁶¹

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If we cast aside literalism, resurrection language must be a way of suggesting an eschatological future that transcends prosaic description, a future that can only be intimated through sacred metaphor and sanctified imagination. In other words, resurrection, like the parables of Jesus, characterizes God's future for us via an analogy, in recognition of the fact that we can't do any better. We see dimly.

But what might resurrection, understood as picture language, help us to fathom?

The beginning of an answer comes from considering the historical context in which Jews first embraced the doctrine. For them, resurrection wasn't the antithesis of non-existence, as it might be for a modern materialist. It was rather the antithesis of being in Sheol, the Bible's name for the land of the dead. This realm was thought of as wholly undesirable. Its wraith-like inhabitants were enfeebled shades, pale phantoms of their former selves, without hope of egress. Pathetically weak, they couldn't even praise God. The miserable place was the Hebrew's counterpart to the Greek Hades, which in Homer houses the "mindless" dead, who are nothing but images of mortals who've come undone. For the old Israelites, death meant Sheol, and Sheol meant existence without life.

61 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* supplement to the third part, question 78, article 2, answer to objection 1.

One guesses that ideas about Sheol grew out of human experience. Apparitions of the dead are a cross-cultural reality.⁶² Indeed, and however ones explains the fact, people frequently see the departed. Moreover, while many apparitions are life-like and comforting, others are transparent, mechanical, and inexpressive. Presumably it was this latter type that informed Jewish ideas about Sheol. To be in the Pit was to be like the stereotypical ghost—an insubstantial vestige, desolate and lost.

Resurrection, when it finally entered Jewish theology, was the negation of all this. It was the belief that God won't permit Israel to pine away in hopeless misery. It was the faith that the bars of Sheol won't ultimately prevail: the prisoners will be set free. It was the conviction that God isn't the God of the dead—that is, of ghosts—but of the living, so what awaits the saints can be hoped for instead of dreaded.

We may, if we choose, share this conviction, even while jettisoning the old literalism. Of course, how such a future might come to pass, or what it might mean concretely, who knows? One could fantasize, on the basis of the stories where the risen Jesus appears and disappears and seems to be material and not material, that resurrected life will mean the ability to participate fully in whatever worlds or dimensions we find ourselves. What counts most, however, is the hope that what lies ahead is not less but more.

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If resurrection effectually communicates the hope that life in the world to come is full rather than attenuated, it also effectually conveys that the fate of the one is bound up with the fate of the many. Bodily resurrection isn't about the lone individual. It's rather a public and communal event at one point in time. In Matthew 25, all the nations are gathered before the Son of man, and in Revelation 20, all the dead stand together before the great white throne. Here Christian art follows the Bible and gets it right. Scenes of the resurrection typically depict large crowds. Even Jesus, in the old icons of his resurrection, isn't alone. As he departs from Hades and rises from the dead, he hauls others up with him, including Adam and Eve, representatives of fallen and redeemed humanity. His defeat of death is their defeat of death. His victory is their victory.

So resurrection is about the human collectivity. It puts everyone in the same story by giving us all the same ending. In this resurrection differs from and is superior to that other chief symbol of the afterlife, immortality. Resurrection isn't about you or about me but about us, and about a kingdom. When, in the Revelation of John, the saints rise from the dead, they enter the New Jerusalem, with its twelve open gates. That means they enter a city, which by definition shelters a large collection of people.

That we will, if we continue to exist, be our true selves only in community is a sensible projection from life as we now know it, and it's a projection encouraged by the image of bodily resurrection. For bodies are more than biological machines. They're also the

62 See Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York/London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 269–99.

vehicles by which we establish and maintain social relationships. Bodies make it possible for us to know others and for others to know us. So profession of the resurrection is a way of saying that the world to come will be, like this one, communal. Here I recall some words of A. E. Taylor: "to be in Heaven, as Christianity conceives of it, is to be a member of a society of persons who see God, themselves, and each other as all truly are, without confusion or illusion, and who love God, themselves and each other with the love of this true insight; what is more than this is imaginative mythology."⁶³

Origen has a beautiful passage in which he ponders why Jesus took a vow not to drink again of the fruit of the vine until the coming of the kingdom. He proposes that, as long as others suffer or sin, the risen Jesus, even though he's in heaven, can't but grieve. So too, according to Origen, is it with the apostles: they can't know perfect joy as long as earth's miserable affairs continue as ever. They are like the saints of olden times: "Abraham is still waiting to obtain the perfect things. Isaac waits, and Jacob and all the prophets wait for us, that they may lay hold of the perfect blessedness with us."⁶⁴ Even after death we are members of one another.

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However helpful resurrection may be as a symbol of life in its fullness and of a shared future, its chief service may lie elsewhere. For if one thing seems assured, it's that we have no power in the face of death. We may, with diet and exercise or whatnot, fend off the sickle for a bit, but the hour comes when none of us will work; and if we aren't to be vanquished utterly, it won't be because we've got something up our sleeve.

Some modern theologians underline the point by insisting that to be dead means not to exist. God, they say, brings life out of things that are not. They're like Milton and Thomas Hobbes, who thought that the death of the soul followed by resurrection would be the best way to preserve God's grace and omnipotence.

I think of things a bit differently. It's true that God is the subject of our sentences with "will raise" or "will resurrect" in them. Yet neither the New Testament nor the dominant Christian tradition teaches that to die is to cease to be. Resurrection isn't the gift of existence as such but the end of being ghosts. It's like Christ harrowing Hades. The dead who rise with the savior are already there when he shows up. They're waiting, hoping to exchange the desolation of the underworld for the joys of heaven.

Nonetheless, death would indeed seem to be the utter end of all human effort, of any illusion that we're masters of our fate. You can't resolve either to be extinguished or to live on after brain death. And if you do somehow live on, you can't choose which part of you does so, or where it goes, or how it gets there. If there's an agent in death, it can only be God. We're reduced to hope. Our incapacity makes us like Jesus on the cross. All he could do was close his eyes and commit his spirit to Another.

63 A. E. Taylor, *The Christian Hope of Immortality* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 69–70.

64 Origen, *Hom. Lev. 7.2*.

Maybe, once we become acclimatized to whatever ultimately awaits us, there'll be a place for our decisions and our efforts. But at the moment when we pass from here to there, it'll be like our first coming into this world. When born, we were ignorant and passive, and we couldn't provide for ourselves. All we could do was instinctively cry out for nourishment and comfort. And as it was in our beginning, so will it be at our end.

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Some people feel that they've been thrown into this world. Although I don't dispute their experience, mine is different. I feel that I was gently laid down here. Maybe that's why so much of life has seemed to be a gift, including my body, which I didn't design or build. As soon as I became aware, it was just there, going about its manifold business.

Furthermore, I don't really understand much about it. I don't know how to break down food or how to distribute nutrients. I don't know how to heal cuts or how to battle infections. I don't know how to manufacture saliva or how to contract muscles. All these things, and a million more of which I'm the beneficiary, just happen. I do none of them. Science, to be sure, helps me to understand some of what goes on, but it was all going on long before my teachers and my books taught me anything.

We're all immersed in a great Wisdom that we didn't invent and don't control, a great Wisdom that's been with us since birth. Hope in resurrection is the conviction that this Wisdom won't abandon us as death approaches but will accompany us to whatever awaits us.