

"And the Life of the World to Come:" The Metaphysics of Resurrection

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I. Introduction

The Christian hope centers largely on what the Nicene Creed calls "the life of the world to come." The Apostle's Creed, moreover, characterizes this life as "everlasting". This everlasting life in the world to come is brought about, orthodox Christianity decrees, in some sense by the death and resurrection of Christ. Christians believe that because of and by way of Christ's death and subsequent resurrection, they too will die only to be resurrected at the end of time to spend an eternity in a place called the "Kingdom of God".

While these sorts of beliefs motivate Christian life and are generally an integral part of Christian doctrine, it is difficult to lend them a precise meaning. The resurrection of the dead is thought to precede man's eternal habitation with God, but it is less than clear what this event entails. The purpose of this paper is to explore various accounts of life after death, resurrection and the persistence of the self through death. In the course of doing this, I will examine competing accounts of (mostly Christian) philosophers in light of the sticky area of personal identity. My goal is to paint a picture of the resurrection that does not blatantly contradict any pertinent passages of Scripture, or any part of the Apostle's or Nicene Creeds. In so doing, I hope to provide what might be considered a coherent, Christian account of "life after death."

I should perhaps point out that in this paper I am making certain assumptions and asking my readers indulgently to make them with me for reasons of utility, if they are not

prepared to make them outright. I am, for example, not going to argue for the existence of God. I will henceforth be taking His existence for granted. I am also implicitly lending a certain weight to the authority of the Bible. I will not make any claims for its "infallibility" or "inerrancy," but I will operate on the general assumption that it is an advantage for a resurrection account not blatantly to contravene any passages of the Bible that have been charitably and reasonably exegized.

Several preliminary observations can be made with regard to resurrection and personal identity. We can safely say that either we, as persons, have souls or we do not have souls. If we have souls, either our personal identity resides with our souls (we *are* our souls), or it does not. If we are not identical with our souls, then either we are identical with our bodies (I will not be considering the outlandish possibility that we do not have bodies) or we are identical with the combination of our souls and our bodiesó with the two things together. Each of these possibilities has had compelling arguments brought to bear on its behalf by capable philosophers. In this essay, I will be examining arguments representing each of these positions.

Most of the group of philosophers and theologians commonly called "the church fathers" as well as the "scholastics" saw man as having a soul and as either *being* (identical with) his soul or as being a soul-body composite. Thomas Aquinas notably maintained that people are soul-body composites, that identity resides in the combination of these two things and that the survival of either by itself is insufficient for the maintenance of personal identity. Peter Geach follows Aquinas in the main and argues for the coherence of a notion of life after death that involves soul-body composites.

Likewise, he argues against the possibility of the persistence of the self as a disembodied consciousness.

Peter van Inwagen and John Hick each conceive of people's persistence, identity, and life after death strictly in terms of materiality. That is to say, they do not appeal to the idea of a soul to support their claims about the coherence of the doctrine of the resurrection. Their respective accounts differ in some rather interesting ways but I don't think either is ultimately compatible with certain passages of Scripture nor certain parts of the Apostle's and Nicene creeds.

II. Peter van Inwagen

Van Inwagen first forces us to consider certain questions about identity by telling a story about a miraculous manuscript. He asks us to suppose that a monastery claims to have in its possession a certain manuscript written by St. Augustine. He further asks us to suppose that the manuscript which they have is known to have been burned by heretics. The monks admit that the manuscript was destroyed but proclaim that God miraculously recreated the manuscript subsequent to its destruction. Van Inwagen says that he would respond to such a miracle story by telling the monks that "the deed it describes seems quite impossible, even as an accomplishment of omnipotence." Van Inwagen informs us that God could quite easily, in His omnipotence, have created a perfect *duplicate* of the original manuscript, but that it is impossible for such a duplicate actually to be the original manuscript. This is, he goes on to say, not because there is something that God is unable to do; on the contrary, the "thing" in question (causing one

thing to be something it is not) is not a "thing" at all; it is nonsense. It would be like God trying to make a triangle with four sides or to create two adjacent mountains without a valley between them. There are no such "things" to be done. Van Inwagen explains, "I can hardly expect to be able to understand the Divine Nature; but I do understand mountains and valleys." _ With regard to the manuscript, the original would have had certain properties that the duplicate lacked and vice versa. The writing on the original, for example, would have been there because St. Augustine put it there. On the duplicate, the writing would be there because God arranged things in a certain way. Therefore, the duplicate would not be a manuscript written by St. Augustine.

The obvious analog with resurrection seems just as problematic for van Inwagen, who is a philosophical materialist about human persons ó that is, he takes the story of human persons to be a story about strictly material beings. He offers a convincing argument against materialist accounts of the resurrection that involve God collecting all of the atoms that once composed a particular person (now dead or even entirely destroyed) and causing them to bear the same spatial relationships to one another that they did when the person in question was alive. "The atoms of which I am composed occupy at each instant the positions they do because of the operations of certain processes within me." _ Identity, as illustrated with the manuscript story, depends not just on the sameness of the material, but on some material *continuity*.

Van Inwagen further argues for the incoherence of the view that God could accomplish the resurrection by collecting the matter that composed me during life and rearranging it, by pointing out an absurdity entailed in such a view. It is possible (in fact,

likely) that I am composed of entirely different simples now than I was composed of when I was two. It would be possible, then, for God to collect all of the two-year-old-will-brown simples and arrange them in the same way that they were arranged in 1981. Would it then be the case that the resultant being could truly say to me "I am you,"? Of course not. This would be to violate the continuity criterion noted above.

But how is material continuity to be maintained when, after biological death, a person's body is destroyed? What of, for example, people who are cremated or eaten by sharks? It would seem that in such cases the natural processes of life are interrupted, that such a person is utterly destroyed, and that he therefore ceases to exist. Continuity is certainly interrupted. Thus he concludes that "it is absolutely impossible, even as an accomplishment of God, that a man who has been burned to ashes or eaten by worms should ever live again."

But van Inwagen is a Christian and professes a belief in the creeds and "the life everlasting." He resolves this seemingly irreconcilable tension by pointing out that all that Christians must maintain as Christians is that those who share in the sin of Adam (that is, everyone) must die, but not that they must be destroyed or annihilated:

It is of course true that men apparently cease to exist: those who are cremated, for example. But it contradicts nothing in the creeds to suppose that this is not what really happens and that God preserves our corpses contrary to all appearance'. Perhaps at the moment of each man's death, God removes each man's corpse and replaces it with a simulacrum which is what is burned or rots. Or' perhaps he removes for "safekeeping" only the "core person" ó the brain and central nervous system ó or even some special part of it.

Van Inwagen seems to be maintaining that it is reasonable to suppose that God spirits away the corpses of at least the faithful, immediately after they die, despite the fact that

He definitely seems not to, and preserves them in some place until the eschaton, at which time they will, in some sense, be "resurrected."

One hardly knows how to respond to such a strange account of how resurrection might happen. It does not seem a particularly desirable position. It fails miserably to maintain appearances. It requires God to intervene in a supernatural way all of the time and, as van Inwagen admits, "contrary to all appearances." Moreover, I do not agree with van Inwagen that such a view "contradicts nothing in the creeds." What, for example, are we to make of the lines from the Apostle's Creed that say "I believe in' the communion of saints,"? Van Inwagen's account would, it seems, require us drastically to alter our understanding either of the word "communion" or of "saint". Could a collection of saintly corpses rightly be called a "communion"? Is it even possible for a corpse to be a saint (even though on van Inwagen's view the saints do exist in the period between biological death and the eschaton, they are *dead* during this time)? One is naturally disinclined to admit such a possibility.

This is to say nothing of the passages in Scripture that seem to indicate that the righteous exist between biological death and the eschaton as the very people they were before their deaths. As St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5.8, to be absent from one's body is to be present with God. It is difficult to see how one could be absent from the body (at all) and present with God on van Inwagen's view. There are, moreover, the words of Christ on the cross to the "good thief": "Today you will be with me in paradise." Again, in 2 Corinthians, St. Paul relates a perplexing story which admits at least the possibility of a person being separable from his body:

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven ó whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person ó whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows ó was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.

From the Old Testament, there is the passage where Saul illicitly employs the witch of Endor to summons up "a divine being" ó or an unearthly being ó which the author identifies as the dead prophet "Samuel." _ Also notable are the words (again St. Paul's), "my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you."

I do not cite these passages as proof that van Inwagen's position is untenable, or even unchristian. I merely wish to point out that his position is at a disadvantage *as* a Christian position inasmuch as he is committed either to a rejection of such passages, or at least to a somewhat unnatural exegesis.

Van Inwagen elsewhere explicitly addresses the issue of "proof texts" within the context of talk about the resurrection. After noting that Paul seems at times to be using dualistic language, and at times to be using language compatible with materialism (when he refers to the dead as "sleeping", etc.), van Inwagen notes his regard for the dualistic passages as "recalcitrant data," and that it is often the case, even in science, for "the best available theories to confront various recalcitrant data." _ It also seems to be the case that inasmuch as the authors of the biblical narrative seem at times to be using dualistic language about persons, resurrection, etc., and at times to be using language compatible with materialism, because dualism and materialism are ultimately incompatible, dualists

and materialists will each have to reconcile themselves to the presence of such "recalcitrant data."

It should further be noted that van Inwagen qualifies, in a note written well after the original article, the views he presents therein. Van Inwagen notes, "I am' inclined to think that there may well be other ways [God could accomplish the resurrection], ways that I am unable even to form an idea of because I lack the conceptual resources to do so." _ Van Inwagen's essay therefore serves chiefly to illustrate certain ways in which the resurrection *could not* be accomplished.

Although van Inwagen is a materialist with regard to persons and personal identity, his arguments are insightful and illustrative in part because they force one to recognize the precariousness of such a Christian materialism.

III. John Hick

John Hick attempts to develop an account which not only maintains appearances to a much greater degree than does van Inwagen's, but also claims to be consistent with a Christian materialism. Hick maintains that individuals are "psycho-physical unities", the pattern or code of which can be re-embodied at any time after death. Such a re-embodied individual based upon a pattern or code would be identical with the its pre-death counterpart providing there is only one such re-embodiment.

Hick begins with "the idea of someone suddenly ceasing to exist at a certain place in this world and the next instant coming into existence at another place which is not

contiguous with the first." We are asked to consider, for example, a person at a meeting in London suddenly disappearing and at the next moment seemingly reappearing at a meeting in New York. We are told that "the person who appears in New York is exactly similar, as to both bodily and mental characteristics, to the person who disappears in London." Hick further informs us that "there is everything that would lead us to identify the one who appeared with the one who disappeared, except continuous occupancy of space." That is, they would certainly *seem to be* the same person.

Hick next asks us to consider what we would say about the identity of the New York person (I will call him "Mr. X-1") with his London counterpart (I will call him "Mr. X"). Are they the same person? Hick maintains that to say that Mr. X is not the same person as Mr. X-1 is to involve oneself in a case of cumbersome linguistic and conceptual disruption. It would be difficult to convince Mr. X-1 that he is someone other than who he thinks he is, which is to say, Mr. X. He would after all remember everything that Mr. X remembered, exhibit the same personality traits and intelligence level as Mr. X. Mr. X-1 would look exactly like Mr. X, having the same fingerprints, DNA, retinal pattern, and so forth. Indeed, as mentioned above, every single thing we could think of that might count as a criterion for making an identity decision would point towards identity, except "continuous occupancy of space," and presumably material continuity. The question then becomes whether continuous occupancy of space is a necessary condition for identity. (Hick dismisses, for reasons that will become clear, van Inwagen's material continuity criterion.)

The case proposed by Hick is rather strange, but so is the case of the general resurrection. By saying that Mr. X is the "same person" as Mr. X-1, we would be stretching the phrase "same person" beyond its normal use, but as Hick says, "we should be extending our normal use of 'same person' in a way which the postulated facts both demand and justify" _ He goes on:

The personal, social, and conceptual cost of refusing to make this extension would so greatly exceed the cost of making it that we should have no reasonable alternative but to extend our concept of 'the same person' to cover this strange new case.

And indeed, Hick seems right about this. I think that we would be rather uncomfortable telling Mr. X-1 that he is not who he thinks he is, that is, if we were not philosophers. In other words, the evidence in such a case would be overwhelming to anyone who was not already wrapped-up in concerns about personal identity. Mr. X's children, for example, would likely be unimpressed if we were to tell them "Sorry kids, you aren't allowed to talk to stranger's and Mr. X-1 is a stranger, despite all appearances, because material continuity and continuous occupancy of contiguous spaces are necessary conditions for personal identity ó this man is not your father."

Hick goes on to emphasize the "non-dependence of human bodily identity through time upon the identity of the physical matter momentarily composing the body," _by suggesting, with cyberneticist Norbert Wiener, that it is theoretically possible to transmit and re-embody

the whole pattern of the human body, of the human brain with its memories and cross connections, so that a hypothetical receiving instrument could re-embody these messages in [an] appropriate manner, capable of continuing the processes already in the body and

the mind, and of maintaining the integrity needed for this continuation by a process of homeostasis.

We might suppose that the London / New York scenario was carried out in such a way.

Hick's suggestion is that even though Mr. X and Mr. X-1 are numerically distinct (in terms of the matter of which they are composed), it is much more appropriate to speak of them as being the same person than otherwise. Hick maintains that "psycho-physical individuality does not depend upon the numerical identity of the ultimate physical constituents of the body but upon the pattern or 'code' which is exemplified."

Hick presents a new scenario suggesting that even if Mr. X were killed in London (where his body remained) and at the next moment an exact "replica" of him appeared in New York ó let's call this "replica" Mr. X-2 ó it would still be less intuitively problematic to say that Mr. X and Mr. X-2 are the same person than to say otherwise.

Even with the corpse on our hands it would still, I suggest, be an extension of "same person" required and warranted by the postulated facts to say that the one who died has been miraculously re-created in New York'. Once again we should have to extend our usage of "same person" to cover the new case.

What is important to note here is that all of the reasons inclining one to decide for identity in the first scenario are present in this second scenario as well. Mr. X-2 would *seem to be* Mr. X in all of the ways that Mr. X-1 seemed to be Mr. X. The only factor in the second scenario (absent from the first) disinclining one to decide for identity is the presence of the corpse in London. Hick maintains that even considering the corpse, an identity decision is warranted.

We now have a seemingly coherent account of how one might survive biological death. One dies at t-1 and at t-2 one "wakes up" or re-enters consciousness in a new, but

exactly similar body (exactly similar in the sense that it is composed of the same number and type of simples arranged spatially in the same way as were those that composed one's pre-death body). Experientially then, on Hick's view, it would be just as if you closed your eyes to die and opened them to find yourself re-embodied (or resurrected) and alive again.

A big difference between the account of the resurrection often pieced together by Christian theologians and Hick's, so far as we have examined it, is that of multiple worlds. Presumably, on Hick's view, in the general resurrection, one is resurrected (or re-embodied, or whatever) to live in a world that is not spatially related to the world we know and in which we live. The so-called "life everlasting" is generally not thought to take place in a world that is at any distance or in any direction from any particular point in this spatial continuum. (Presumably, on the other hand, the resurrection world is *temporally* related to the present world ó the resurrection of the dead is generally thought to occur at some point in the future.) In turning to what such a consideration might bring to bear on the question of identity as it relates to potential human "replications" or re-embodiments, Hick again appeals to the notion of intuitional disruption and linguistic / conceptual manageability. Admittedly, we would have to further extend our understanding of the phrase "same person" to cope with a scenario involving transworld "replication", but such an extension, says Hick, "involves far less arbitrariness and paradox than would be generated by saying either that [Mr. X and his "replicated" counterpart] are not the same person or that it is uncertain whether they are the same person." Here again, our everyday beliefs about identity appear to corroborate Hick's account. Further, it seems that if one is going to entertain the notion of a person existing

in two different, spatially unrelated worlds, one will have to abandon a spatial continuity criterion for identity in the process. To "travel" between two such worlds it seems would entail existing at one moment in one space and in the next in a space that is spatially unrelated to (and therefore not contiguous with) the first. I can see no other way to make sense of the notion of the same person existing in such different worlds. It would be just as difficult as it was in the last two of Hick's scenarios, to think of a "replica" in the next world as someone other than his pre-death counterpart considering that, he would "have everything in common that [he] could possibly have, given that [he exists] successively in different spaces," and, I might add, is composed of numerically distinct bits of matter.

Hick considers a serious objection to his theory proposed by J.J. Clark (following, in turn, an argument proposed by Bernard Williams) involving the possibility of multiple replications. As a preamble to examining this argument I should note that I have followed Hick in using his sense of the word "replica" with quotation marks. Hick explains:

The quotes are intended to mark a difference between the normal concept of a replica and the more specialized concept in use here. The paradigm sense of "replica" is that in which there is an original object, such as a statue, of which a more or less exact copy is then made. It is logically possible (though not of course necessary) for the original and the replica to exist simultaneously; and also for there to be any number of replicas of the same original. In contrast to this, in the case of the disappearance in London and re-appearance in New York it is not logically possible for the original and the "replica" to exist simultaneously or for there to be more than one "replica" of the same original. If a putative "replica" did exist simultaneously with its original it would not be a "replica" but a replica; and if there were more than one they would not be "replicas" but replicas.

A "replica" is the same thing as a replica, except that there can be at most one "replica" and it cannot exist simultaneously with that person whom it is "replicating." The set of all "replicas" is therefore a subset of the set of all replicas.

Clark's multiple replication objection to Hick's arguments says essentially that it cannot be the case that Mr. X is identical with a postmortem "replica" of him for the same reason that Mr. X could not be identical with two different supposed postmortem "replicas," it being impossible for there to exist more than one "replica". In other words, if Mr. X dies at t-1 and two replicas of him are created (or arranged or whatever) at t-2, there could be no criteria for deciding for Mr. X's identity with one of the replicas as opposed to the other. It appears true that Mr. X *could* be identical with (at most) one of the replicas, but given the absence of any notable difference between the two, there is no reason to suppose that Mr. X is identical with one and not the other. In such a situation there would be no properties shared by Mr. X and one of the replicas to which one could point as identity criteria that Mr. X would not likewise share with the other replica. There would then be no reason to suppose him to be identical with either of them, for it is impossible for Mr. X to be identical with both replicas since they clearly are not identical with each other.

Furthermore, as Clarke suggests, it seems that the mere *possibility* of there being multiple replicas of Mr. X precludes there being even one "replica". Speaking of John Hick (H-n) replicas in the resurrection world, Clark argues that

[The mere possibility of multiple replicas precluding one "replica"] is pinpointed by the fact that if H-3 became constituted some while after H-2, one would have to say that for a while H-2 *could* conceivably have been H-1, but then on H-3's

arrival in the resurrection world this identification ceased to be possible. This is incoherent.

Hick's response to this criticism says basically that because it is impossible for there to be more than one replica in the resurrection world, this does not mean that it is impossible for there to be one "replica" and only one.

The question, then, is whether we can properly move from the premise that there cannot be two beings in the world to come each of whom is the same person as Mr X in this world, to the conclusion that there cannot be one being in the world to come who is the same person as Mr X in this world.

Hick holds that we cannot move from such a premise to such a conclusion. He proposes a counterexample in which the impossibility of there being two John Hicks in London next week does not prevent there being one. If Mr. X is in New York this week, the fact that there can't be more than one of him in London next week does not mean that there cannot be one and only one. But this counterexample is not analogous to the resurrection picture in an important way: in it Mr. X maintains material continuity with himself and continuously occupies contiguous spaces, so there is no question about his identity to begin with. The resurrection cases are strange in important ways. That is to say that identity is questionable in the resurrection cases precisely because the resurrection world is not analogous to this world in very important ways. It is unfair for Hick to propose a counterexample to Clark's criticism that eliminates the disanalogies which were the source of the problem from the outset.

If there *were* two supposed John Hicks in London next week, there would be definite criteria for deciding on which is John Hick and which a replica. (The real) John Hick would be the one who was materially continuous with the John Hick in New York last

week and who came to be in London by continuously occupying a series of contiguous spaces.

It still could hold true that the impossibility of multiple replicas in the resurrection world would not prevent there being one and only one "replica", but Hick's counterexample does little to show this.

One might similarly object to Hick's theory by pointing out that it seems plausible that the *very same* replica could conceivably come into existence at various times. In other words, the same replica of Mr. Y could be created on Tuesday or Thursday (it doesn't matter which). There are two possible worlds in which the very same replica (in each world) comes into existence at different times. We can construct two scenarios (corresponding to the two possible worlds) in this regard involving replicas that seem clearly to be identical with one another. In the first scenario, scientists (or whoever) construct a replica out of a pile of organic molecules on Tuesday, producing Mr. Y-1. In the second scenario, the scientists decide to hold off for whatever reasons and don't construct the replica until Thursday, but on Thursday, they construct a replica using the same organic molecules as in the first scenario, resulting in Mr. Y-2. In considering such scenarios, it seems natural to suppose that Mr. Y-1 = Mr. Y-2. After all, they are exactly the same except that one was constructed on Tuesday, the other on Thursday. They are even composed of the same matter and it seems that given a choice between deciding for the identity of x and y given that they are composed of the same matter, or deciding for nonidentity because x and y came into existence at different times, it seems natural to choose the former. But, if we consider that Mr. Y (the man being replicated) dies on

Wednesday in both scenarios, it becomes clear that it is impossible for either to be identical with Mr. Y, if it is true, as it seems to be, that Mr. Y-1 and Mr. Y-2 are identical with each other.

Or consider tables. Suppose Mr. Y is a carpenter and that on Monday he has a pile of table parts, four legs, a top, nuts and bolts, and so forth. Mr. Y could decide to put the parts together on Tuesday (producing table-1) or Thursday (producing table-2). It seems that it would make no difference as to "which table is produced" if he puts the parts together on Tuesday or Thursday. We would not, for example, encourage Mr. Y to go ahead on Tuesday because we want him to make a certain table, thinking that if he waits until Thursday a different table will result. It seems, therefore, that table-1 = table-2.

Likewise in a case involving human replicas, for the table correlates, Mr. Y-1 = Mr. Y-2. So what if Mr. Y is not a carpenter but a mad biologist? He intends to replicate himself using a replicating machine he invented for this purpose. The machine, for one reason or another, will produce the replica sometime between Tuesday morning and Thursday evening ó there is no telling when. In scenario one, the machine renders the replica on Tuesday afternoon, resulting in Mr. Y-1. Obviously in such a situation, Mr. Y ≠ Mr. Y-1. Even if Mr. Y dies on Wednesday, Mr. Y-1 does not thereby become Mr. Y. In the second scenario, the machine doesn't do its replicating until Thursday. Unfortunately for Mr. Y, he dies on Wednesday waiting for the production of the replica. Fortunately for science, the machine works as advertised and renders the Mr. Y replica, Mr. Y-2, on Thursday. On Hick's view, it would be "correct" to declare Mr. Y-2 to be

identical with Mr. Y. But this is absurd since Mr. Y-2 is identical with Mr. Y-1, and Mr. Y-1 is obviously not identical with Mr. Y (identity being transitive).

The point is that it is more natural to suppose Mr. Y-1 and Mr. Y-2 to be identical with one another than it is to suppose that either is identical with Mr. Y. If such is the case, then Hick's claim that a "replica" of a person is identical with that person is false.

But even if one maintains that it is more natural to identify a person with a "replica" of that person than it is to identify a "replica" with a replica across possible worlds, without some solid, sufficient condition for personal identity decisions (such as material continuity or, somewhat more controversially, the presence of an immaterial soul), the best one can do is to make an educated guess. The best we could say about the identity of Mr. X with Mr. X-1 or Mr. X-2 from Hick's respective scenarios is that either the "replica" is Mr. X in each case, or that it is a very good replica.

In the case of a resurrection world with one and only one "replica" of Mr. X, the best we could say is that there would be a lot of factors inclining one to believe that the "replicated" Mr. X was, in fact, Mr. X. We could say that a belief that "Mr. X-1 (or 2) is identical with Mr. X," is a justified belief, but that there is certainly some doubt based (1) on the lack material continuity, and (2) on the knowledge that in the presence of multiple replicas, it would be likely that none would be identical with Mr. X.

But Hick makes a stronger claim than that we could make a good, informed identity decision in the presence of one and only one "replica". He says "it would be a *correct* decision, causing far less linguistic and conceptual disruption than the contrary

one, to regard the 'replica' as the same person as the original." Now I think it is true that Hick has established that a decision for identity in such a case would, as he says, "cause far less linguistic and conceptual disruption than the contrary one," but I do not think that he has established that such a decision would be correct, and I do not see how it might be possible to argue successfully for such a claim. There is simply no way to know the "truth" about the identity of Mr. X with a resurrection world counterpart if material continuity is disrupted or if it is not the case that Mr. X and his counterpart share the same soul. Even though there are a number of compelling reasons to decide for identity, we simply cannot *know* in such situations.

Hick quotes Terence Penhelum as saying that all of his posited cases are strictly matters for decision. We may decide for identity, but we do not have to. Penhelum's point is that apart from everyday situations involving personal identity, the best we can do is to decide. This certainly seems true. Indeed, Peter Geach makes an important point, that "when queer things start happening, we have no right to stick to our ordinary assumptions as to what can be known." Cases of replicas, and indeed hypothetical resurrections cases, can certainly be described in terms of events wherein "queer things" are happening.

What must be acknowledged, though, is that the fact that decisions are involved (they are, in fact, always a part of identity cases about which we can have knowledge) does not mean that there is no fact of the matter. We can conceivably make the wrong decision. And as I will argue later, we must distinguish between identity criteria and evidence for, that is, what can be known about, such identity criteria.

IV. Peter Geach

Peter Geach defends what he takes to be a logically possible account of surviving biological death. Geach, following Aquinas, introduces the notion of an immaterial soul into our discussion. Materialism regarding persons is thus left behind.

Geach characterizes the tenets of one sort of dualism (not the compositional dualism he will later espouse) as being basically those embraced by Plato in the *Phaedo*. Geach summarizes such a dualism in the following way:

Each man's make-up includes a wholly immaterial thing, his mind and soul. It is the mind that sees and hears and feels and thinks and chooses ó in a word, is conscious. The mind is the person; the body is extrinsic to the person. Like a suit of clothes. Though the body and mind affect one another, the mind's existence is quite independent of the body's; and there is thus no reason why the mind should not go on being conscious indefinitely after the death of the body, and even if it never again has with any body that sort of connexion [sic.] which it now has.

He presents this platonic, soulist dualism in contrast to the compositional dualism which he, following Aquinas, develops.

Geach goes on to say that "it appears a clearly intelligible supposition that I should go on after death having the same sorts of experience as I now have, even if I then have no body at all." For although it seems that the sorts of experiences we have during life are intimately associated with our physical bodies ó our eyes, ears, nerves, etc. ó it seems that there really isn't a *necessary* connection between such (e.g. visual) experiences and their physical, sensory correlates. Someone without any eyes, for example, could

have the experience I call "sight" if he is has "the same experiences as I who have eyes do, and I know what sort of experience that is because I have the experience." It therefore looks as if we know what it would be like for an eyeless entity to have visual experience.

But, as Geach illustrates, to extend experience concepts (that is, concepts that refer to experiences that we have privately, like seeing, or hearing, or being happy) to purported souls would be to extend them to "very alien creatures," which we are intuitively uncomfortable doing in other instances. We would probably not normally talk about a "happy" starfish, or a protozoan as "hearing something." If we are uncomfortable extending experience concepts in instances such as these (where at least starfish and protozoa share with us the property of being physical entities), how less comfortable ought we to be extending experience concepts to a supposed *immaterial* entity?

Geach maintains that we really can make no sense of an immaterial soul or spirit "seeing" or "hearing" or whatever because when we use such words, our understanding of them naturally references a large series of connections of appropriate instances of using the word (and related words) in question:

'our ordinary talk about seeing would cease to be intelligible if there were cut out of it such expressions as "I can't see, it's too far off," "I caught his eye," "Don't look round," etc'. the concept of seeing can be maintained only because it has threads of connexion [sic.] with these other' concepts; break enough threads, and the concept of seeing collapses. [\[36\]](#)

Geach's point seems to be that such "threads of connexion" could not apply to an immaterial soul, by virtue of its being an *immaterial* soul, any more than they might apply to some similarly (but less) alien creature, like a starfish or a protozoan. Can we

make literal sense of something "catching a starfish's eye"? We cannot. Nor can we make sense of something catching the eye of an immaterial soul (which presumably doesn't have eyes). Indeed, Aquinas says that "a soul is united to its body through its operation, which is understanding, not in the sense that without a body the soul could not understand in any way at all, but because in the natural order it cannot understand adequately without a body" [\[37\]](#)

If we admit that it is impossible to apply sensing or feeling words to souls or spirits, it does not follow that souls or spirits are inconceivable. All that follows is that souls would not be describable in terms of operations that are intrinsically bound-up with physicality, such as sense experience. Souls *would* be describable, on Geach's view (as on Aquinas's) in terms of operations that are presumably not so bound-up. Such operations might include thinking and willing. Indeed, as Geach points out, on Aquinas's view, "damned spirits would suffer from the frustration of their evil will, but not from aches and pains or foul odours or the like," [\[38\]](#) it being impossible for such beings to feel or smell *as we understand those words*. It seems futile, moreover, to try to conceive of some way of understanding such words with no precedent for such a conception in this-world experience.

But Geach proceeds in making a significant observation:

In our human life thinking and choosing are intricately bound up with a play of sensations and mental images and emotions; if after a lifetime of thinking and choosing in this human way there is left only a disembodied mind whose thought is wholly nonsensuous and whose rational choices are unaccompanied by any human feelings ó can we still say there remains the same person? Surely not: such a soul is not the person who died but a mere remnant of him. [\[39\]](#)

As Geach further observes, Aquinas admits as much too: "my soul is not I; and if only souls are saved, I am not saved, nor is any man." [\[40\]](#) And as Geach goes on to illustrate, I may be said to live again, or still, only in the event that at some time after my biological death there exists a man who can be correctly identified as Will Brown. [\[41\]](#) The implication is, of course, that a disembodied consciousness (or soul) only capable of nonsensuous thought could not be thus correctly identified as Will Brown.

Geach follows Aquinas in insisting that a disembodied soul must be associated with a particular body in order to be (or to be identifiable as) the soul of a particular person. In maintaining that, as Aquinas observed, "my soul is not I" what becomes clearly necessary for the survival of, say, Mr.X is for Mr.X's consciousness or soul to be once again *embodied*. But, as Geach observes, not just *any* body will do.

There is an analog for resurrection-world identity with this-world identity. "How," asks Geach, "could a living man be rightly identifiable with a man who previously died?". [\[42\]](#) Geach considers the identity relation as it obtains between an old man and the infant body from which he grew into an old man. We ought to observe a few important features (regarding the material in question) of such a pedestrian scenario:

'something we regarded as disproving material continuity (e.g. absence of a birth mark, different fingerprints) would disprove personal identity. Further, we believe that material continuity establishes a one-one relation: one baby grows up into an old man, and one old man has grown out of one baby'. Moreover, the baby-body never coexists with the aged body, but develops into it. [\[43\]](#)

Geach takes an important observation regarding such considerations to be that material conditions of identity must be met in order for us to be able to make a positive identification of a resurrected person. Geach makes an even stronger claim: "There must

be a one-one relation of material continuity between the old body and the new." [\[44\]](#)

The important consideration here is Geach's emphasis on material *continuity* as opposed to material *identity*. The former is a necessary condition for personal identity, while the latter is not. "The old man need not have kept even a grain of matter from the baby of seventy years ago." [\[45\]](#) Geach further notes that such an understanding seems to correspond with the simile used by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 (which will be discussed later).

Geach appropriately anticipates a confusion about material continuity and identity: if two physical things are different exactly when they are different bits of matter, it does not follow (as it may seem to) that a particular thing is itself at two different times exactly when it shares (at least some of) the same matter at those times. Geach is insisting that the Ship of Theseus is not destroyed (as itself) even after it undergoes a series of repairs that result in the eventual and total replacement of its constituent material parts. Or, to consider a similar example, "Sir John Cutler's famous pair of stockings were the same pair all the time, although they started as silk and by much mending ended as worsted" [\[46\]](#) And this seems right; it has a commonsensical appeal. We do not really think (except as philosophers) that things are destroyed by repair, even dramatic repair.

If it is the case ó as Geach and Aquinas maintain ó that a living person is precisely a soul united to a body (that is to say, is neither the soul nor the body, but the two together) it follows that existence as a person generally, and as the same person particularly, in the postmortem world requires the soul or consciousness likewise to be united to a body. Additionally, considering the above observations regarding the necessity of material

continuity, if not to say *identity*, for sameness, it follows that the soul must be united not just to any body, but to a body materially continuous with (though not necessarily numerically identical) the person's this-world body.

An implication is that mental continuity is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for postmortem identity. Geach asks us to consider the case of Roger Tichborne:

Roger Tichborne, an English aristocrat, was lost at sea in 1854. His mother, Lady Tichborne, refused to accept his death and advertised for information concerning his whereabouts. In 1865 a man in Australia claimed to be Roger Tichborne and was acknowledged by Lady Tichborne as her son. He thereupon brought an ejection suit against Roger's nephew who had inherited the Tichborne baronetcy and estates. The jury declared that he was an imposter. His real name was Arthur Orton. He was tried for perjury and sentenced to imprisonment for fourteen years. Orton later published a confession. [\[47\]](#)

What if Arthur Orton had ostensible memories of Roger Tichborne's life? Say, for example, that he could recognize Tichborne's friends and relatives and knew things that only Roger could have known. But suppose that in the face of all of this evidence Roger Tichborne's body was dredged up and unquestionably identified as such (via dental records, DNA, etc.). In such a situation we would have to acknowledge Arthur Orton as an imposter and say that his memories were, after all, false memories. Geach takes such a situation to show that the appearance of mental continuity is not a sufficient condition for personal identity. It also seems to illustrate our tendency to place a higher priority on material, rather than mental, continuity. In the presence of the former, we willingly dismiss counter evidence based on the presence or absence of the latter.

So material as well as mental continuity are necessary if a person alive today is to be able to live again in a resurrection world. Geach concludes that if we are to live again (after

biological death), we must be resurrected: "So the upshot of our whole argument is that unless a man comes to life again by resurrection, he does not live again after death." [\[48\]](#)

In light of these considerations, Geach answers the question of why one ought to worry about material continuity if there is a soul or consciousness in the postmortem world which has ostensible memories of one's life. His answer is that one ought to worry "if the ostensible memories of [one's] life were to be produced by processes that can produce entirely spurious memories." [\[49\]](#)

I ought to note that Geach's intuitions run contrary to John Hick's. We should recall that Hick claimed that if a man turned up in New York with all the memories and mental characteristics of a man who had just been killed in London, and that if the New York man *appeared* to be the London man, that we would have to acknowledge the New York man as identical to the (dead) London man, and that such an identification would "be an extension of 'same person' required and warranted by the postulated facts" [\[50\]](#). The question is whether such a strange scenario would produce spurious memories.

I suppose the best we could say is that if the memories in question are spurious then the person in question is not the same person as the one with non-spurious correlative memories. Moreover, if there is a resurrected person with ostensible but spurious memories of some life, that person is likely not identical with the person whose life is (spuriously) remembered. The question is whether the memories in such a situation are in point of fact spurious. It is obvious in the Roger Tichborne situation that the ostensive memories are not memories at all (Orton was lying), and therefore not even spurious memories. It seems that in the related resurrection situation, and contrary to what Geach

implies (that such memories would be spurious) we cannot know whether the memories are spurious or real. If they are real, then the putatively resurrected person is identical with his pre-death counterpart. If they are spurious, then he, like Arthur Orton, is likely an imposter.

It should be noted, though, that the presence of spurious memories is not a sufficient condition for nonidentity. I might, in fact, have spurious memories of my own life. As was pointed out to me by one Sewanee philosopher, it is possible that I might have spurious memories of my childhood, as for example having caught a big fish, when in fact my grandfather caught the big fish and told everyone that I did. In such a situation, the person doing the spurious remembering is obviously identical with the person whose life is being spuriously remembered. In short, and as stated, the presence of spurious memories is not a sufficient condition for nonidentity. On the other hand, presumably, the presence of non-spurious memories of some life would be a sufficient condition for identity.

I suppose the most pertinent criticism of Geach's Thomistic account is that it runs against orthodoxy in an important way. It, like Hick's view, does not take into account the notion of an interim existence for persons between biological death and the resurrection of the body. The creeds, for example, mention "the communion of saints" as an object of orthodox belief, and surely we must admit that the term "saint" refers to the particular *saintly person*, and not to their soul or body singly (unless it is the case that they are identical with one or the other, which Geach ó and Aquinas ó deny). What sense then could Geach (or Aquinas) make of a "communion" consisting either of persons who have

gone entirely out of existence (a communion, then, composed precisely of nothing), or consisting of parts of persons existing solely as "a disembodied mind whose thought is wholly nonsensuous and whose rational choices are unaccompanied by any human feelings"? [\[51\]](#)

Moreover, what is one to make of the Old Testament story of the Witch of Endor and the ghost of Samuel (1 Samuel)? Or the words of Christ on the cross to the good thief:

"Today you will be with me in paradise." [\[52\]](#) Van Inwagen has suggested a reading of such passages that would be consistent with a denial of an interim existence. Speaking of Christ's words to the Good Thief, van Inwagen says the following:

Imagine that the good thief dies in agony; "the next thing he knows," as the idiom has it he is in Paradise. He presently discovers that over 3,000 years have passed since he died. Was he deceived? Was it somehow wrong of Jesus to say to him, "Today you shall be with me in Paradise"? If so, what should Jesus have said? Should he have said, "After the general resurrection, which will occur after an indefinite period that only the father knows, you shall be with me in Paradise ó but it will seem to you as if no time has passed"? [\[53\]](#)

Van Inwagen is simply illustrating that it is possible for a Christian materialist to make sense of this and similar passages. He admits that "I wish these texts were not worded quite as they are," [\[54\]](#) by way of conceding that a dualistic exegesis is rather more natural for such passages.

Geach does not have precisely the same problems with such passages inasmuch as, on his view, there would be *some* entity (a soul) which would exist during this interim period; its just that the soul of a man is not, strictly speaking, that man himself.

V. What Remains

What remains then of the options presented at the beginning of this paper? It seems that the materialist solutions of Peter van Inwagen and John Hick are some combination of impossible, contrary to all available evidence, or heterodox. Further, it seems like Peter Geach's Thomistic dualism has serious problems, that is, if we take the supposition that people cease to exist during the period between biological death and the general resurrection to be problematic. And it seems to be problematic from an orthodox standpoint. What remains is the proposition that the survival of a person's soul is a sufficient condition for the survival of that person. That is to say, if a person dies at $t-1$ and his soul exists at $t-2$ (subsequent to $t-1$), then that person continues to exist.

Stephen T. Davis, in his book, *Risen Indeed*, argues for such a relaxed, soulist dualism. Davis refers to this theory as "temporary disembodiment" since it proposes that people can exist (though, as we shall see, imperfectly) as disembodied souls:

What this theory says, then, is that human beings are typically and normally psycho-physical beings, that the soul can exist for a time apart from the body and retain personal identity, but that this disembodied existence is only temporary and constitutes a radically attenuated and incomplete form of human existence. [\[55\]](#)

The main problem with a conception of the resurrection such as Geach's, and a problem solved by such a theory of "disembodiment," is that (on Geach's view) there is an indefinite time after my biological death during which I simply do not exist, and then at the resurrection, I come back into existence as the resurrected Will Brown. (We should note that this problem is likewise not addressed by Hick's view, though it is with van Inwagen's, since we *exist* during the period between death and the eschaton — on van Inwagen's view — we're just *dead*.) Even though my soul may survive death and be able

to think and remember, still as Aquinas puts it, *anima mea non est ego*, my soul is not I, and so *I* do not survive.

On Davis's theory, which seems compatible, as we shall see, with orthodox Christianity, "there is no moment subsequent to our births in which you and I simply do not exist; we exist either as whole persons (soul-bodies) or as mere souls at every moment until eternity." [\[56\]](#) Davis points out that such a theory is different from classical dualism (as in Geach), but shares at least one premise with it, that humans normally consist of both souls and bodies and that the existence of one without the other is an imperfect state of affairs. As Davis asserts, "disembodied existence is a kind of minimal existence." [\[57\]](#)

Disembodied souls would be unable (as Geach and Aquinas maintain) to engage in the kinds of activities that are necessarily bound up with corporeality. The contents of such a set of activities is inevitably controversial, but it certainly contains such activities as seeing, hearing, talking, eating, going for walks, etc. "But if by the word 'soul' we mean in part the constellation of those human activities that would typically be classified as 'mental,' then the claim that our souls survive death entails the claim that our mental abilities and properties survive death," (ibid.). At least, those mental abilities and properties which are not *also* necessarily bound up with corporeality. It seems conceivable, then, that a disembodied soul could think (in a language), remember, feel emotions, and maybe even perceive. Of course a disembodied soul's "perceptions" would not be *sense* perceptions, as in what we normally call seeing, hearing, etc. But it seems that there could be some class of "perception" possible for souls that is not like any of

these others that operate on the corporeal world. It is conceivable that a soul could be aware of its "surroundings" (to use a spatial word for a presumably non-spatial event), though it is difficult to imagine how since we live in a spatial world and are hence unfamiliar with any such "perceptions." [\[58\]](#)

It is important to note, however, that Davis agrees with Aquinas in that a disembodied soul would be rather drastically imperfect in that it would not be able to act in ways that are central to life *as a person*. Furthermore, "no one in whom some perfection is lacking is ultimately happy, for in such a state there will always be unfulfilled desires. It is contrary to the nature of the soul to be without the body..." [\[59\]](#) If it is the case that the afterlife involves our ultimate happiness or perfection, as it might plausibly be maintained that Christianity asserts, we will need our bodies.

So an eventual reunification of the soul with the body is required. This is where resurrection, as such, comes in. But is it necessary for *our very same bodies*, that is the bodies that die and rot, to be resurrected? One thing has become clear from the above claims: if it is the case that the survival of my soul is a sufficient condition for *my* survival (as myself — as Will Brown), then wherever my soul goes, I go. With regard to personal identity, it doesn't matter which body I inhabit or even whether I inhabit a body. If it is my soul, it is me. This is precisely the point on which Stephen Davis (and I) differ from Aquinas and Geach.

Some will no doubt object saying that when we use words like "me" we are not referring to souls, but (at least) to souls *and* bodies. That is, our bodies are a significant part of who we are. We look in the mirror and "see ourselves," for example. If a person

looks at me and says "I see you," and they are not seeing my soul, then they must mean by "you" that they are seeing (at least in part) my *body*. Words like "you" and "me" and "Will Brown" seem to refer at the very least partially to bodies. What seems certain is that these words do not refer only to souls.

To solidify in a logical way: if person P is identical to (exactly) his body and his soul together, then he is not identical to anything which is something other than his body and soul (together). His body is not the same thing as his body and soul together, nor is his soul. Therefore, P is neither identical to his body by itself, nor to his soul by itself.

The problem is basically as follows. If we have two parts essentially, the body and the soul, then neither part can be lost or replaced without our ceasing to be who we are.

In answer, I would simply point to a materialist analog and appeal to commonsensical intuition. We do have parts, but we can lose parts without ceasing to be who we are. Suppose that we are our bodies — that we have no souls and are entirely material beings. There are many people of common sense who hold such a view. But most of these people would not say that if Mr. Jones loses a finger, he ceases to be Mr. Jones. That is, it makes sense say that Mr. Jones's finger is certainly a part of him, but that he can lose it, or replace it, without ceasing to be who he is.

We might look at it this way, still, for the time, assuming materialism. Mr. Jones can lose a finger without ceasing to be who he was before he lost the finger. He would be unable to do things that required the use of that particular finger and so would be deprived of participating in normal human activities for which the use of such a finger is

necessary. He could even lose his entire hand without ceasing to be Mr. Jones. Even if he lost his entire arm, we would still affirm his identity as Mr. Jones. (My great-grandfather, whose name happens to have been Mr. Jones, lost his arm in a cotton gin accident; but no one considered him anyone other than the same Mr. Jones who once had two arms.) The upshot of all of this is that even if some man lost his arms and legs and eyes and ears, he would still be the same *person* he was before his dreadful accident. He would be severely limited in terms of normal human activity, that is to say his would be "a radically attenuated and incomplete form of human existence," [\[60\]](#) but he would still be the same man.

Suppose the following happened. Suppose a man, through some cruel misfortune, lost his limbs and his eyes and his ears, so that he was forced to live-out such a "radically attenuated... human existence." But then suppose medical technology progressed to the degree that doctors were able to transplant new limbs, new eyes and new ears. Would we say that a new man resulted? Of course not, except perhaps hyperbolically or as a figure of speech. He would of course be literally the same man who underwent the grave misfortune. In fact, if we considered the original man to have been destroyed by the accident (though *someone* obviously endured through it), we would probably be less motivated to undertake such radical surgery. There is a sense of this man deserving a new start exactly because *he* (the same man) suffered through the awful accident. [\[61\]](#)

We could even conceive of removing person parts until there was little left but the brain and central nervous system, or even some basic part of it, kept alive and nourished by a high-tech medical arrangement. [\[62\]](#) If it became possible to provide a new set of

organs, a new skeleton, a new set of connective and muscle tissues, and so forth, and then we spoke to the resulting man, would we really treat him as though he were not the same man? It would be hard to treat him so, for the very same reasons that it would be hard to speak to Mr. X's replicated counterparts as though they were not Mr. X. [\[63\]](#) In other words, it would be hard because this "new" person would think he was the "old" person, would act like the "old" person, would remember *being* the "old" person, etc.

Now consider an analogous situation involving parts, this time with the body considered as a part (with numerous sub-parts) and the soul considered as a (simple) part. The analogy is obvious. The person in question could lose parts of his body up to and including the entire thing, with each successive loss involving him in a more radically attenuated human existence than before.

Let us return to person P with one of his parts (his body) called X and another one (his soul) called Y. X is, of course divisible into subparts, (a), (b), (c), (d)... while Y, we shall presume to be (though non-material) simple. Moreover, we will further explicate that the sum of all of the subparts of X to be identical to X. So $(a) + (b) + (c) + (d) + \dots = X$. P could lose subpart (a) without ceasing to be P (intuitively) but from then on (or until it or a similar (a) is replaced) unable to participate in those activities which require (a). If (a) is a nose, then P would be unable to participate in the activity called "smelling," for example. P could lose parts (a) and (b) without ceasing to be P, as has been demonstrated above. With each successive loss P's existence is becoming more and more radically attenuated such that eventually it is attenuated to the extent that $P = (X - [(a) + (b) + (c) + (d) + \dots]) + Y$. This is to say that P, at this point, exists only as Y: $P = (X - X) + Y = Y$.

Thus the objection is answered: it is simply not compatible, when posed as above, with deep-seated beliefs we have about ourselves and our fellow humans. Strictly speaking, we are identical with our souls; but our bodies are an almost inestimably important aspect of our existence as persons. To say that we are identical with our souls is misleading since we are very closely associated with our bodies. Much more closely associated than is a pilot with his ship, or a body with a suit of clothes, to use old analogies, or in this case *disanalogies*. We are so closely associated with our bodies that it seems quite appropriate to refer to our bodies as "part of us" since, presumably, we cannot exist *well* without them. Analogously, a hunter could continue to exist *as a hunter* without his gun, he would simply not exist as quite the hunter he was when he had the gun. As a hunter, his existence would be "radically attenuated." So a soul is meant to enliven a body; a person is meant to "have" a body. He may exist (logically) without his body; its just that he will not be quite the person he was when he had a body (speaking figuratively, but appropriately). He won't be able to participate in a large set of activities in which people, as people, are intended to participate.

Two ways of speaking about "parts" have emerged: the normal, everyday way, and the technical, metaphysical way. When we are speaking in the first way, we have no problem with the idea that we (as well as most other objects) can lose parts pretty much willy-nilly without ceasing to be who we are (as in the case of Mr. Jones and the cotton gin). When we are speaking technically and metaphysically, we admit that a thing (as that thing) has all of its parts essentially and cannot lose any of them without ceasing to be that thing.

Another issue arises at this point, an issue articulated by many of the church fathers, [\[64\]](#) expressed as an insistence on the material continuity of the resurrection-world body with the this-world body. That is to say, an insistence that God will resurrect the very same matter at the eschaton that composed a person's body during his lifetime. Davis notes that, in terms of personal identity, such an insistence is unimportant from a "soulist" point of view:

There may be other (perhaps theological) reasons why we should hold that it must be the very matter of our old bodies that is to be raised, but so far as the problem of personal identity is concerned, a strong case can be made that it will not matter. [\[65\]](#)

The point here is that, there could be (and I think *are*) compelling reasons for such an insistence, based largely on certain passages from Scripture, but such an insistence is unnecessary in order simply to maintain personal identity. In 1 Corinthians 15, for example, St. Paul uses the analogy of a seed which becomes a plant in giving the most explicit and complete account in Scripture of the resurrection, as such:

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we

have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

"Death has been swallowed up
in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. [\[66\]](#)

A conservative exegesis of this passage would seem to indicate some kind of material continuity between the body that dies and the body that is raised. One thing seems certain: the body that is raised is not qualitatively the same as the body that dies. The latter is perishable, sown in dishonor and weakness; the former is glorious, spiritual, and raised in power, imperishable and immortal. On the other hand, just as one plant *comes from* one seed, and just as one seed *becomes* one plant; so in the case of the resurrection it seems that one resurrected body *comes from* one dead body, one dead body *becomes* one resurrected body.

Davis's view of the resurrection is also compatible with the prevalent New Testament idea that death is a horrible thing, something that had to be conquered and triumphed over by Christ's dying and being resurrected. (This idea is manifested in the above passage from 1 Corinthians where Paul contrasts the "victory" and "sting" of death which Christ

has vanquished.) Because God intends for man's fulfillment (as man) to be partly a corporeal fulfillment, we need our bodies. The association obtaining between our souls and our bodies (or to speak in the strict, metaphysical sense, between *us* and our bodies) is a good thing which is disrupted by biological death. Such a conception ought to be contrasted with the typical platonic view manifested in Socrates' words in, e.g., the *Phaedo*, that biological death amounts to an escape and is therefore something not altogether bad. [\[67\]](#)

The picture of the resurrection which emerges might run something like the following. Mr. X dies at t-1. He goes on existing in a radically attenuated, imperfect state — which is to say as a soul (yet as Mr. X) — for an indefinite period of time. At t-2, at the eschaton, Mr. X's body is resurrected and changed into what St. Paul calls a *soma pneumatikon*, a spiritualized body [\[68\]](#) and is reunited with Mr. X. In the kingdom of God, Mr. X exists once again as a complete person, as a soul enlivening a glorified, spiritual body. With regard to personal identity, then, a person in the afterlife (or anywhere else) is Mr. X if and only if he has Mr. X's soul.

Davis makes an important distinction which, if not clearly enumerated, might lead to some confusion. We must distinguish between *criteria for* personal identity and *evidence for* personal identity. "...The presence of absence of a soul or of a certain soul is not something for which we can successfully test, at least not directly."

We cannot, for example, prove that a given person really is our long-lost friend by proving that this person really has our long-lost friend's soul. But it still might be true that the soul provides *a criterion of* personal identity. That is, it still might be the case that the person really is our long-lost friend if this person and our long-lost friend have the same soul. [\[69\]](#)

Even though souls might presumably be things that are not empirically observable, the presence or absence of a particular soul still might be the definitive grounds on which correct identity decisions might be made.

Moreover, and as Davis later observes, to say that the presence of a particular soul is the definitive grounds on which correct identity decisions might be made, is not to say that the presence of a particular soul is the only criterion. There could be many other criteria, particularly non-definitive criteria. It is plausible to maintain that other such criteria might (largely) be based on physicality. If a person in the resurrection world has Mr. X's body, or a body materially continuous with Mr. X's, it is likely that that person is Mr. X. If a person remembers being Mr. X, it is likely that he is Mr. X. We can thus imagine a resurrection world in which identity decisions are made largely in the same ways as they are made in this world. It might be true (in this world) that a person is Mr. X if and only if he has Mr. X's soul. But it is certainly the case that our identity decisions regarding Mr. X are based on non-soul criteria, e.g., on whether this putative Mr. X looks like someone we remember being Mr. X, or whether this putative Mr. X seems to remember being Mr. X.

It should be noted that I have not argued, e.g., empirically, for the existence of something called "the soul." I maintain that belief in souls is not a controversial one for orthodox Christians. In other words, from the perspective of orthodox Christianity, the notion of souls ought to be taken for granted. Their exact nature, *what they are*, is a matter of dispute. But even in this regard, my understanding of the nature of souls (the understanding presented in this paper) is well within the confines of Christian orthodoxy.

What I have attempted to show, in positive terms, is that understanding the human soul to bear the identity relation to the human person solves a number of problems otherwise prevalent in accounts of the resurrection of the body. All I maintain is that understanding the human person to be (technically) identical to the human soul is a viable possibility for orthodox Christians, and a possibility which addresses some of the more problematical conclusions of other accounts with regard to what is logically possible, or what is compatible with Scripture.

VI. Postscript

The doctrine of the resurrection of the body is important, not because of what we can learn about personal identity or any other metaphysical notions per se. It is important because it is a central aspect of the Christian hope. Our hope, as Christians, is based on our consideration that things in this world, including ourselves, are not as they should be, but through the death and resurrection of the God-man, Jesus Christ, the possibility of reconciliation and restoration is manifested. The mysteries of Easter are partly the object of our faith and, when misapprehended, a potential source of confusion. However, metaphysical conjecture can get us only so far. We are not likely to take joy in the acclamation "The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!" because of metaphysical conjecture. Ultimately then we must be content to acknowledge mysteries as mysteries. But just because we are unable to apprehend them with empirical certainty, it does not follow that we are unable, as Christians to experience, revere, or be enlivened by them through faith.

The Christian body (that which we experience as "ours" now, and that which will, in the eschaton, be resurrected) must finally be understood as a participant in these

wonderful mysteries. "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" asks St. Paul (1 Corinthians 6.15). It is because of our relationship to the resurrected Christ, in the fullness of his manhood and divinity, that we have hope. Through his death and resurrection we are brought to imperishability, glory, power, and immortality. In his essay *With what Body do the Dead rise again?* (anthologized in *Immortality and Resurrection*) Maurice Carrez says this of the human body:

...it makes possible the human existence willed by God; it expresses the possibilities of man's life; it allows sexual union and commits the whole being that it is and represents; it is... his reality with all its activities, its values... the word "body"...describes man in a definite situation, in relation to others.... The body is man responsible for what he does, for how he lives; it is his entire situation... [\[70\]](#)

It is this body then that is the object of the divine activity called "resurrection." The resurrection is a story about what Carrez calls the "three creative initiatives" [\[71\]](#) of God. The resurrection is the fulfillment of the divine work that began in the individual man when he was created, by God, out of the dust of the earth. This first initiative is the instigation, the beginning, properly, of a relationship between the individual man and his Creator.

The second creative initiative is the ongoing character of that God-man relationship.

"This initiative begins on the day when by a creative act God shines forth into the heart of the man blind until now..." [\[72\]](#) "For," as St. Paul says, "it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of the darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." [\[73\]](#) This second initiative is at work in Christian *action*, and perhaps most explicitly in the sacraments. Likewise, it is this second creative initiative that is opposed and thus muddled by the corrupting power of

sin, itself an action-motivating power. In this second initiative, God dwells with us here in the present; but through sin, we can restore the distance of our separation from Him. Carrez also points out, interestingly, that God's second creative initiative "remains active on behalf of the dead believer, for death has had ousted from it, since Christ's death for us, its character of separation from God." [\[74\]](#)

The third creative initiative of God is the resurrection of the dead. It is through this resurrection that our fulfillment is achieved, by God, through the death and resurrection of Christ. It is through this third initiative that our destiny as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and children of the Most High is manifest. "From this third initiative onwards the body will be entirely under the control of the spirit, a person totally renewed by this creative act." [\[75\]](#) It is this third initiative that is prefigured in the sacrament of baptism. We die, as ourselves, and are raised, with Christ, in his resurrection, to be infused with the power and glory which is ours, through the grace of God the Father.

The resurrection of the dead cannot be understood in its full significance, solely as a metaphysical puzzle to be unraveled. Understood properly, it is a central aspect of Christian life, and an object of Christian faith and hope. It occurs *through Christ's resurrection* and must be thus understood. We are raised with Jesus *now*. Christ revealed himself to the disciples in his power and glory, after his resurrection. In Luke 24, the risen Christ reveals himself to the bewildered disciples in his physical-spiritual reality, but also as scripture, and in the breaking of bread. Thus is the precedent for Christian life set. The resurrection of the dead is divine action. It is the story of Christ and of our life in Him.

[1] Edwards, 242

[2] *ibid.*

[3] Edwards, 243

[4] Edwards, 244

[5] Edwards, 245

[6] Edwards, 246

[7] Luke 23.43 — I will later discuss van Inwagen's explicit consideration of this text.

[8] 2 Corinthians 12.2-5

[9] *cf.* 1 Samuel 28.15

[10] Philippians 1.23

[11] van Inwagen, 63

[12] Edwards, 246

[13] Hick, 454

[14] *ibid.*

[15] *ibid.*

[16] Hick, 455

[17] *ibid.*

[18] Hick, 455

[19] *ibid.* (Hick quoting Norbert Wiener)

[20] *cf.* Hick, 456

[21] Hick, 456

[22] Hick, 456f.

[23] Hick, 458

[24] Hick, 458

[25] Hick, 456

[26] Hick, 459 (Hick quoting Clark)

[27] Hick, 460 (sic.)

[29] Please see the appended diagram.

[30] Hick, 456 (emphasis mine)

[31] Edwards, 240f.

[32] Edwards, 231

[33] Edwards, 226

[34] *ibid.*

[35] *ibid.*

[36] Edwards, 228

[37] Aquinas, p.190 sec.4

[38] Edwards, 229

[39] *ibid.*

[40] *ibid.* (Geach paraphrasing Aquinas)

[41] *cf.* Edwards, 229

[42] Edwards, 231

[43] Edwards, 231f.

[44] Edwards, 232

[45] *ibid.*

[46] [ibid.](#)

[47] [Edwards, 232 \(editor's note\)](#)

[48] [Edwards, 233](#)

[49] [ibid.](#)

[50] [Edwards, 456](#)

[51] [Edwards, 229](#)

[52] [Luke 23.43](#)

[53] [van Inwagen, 62](#)

[54] [van Inwagen, 63](#)

[55] [Davis, 87](#)

[56] [Davis, 89](#)

[57] [Davis, 90](#)

[58] [H.H. Price](#), for example, argues that dreamlike "mental imagery" could "play the part [for a disembodied soul] which sense perception plays" for people in this world. Cf. [Edwards, 216f.](#)

[59] [Davis, 91](#)

[60] [Davis, 87](#)

[61] [as in the movie *Robocop*](#)

[62] [Van Inwagen](#) makes a similar point in a different context ([Van Inwagen, 59](#)).

[63] [cf. the John Hick section above.](#)

[64] [cf. for example, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Tertullian, and St. Augustine on the subject.](#)

[65] [Davis, 99](#)

[66] [1 Corinthians 15.35ff](#)

[67] [cf. Van Inwagen, 63](#)

[68] It should be noted that *soma pneumatikon* does not refer to an immaterial body (whatever that might mean), but to a body enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

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[70] Benoit Murphy, 93

[71] cf. Benoit Murphy, 96f.

[72] Benoit Murphy, 96

[73] 2 Corinthians 4.6

[74] Benoit Murphy, 97

[75] *ibid.*