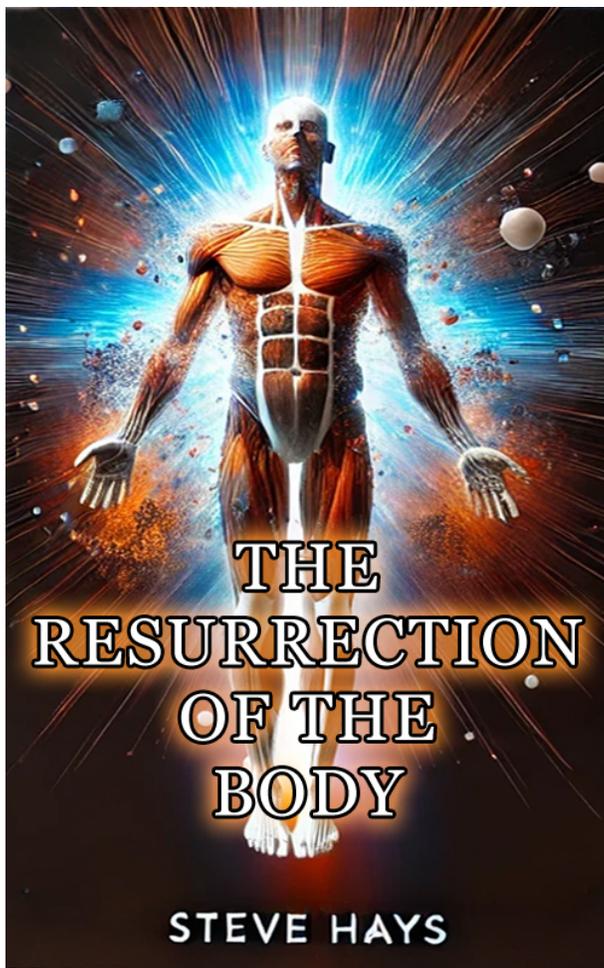


**THE  
RESURRECTION  
OF THE  
BODY**

**STEVE HAYS**





The Resurrection of the Body and  
the Life Everlasting

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## The resurrected saints

Licona's discussion assumes that this incident (Mt 27:52-53) presents unusual difficulties if taken literally. I myself don't find anything notably problematic about this incident. It's a rather enigmatic event because Matthew only gives the reader a thumbnail sketch of what happened. As such, he leaves our idle curiosity unsatisfied. We'd like to know more. But that's often the case.

I expect his brevity is due in part to the fact that he's writing to contemporaries, some of whom would be in a position to fill in the blanks. He refers to this incident in passing because it would be familiar to some of his readers. Some of them were in Jerusalem at the time. They have inside knowledge. That can be frustrating to a modern reader, who isn't privy to the same background information.

The account itself makes perfect sense in Matthew's narrative theology. The resurrection of Christ lays the foundation for the resurrection of the just. And the resurrection of this subset of the just is a pledge of things to come. It graphically grounds the resurrection of the just in the resurrection of Christ. Connecting the past and the future is a cause/effect relation, with a linking event in the then-present.

It's an amazing event, but no more so than any other miracles in Matthew's gospel.

On 185-86 of his book, Licona uses the word "legend." Needless to say, "Legend" is a hot-button word. But in context, I don't think Licona was classifying the Matthean pericope as a legend. Rather, that's part of his inference-to-the-best explanation methodology. He's listing a range of

logically possible options; then, by process of elimination, zeroing in on the most probable explanation. He mentions the “legendary” explanation to eliminate that alternative as a less likely explanation.

You test the “Resurrection hypothesis” against competing hypotheses, based on 5 criteria. The hypothesis which meets all five criteria, or comes the closest, is the preferred hypothesis.

Mind you, I personally cringe at this way of framing the debate. It also depends on whether this is simply an apologetic strategy, or a genuinely open-ended dialogue.

Via Raymond Brown, Licona cites descriptions from Plutarch, Ovid, Virgil, and Pliny that are allegedly similar to the Matthean pericope. On the next page, he also cites Lucian and Dio Cassius. However, this raises two questions:

**i)** What is the genre of these sources? How does that compare with the genre of Matthew?

**ii)** How relevant are these Gentile writers to Matthew? He’s a Jew, and he’s writing for the benefit of Jews. So it’s not like audience adaptation for Gentile readers.

Licona also cites Josephus. However, he says:

Josephus reports that even the strangest of these things actually happened (550).

But assuming that Josephus is relevantly parallel to Matthew, wouldn’t this imply that Matthew, too, reports the resurrection of the saints as an actual event?

Licona then shifts to eschatological imagery in the OT prophets. Here he's on somewhat firmer footing. However, this raises additional questions:

**i)** Sometimes OT prophets employ stock imagery. But at other times they employ literal imagery. Licona needs to establish, in any given case, whether an OT prophet is speaking literally or figuratively.

**ii)** Even if an OT prophet is using figurative imagery, you must still identify the literal, real-world referent of that metaphor. What event does the metaphor stand for?

**iii)** In addition, is Licona saying that Matthew is alluding to these passages? That this is the background material for the Good Friday "effects"? Or is he just treating this as generic, free-floating imagery. It makes a difference in terms of how Matthew understood his own account.

Licona also cites OT seismic and resurrection passages. But this raises the same questions:

The fact that a NT account may have OT precedent doesn't imply that the NT account is a poetic device. In a prophecy/fulfillment scheme, we'd expect the OT prophecy to correspond to a future event. Even if the prophetic imagery is figurative, it will still have a real-world analogue. There must be some concrete correlation.

Licona says:

Matthew adds that they did not come out of their tombs until after Jesus' resurrection. What were they doing between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning? (552).

i) But that's a disappointing objection. To begin with, he footnotes Crossan and Borg to support that objection. But they are hardly reliable. Both of them automatically discount the supernatural.

ii) In addition, the syntax of the Greek sentence is ambiguous. It can be rendered in more than one way. And that affects the sequence of events. Surely Licona is aware of that fact. Cf. J. Nolland, **THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW** (Eerdmans 2005), 1215-16.

Recently, Licona has modified his previous position:

Although additional research certainly remains, at present I am just as inclined to understand the narrative of the raised saints in Matthew 27 as a report of a factual (i.e., literal) event as I am to view it as an apocalyptic symbol. It may also be a report of a real event described partially in apocalyptic terms.

<http://deeperwaters.wordpress.com/2011/09/08/mike-licona-replies/>

To say the account is a real event partially depicted in apocalyptic terms is a more defensible alternative.

In his book, Licona says:

During the past three years, I have attempted to divest myself of preconditioning and have worked toward experiencing empathy when reading the works of those with whom I do not agree...I have been able to experience what I believe was a neutral position for a number of brief periods. During these, I have been so uncertain of what I believe in terms of Jesus'

resurrection that I prayed for God's guidance and continued patience if the Christianity I was now doubting is true. I was walking on a balance beam and could have tipped toward either side...I am doubtful that I will conclude that the resurrection of Jesus did not occur. However, I believe myself very open to the possibility that the historical evidence for the event is not strong enough to place the resurrection hypothesis far enough along on my spectrum of historical certainty to warrant a conclusion of "historical."...I am convinced that my interest in truth supersedes my fear of embarrassment and disappointment (131-132).

This raises a number of issues:

**i)** Apparently, Licona precipitated a crisis of faith by bracketing or suspending his Christian commitments. Putting his faith on hold while he tried to give the other side a fair hearing. Truly assuming the viewpoint of the other side. Not just for the sake of argument.

On this methodology, no position has a head-start. You identify with each position, making each position your own.

**ii)** That goes far beyond critical sympathy. And it betrays a basic flaw in his methodology. For one thing, he collapses the distinction between what is historical and what is demonstrable. Even if you couldn't prove the historicity of the resurrection using his 5-point criteria, or inference-to-the-best explanation, that simply reflects the limitations of proof.

For instance, most things that happen in history go unreported. In that respect, we can never prove they happened. Yet it would be irrational to doubt that many

things have happened, for which we have no record. No specific evidence.

**iii)** In addition, I understand that in apologetics we often cite corroborative evidence for Scripture rather than using Scripture itself as evidence. But Scripture ought to be evidentiary to a Christian, even if that's not evidentiary to an unbeliever. It should count for Christians, even if it doesn't count for unbelievers.

**iv)** This also exposes the weakness of a top-heavy apologetic, where the Resurrection is the lynchpin for everything else we believe. On that model, the evidence for the Christian faith is only as good as the evidence for the Resurrection. But that's terribly myopic.

**v)** On a related note, Licona needs to shift to a more holistic religious epistemology, like Newman's illative sense and Polanyi's tacit knowledge. It's often impossible to retrace all the lines of evidence for what we believe. Impossible to explicate all our reasons in a formal argument. Human experience operates at a more subtle, elusive level.

**vi)** By the same token, even the "right" methodology won't immunize us from possible doubt. An apologetic method (be it evidentialism or presuppositionalism) is no substitute for faith. An apologetic method can't be the source of faith. The aquifer must lie elsewhere, and deeper.

**vii)** One source of doubt is the failure to think through an issue. However, an opposite source of doubt is to overthink an issue. The paralysis of analysis. Indeed, philosophers are notorious for doubting the indubitable.

It's possible to work yourself into an artificial state of doubt by staring at the same "problem" all the time. So it's important to strike a balance. Sometimes we just need to take a break. Get some fresh air.

**viii)** On a related note, Christian apologists aren't disembodied minds. Their faith can be affected by their moods, and their moods can be affected by what's going on in their life. The aging process. A marriage going through a dry spell. Regrets and disappointments. A death in the family. Lost opportunities. Unanswered prayer. The wear and tear of life in a fallen world.

And there's no guarantee in life that you will find your way out of the tunnel in this life. Some Christians may die depressed.

**ix)** It can also be a problem if we only read the Bible to defend the Bible rather than reading the Bible to water our soul.

**x)** The notion of disinterested commitment to truth for truth's sake, just pursuing the truth wherever it takes you, sounds very pure and noble. But it's actually quite shortsighted. Naively idealistic.

What if following the evidence wherever it leads you ends up leading you into a blind alley? What if pursuing the truth wherever it takes you is a trip to nihilism?

Are you getting closer to the truth, or farther away? Truth is only a value in a worldview that values truth. If, in your disinterested pursuit of truth, you wind up leaving truth behind as you hurtle headfirst into nihilism, then there's nothing very truth-affirming about the conclusion.

Seems to me that Licona fails to appreciate the stark alternatives. What if going wherever the evidence leads you is a one-way ticket to nowhere? Are you really making progress? Or do you find yourself out of gas, out of water, in the middle of the desert? A no-man's-land with no way forward and no way back?

Mind you, I don't think the evidence points away from Scripture. But even if it appeared to do so, that doesn't mean the "truth is out there," in some alternative to Christianity.

## The day hope died

One of the ironies of the Licona controversy is the way it's deflected attention away from the fundamental issue. Much has been said about inerrancy and hermeneutics. Genre. Comparative literature. ETS and ICBI documents.

What's striking is how little has been said about the incident itself. About the resurrected saints. That's been nearly eclipsed from the current debate.

If some readers find that inherently implausible, if they mock that scene as a "zombie apocalypse," then what they're rejecting is not simply the historicity of this pericope, but the underlying principle.

Do we believe in the resurrection of the body? Or do we think this life is all there is? Do we really believe in God's omnipotence?

Now for some folks, especially the younger generation, death is often an abstraction. It's something they see on the news. They may not be at that age where they've had to bury someone they loved.

Detachment from death is also fostered by a transient society in which relatives frequently live hundreds or thousands of miles away. You may not see aunts and uncles or grandparents very often. So their death doesn't have the same impact. They really weren't a part of your life. You weren't in the room when they died. It's just something you're told on the phone. Or email.

Likewise, childhood friends or high school buddies may move away. After you graduate, you never see each other

again.

But if you attend an open casket service, or a graveside service, especially for someone dear to you, that's different. If the crematorium hands you a sack of dust and ashes which used to be your loved one, that's different.

We're often insulated, not only from death, but from dying. From the process of dying. From watching a loved one lose ground. Become enfeebled or feebleminded. Fearful. Vulnerable. Losing control.

Nowadays the dying rarely die at home. They die in the hospital, or hospice, or nursing home. They often die alone. Lonely. Abandoned. At the mercy of underpaid strangers.

Does the last enemy have the final say?

## The blessed hope

As I remarked in a previous post, in all that's been written about the Licona controversy, it's striking how little has been written (in this connection) about the underlying principle. Scripture records several different resurrections:

1. The resurrection of Christ
2. The resurrection of the saints (Mt 27:52-53)
3. The resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11)
4. The resurrection of the just (1 Cor 15; 1 Thes 4)
5. The general resurrection (Dan 12:2; Jn 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rev 20:13-15)

There are some potential differences:

**i)** In one respect, the resurrection of the just is a subset of the general resurrection.

Since, however, the resurrection of the just is a reward, whereas the resurrection of the unjust is a punishment, there may be some differences in the quality of the resurrection.

**ii)** There's a difference between restoration to mortal life, and glorification—which confers immortality.

The “resurrection” of Lazarus is less than glorification, but more than resuscitation. Since his body already underwent extensive necrosis, it wasn't like wheeling in the crash cart.

However, despite the differences, they share a common principle: in all instances, the dead are restored to life. And it's not like defibrillating someone who flat-lined three minutes ago—where there's no tissue death or brain damage. (We do have some miraculous resuscitations in Scripture.)

Some professing believers find Mt 27:52-53 incredible. But if that's inherently unbelievable, then what's left?

I daresay that those who find Mt 27:52-53 incredible are also inclined to disbelieve the intermediate state. Nowadays it's fashionable to deride the intermediate state as a doctrine based on platonic dualism and the immortality of the soul. The Hebrews, so we're told, had a more holistic view of biological existence. Indeed, some professing believers are physicalists.

In that case, the only basis for the afterlife is the resurrection of the body. If, however, we're going to mock Mt 27:52-53 as a zombie apocalypse, then what's left?

Or, to approach this from another angle, do they still believe in the Parousia? Do they believe in the future return of Christ? Will Christ physically return to earth?

If so, then when Christ returns, what will happen to those who died in Christ? Take a Christian who was buried a day before. Will Christ raise that body from the dead? Will he glorify that body?

In many cases there is no preexisting body to raise. In the nature of the case, you have a continuum, ranging from those who died a few minutes ago to those whose bodies have turned to dust. Scattered to the four winds.

But what about a Lazarus-like scenario? If you think the resurrection of the saints in Matthew is incredible, do you also think the resurrection of Lazarus is incredible?

What about the resurrection of the just? Is that a mass zombie apocalypse?

You can make fun of this, but death isn't funny. Death will catch up with you. There's such a thing as gallows humor, but that presupposes the fear of death. That masks the fear of death.

If Mt 27:52-53 is deemed to be intrinsically implausible, then that implicates the common principle which underlies any resurrection.

I'm not addressing atheists in this post. I'm addressing those who profess to be Christians.

## God of the living

*31 And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 32 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living (Mt 22:31-32).*

Commentators puzzle over this argument. How does Jesus infer the resurrection from God's statement to Moses (Exod 3:6)? I've discussed this before, but now I'd like to approach it from a different angle.

The statement in Exodus alludes to the patriarchal narratives in Genesis. And that centers on God's promise to Abraham. For instance:

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the **land** that I will show you" (Gen 12:1).*

*for all the **land** that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever (Gen 13:15).*

*And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this **land** to possess" (Gen 15:7).*

*“8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the **land** of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God” (Gen 17:8).*

But this creates a source of tension. For Abraham dies without taking possession of the land. It's already occupied. Indeed, Abraham's lifestyle is conspicuously nomadic. He's a drifter.

Admittedly, the promise is not confined to Abraham. The promise extends to his posterity. But does the promise include his posterity to the exclusion of Abraham himself?

Moreover, it's not as if his immediate posterity take possession. Isaac never inherits the land. Jacob and Joseph die in Egypt. They effectively die in exile.

So when does God make good on his promise to the patriarchs? Not during their lifetime.

If, however, God resurrects them at a later date, then they will be in a position to take possession of the promised land.

## Appointed once to die

*And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (Heb 9:27).*

Some Christians quote this verse to nix NDEs. There is, however, a fundamental problem with their proof texting. Unless they believe the Bible contradicts itself, the statement can't be absolute. For in the Bible itself, there are some individuals who died more than once. Mortals who were restored to life, viz. Tabitha, Eutychus, Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus, the widow of Nain's son, and the unnamed individual in 2 Kgs 13:21. Conversely, Elijah didn't die even one time.

Moreover, to treat Heb 9:27 as unexceptional would make the author of Hebrews contradict himself. On the one hand, he himself mentions two mortals who died more than once (alluding to the Shunammite's son and the widow of Zarephath's son):

*Women received back their dead by resurrection (11:35).*

On the other hand, he mentions an individual who didn't die even once:

*By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him (11:5).*

It's odd that Christians who quote Heb 9:27 to nix NDEs overlook all these Scriptural counterexamples.

Heb 9:27 is a general statement rather than a universal statement. Humans are mortal. As a rule, humans die just once—barring rare, miraculous exceptions.

## The graves were opened

**52** *The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many (Mt 27:52-53).*

Many otherwise conservative (or fairly conservative) scholars are skittish when they come to this incident.

i) This incident is anomalous in the sense that this is the only place where it's recorded. However, in terms of biblical theology, it's not anomalous.

This is a microcosm of the resurrection of the just. That's a fundamental hope and expectation in biblical eschatology.

ii) I don't think it's coincidental that this takes place right after the death of Christ. This is God's way of showing that the death of the Redeemer made atonement for the sins of his people. Here's some graphic evidence. Ever since Adam and Eve were banished from access to the tree of life, death has been the fate of all mankind, including God's people. Here we have a token reversal, keyed to the vicarious atonement of Christ.

iii) The incident in Mt 27:52-53 is a foretaste and pledge for what the future holds.

iv) Although this passage has no direct parallel in other Gospels, the raising of Lazarus is roughly analogous (Jn 11).

v) If the Bible is to be trusted, then this incident is *exactly* what will happen on a massive, worldwide scale when Jesus returns.

If you happen to be walking through a cemetery at the time Jesus returns, that's what you will see. Graves will open and the dead in Christ will rise. This is a picture we need to take seriously, for this is what the resurrection of the just entails. If Christian scholars balk at that, they have failed to take to heart and think through the implications of biblical eschatology in this respect. That's how it

cashes out in concrete terms. It will be a very physical, dramatic, hair-raising event.

(Some premil positions view the effects of the Parousia as multistaged rather than simultaneous. But even if it's a delayed effect, that's still the effect when it happens.)

**vi)** Admittedly, the object of glorification ranges along on continuum. At one end are Christians alive at the time Jesus returns. They will be instantly transformed.

At the other end are Christians whose bodies have disintegrated. God will reconstitute the unique molecular pattern of their bodies, and reunite their souls to their bodies. But where the body is intact, this is what will happen.

**vii)** Some readers have been conditioned by horror flicks about the zombie apocalypse to superimpose a false image on the text. But this doesn't describe rotting corpses which lumber around. To the contrary, they will be restored to life, youth, and health. Healthier than they were in the mortal prime of life.

**viii)** [Mt 27:52-53](#) raises more questions than it answers, but that's a mark of historicity. If this was fiction, it would be easy for Matthew to tie up the loose ends. Fiction is tidy, reality is messy.

**ix)** Some critics think it's legendary because, if it really happened, it would be a famous event. However:

**a)** The only people in a position to recognize that these were former decedents would be contemporary friends and relatives living in Jerusalem. And that might come down to just a handful of witnesses.

**b)** Jerusalem suffered two devastating attacks by the Romans, resulting in massive casualties, massive dislocation of survivors, as well as massive destruction of written records.

## Are bodies superfluous?

**i)** I'm going to consider a philosophical objection to the resurrection of the body. The objection is not that physical resurrection is impossible, but unnecessary.

Traditional Christian eschatology distinguishes the intermediate state from the final state. The intermediate state is a conscious, discarnate state. When a human dies, their soul is "separated" from the body. The soul (mind, consciousness) continues to exist.

And I think that's correct. I put "separation" in scare quotes because, strictly speaking, I don't think the soul is in the body or attached to the body. Rather, the soul uses the body.

**ii)** There are different ways of representing the intermediate state. In Scripture, the intermediate state is like an extended out-of-body experience. In Scripture, the mode of visionary revelation employs what is, at least from a phenomenological standpoint, an out-of-body experience.

In this altered state of consciousness, the seer has very vivid, inspired dreams or visions. It simulates physical or sensory experience. The intermediate state is like an inspired collective dream. It can heavenly for the saints, and hellish for the damned.

**iii)** In principle, it seems as though a discarnate state can mirror physical experience. Indeed, because it is liberated from what's physically possible, it is more flexible than physical experience. In that state you can do or perceive things you can't do with the body. By "do," I mean manipulate or interact with the imaginary environment.

But if that's the case, the final state seems to be superfluous. It doesn't add anything to the intermediate state. Indeed, it's more limited than the intermediate state. It is subject to physical restrictions.

**iv)** We can also model the intermediate state by using SF analogues. These take two basic forms. There's virtual reality. A neurointerface may bypass the subject's sensory inputs. Instead, information is fed directly into his brain. An imaginary world which may mimic the real world down to the last detail. The experience may be indistinguishable from reality.

A more dualistic version involves uploading consciousness into a computer–or synthetic body. On this view, consciousness is information. It can be digitized.

It's dualistic in the sense that mind is separable and transferable. However, it still requires a physical platform to subsist. And that's because science fiction is into hardware.

Examples of both include **AVATAR, FREEJACK, THE MATRIX, HARSH REALM, TOTAL RECALL, "KILL SWITCH"** (The X-Files), &c.

A character can become trapped in virtual reality. He can't tell when, or if, it ends.

Although this is fictional, there are scientists like Frank Tipler and Ray Kurzweil who think it's realistic. That, of course, depends on a particular theory of the mind. As well as the assumption that the brain is exhaustively mappable.

**v)** If this is true, then the final state seems to be superfluous. But is it true that the intermediate state is empirically equivalent to physical existence? Or is there some loss as we switch from embodied existence to disembodied experience?

**vi)** One possible reason is that we initially need genuine sensory experience in a physical world to stock our imagination. But once we acquire a mental map of sensation and physicality, then, in principle, imagination can take it from there.

But perhaps sensory deprivation would become psychotic unless our imagination is periodically refreshed by the real thing. If a dreamer never wakes up, will the dreamscape deteriorate the way memories fade unless they are reinforced by contact with the person or place?

**vii)** Although this is controversial, one thing VR can't properly simulate is procreation. Imagining a baby isn't a baby. A mental projection of a baby or child isn't the same thing as an independent person. So one irreducible value of a final (physical state) is if the saints can procreate.

**viii)** Even if a discarnate state can simulate a physical sensation, yet without a body we may not have the same motivation. For instance, young men are physically restless because they have surplus energy. They burn it off through athletic activity.

Even if a discarnate state can simulate athletic activity, without a body there wouldn't be the same impulse. They wouldn't have energy to burn, so the incentive would be gone.

**ix)** Apropos (viii), what makes some sensations pleasant isn't merely the immediate sensation, but the prior physical state of the agent.

Tasty food is pleasant even if you aren't hungry, but it's more enjoyable if you are hungry. A chilly drink is more enjoyable if you're thirsty.

Some physical pleasures assume a degree of physical discomfort prior to the subsequent experience which brings relief. Like eating and drinking.

Sleep is more enjoyable if you're dog tired. Chocolate gelato is always good, but better on a hot day.

A hot bath or shower feels even better if you're chilly. Same thing with sitting in front of a cracking fireplace.

Even if the discarnate state can simulate swimming, the pleasure of merely swimming doesn't capture the pleasure of swimming on a hot day. You must feel initially overheated to fully enter into the pleasant experience of cooling off by taking a dip.

**x)** This all goes to the fact that in interactionist dualism, the body affects the mind, as well as vice versa. Without a body, you can't have the complete experience. So there's something lost in the absence of a body. It isn't possible to replicate embodied experience in toto minus a body. Not everything carries over.

## Is the final state feasible?

I'd like to consider some potential objections to the Christian doctrine of the final state, then consider how to field those objections.

Generally stated, are there aspects of the final state that are naturally impossible? There are things that even an omnipotent God can't *naturally* do. That doesn't mean he can't do them; just that he can't *naturally* do them. God would have to circumvent natural processes to make it happen.

Let's take one example: Is biological immortality naturally possible? I don't think we know the answer to that as of yet. To my knowledge, scientists haven't figured out why humans (and other organisms) age. Yet the Bible promises that we will have immortal bodies.

One question is whether aging is caused by a master switch. Is there one mechanism that triggers a cascade effect. Assuming that's the case, then if that switch were improved, renewed, or replaced, the organism wouldn't age. The human body already has some capacity to regenerate itself. Just not systematically and permanently.

Perhaps, though, there is no single mechanism of senescence. Perhaps organs and body parts individually age, independent of each other. The whole body wears out, and there's no discrete solution.

In that event, how would God preserve the body from aging? The answer depends in part on whether senescence is naturally inevitable. If so, then God must supernaturally preserve the body.

How might God do so? Of course, the answer is speculative, but let's speculate. We might begin by asking what's a body? A body is a specific organization of matter. Of atoms and molecules, in various combinations, combinations in various scales of magnitude. Highly structured patterns of particles and fields of energy. If aging means organs and body parts lose the structural pattern necessary to function, God could repair that by bringing the atoms and molecules back into alignment.

Another possibility is replacement. God replaces aging parts, organs, body systems. In principle, God could instantly replace the entire body with a duplicate body.

Suppose aging is naturally inevitable. Suppose your physical prime is between 18-28. Suppose every ten years, God gives you a brand-new, 18-year-old body. God replicates the pattern of atoms and molecules that compose your body.

That isn't pure speculation. After all, how is the resurrection of the body going to occur? In many cases, there is no extant corpse to work from. Our bodies disintegrated. The body would need to be recreated from scratch. The way to resurrect our bodies is for God to replicate the specific organization of matter that constituted our distinctive bodies. At least, that's my preferred explanation.

Let's consider another potential objection. The sun will exhaust its fuel. Moreover, to sustain life on earth, the sun must maintain a very specific output. Long before the sun is a spent force, its output will be at the wrong level to sustain life on earth, which has very narrow, very exacting parameters.

Moreover, the problem isn't confined to the sun. There's the distant specter of cosmic heat death. Stars have natural lifecycles.

Once again, we might evoke the replacement model. God instantly replaces an aging sun with a new sun the right age to sustain life on earth.

Here's another potential objection:

Large moon with right planetary rotation period (which stabilizes a planet's tilt and contributes to tides). In the case of the Earth, the gravitational pull of its moon stabilizes the angle of its axis at a nearly constant 23.5 degrees. This ensures relatively temperate seasonal changes, and the only climate in the solar system mild enough to sustain complex living organisms.

A few, large Jupiter-mass planetary neighbors in large circular orbits (which protects the habitable zone from too many comet bombardments). If the Earth were not protected by the gravitational pulls of Jupiter and Saturn, it would be far more susceptible to collisions with devastating comets that would cause mass extinctions. As it is, the larger planets in our solar system provide significant protection to the Earth from the most dangerous comets.

<http://www.discovery.org/f/11011>

Problem is that over time the relative position of planets and satellites in the solar system changes. For instance, due to tidal friction, the moon is moving incrementally away from the earth. A solution would be for God to restore the configuration necessary to maintain life on earth.

Now let's consider an objection from Leibniz:

Newton and his followers also have a very odd opinion regarding God's workmanship. According to them, God's watch—the universe—would stop working if he didn't rewind it from time to time! He didn't have enough foresight to give it perpetual motion. This machine that he has made is so imperfect that from time to time he has to clean it by a miraculous intervention, and even has to mend it, as a clockmaker mends his work.

The oftener a clockmaker has to adjust his machine and set it right, the clumsier he must be as a clockmaker! In my view, the world always contains the same amount of force and energy, which changes only by passing from one material thing to another in accordance with the laws of nature and the beautiful order that God has preestablished. And I hold that when God works miracles, he does it not to meet the needs of nature but to meet the needs of grace. Anyone who thinks differently must have a very mean notion of the wisdom and power of God.

A final point: If God has to mend the course of nature from time to time, he must do it either *supernaturally* or *naturally*. If *supernaturally*, this is appealing to miracles in order to explain natural things; and that amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum* of this hypothesis, for once you let in miracles anything can be 'explained' with no trouble at all. And if God's mending is done *naturally*, then rather than being *intelligentia supramundana* he is included in the nature of things—i.e. is the soul of the world.

[http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/leibniz1715\\_1.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/leibniz1715_1.pdf)

His objection has some merit. Newton postulated divine intervention to shore up gaps in his theory. That's ad hoc.

However, the Leibnizian objection is overstated. It's not a design flaw that when nature is left to take its course, stars burn out and planetary configurations shift. That's what's supposed to happen. That's the natural outcome of a natural process. The Leibnizian objection has less to do with his philosophy of miracle than his philosophy of nature. Perpetual motion is an artificial abstraction.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong with the lifecycle of stars or the realignment of planets and satellites in the solar system. (In fairness, Leibniz wasn't commenting on these specific examples). Rather, it's only a problem relative to the conditions necessary to sustain life on earth. A particular configuration of the planets and satellites isn't absolutely required, but only required for life on earth.

In addition, divine intervention needn't mean God is jumping in to make last-minute adjustments. Rather, those midcourse corrections were foreseen. They were part of God's master plan for the world all along. If God makes a world that normally operates according to second causes, but in addition, certain desirable events exceed the productive power of nature to affect their eventuation, it's not makeshift to invoke supernatural agency in such cases.

Ironically, the proposed alternative of preestablished harmony is just as ad hoc as Newton's stopgap invocation of miracles to salvage his theory. There's a difference between invoking miracles to make a scientific theory hang together, and invoking miracles to account for an outcome that isn't naturally feasible.

## A moment in the sun

I'd like to consider the shooting of the gorilla (Harambe) from both a secular standpoint and a Christian standpoint.

**1.** I suspect most folks who wax indigent over shooting the gorilla to save the boy are Darwinian atheists. There may be some "progressive Christians" thrown in for good measure.

From a secular standpoint, the reaction to shooting the gorilla is irrational. Animals are temporary organisms. Harambe was not immortal. He was going to die anyway. Just a matter of time.

Animals naturally die. In the wild, many animals die a violent death: killed by predators. Many animals die young due to relentless predation.

Although Harambe was a magnificent specimen, individual animals are utterly replaceable. One male, silverback gorilla serves the same function as another male, silverback gorilla. The players change, but the play remains the same.

From an ecosystemic perspective, animals aren't more important than plants. There's a symbiosis between plants and animals, life and death, that sustains a balanced ecosystem. Animal death is necessary.

Nature is utterly indifferent to the plight of animals. According to Darwinians, most species become extinct.

Some atheists profess an Epicurean outlook on human death. As Mark Twain boastfully put it: "I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I

was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it.”

In consistency, they should view animal death the same way.

**2.** From a Christian perspective, animals are temporary creatures. There is no afterlife for animals.

Perhaps God will resurrect Christian pets. I'm open to that possibility. But there's no reason to think God will resurrect animals generally. Indeed, there's not nearly enough room on planet earth to accommodate all the animals that ever lived and died.

With the possible exception of Christian pets, when an animal dies, that's it. It's gone. It won't come back. End of story. Life goes on, but not for it.

The animal kingdom is stark and sobering. Immortality is a rare gift. Among all God's creatures, only humans are promised biological immortality. Angels are the only other exception, and strictly speaking, they aren't alive (in the biological sense).

A few months ago I saw some coyotes frolicking in a meadow. Having their moment in the sun. That will pass. They will pass. In a few years, they will die—never to return.

A few days ago I sat down on a park bench. I noticed a little rabbit right beside me. Practically a baby. Unafraid of humans. It was busily feeding on the moist green grass.

Odds are, it won't survive until adulthood, and even if it does, it, too, will die. Mostly likely be killed by predators.

The gift of immortality is one thing that sets us apart from animals. Sure, we die, but that's punitive. Although humans are mortal, we die once but live twice. We have immortal souls. And we will be resurrected. For some, that's a gift—for others, that's a curse.

## The world to come

Here's a sequel to a related post:

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2015/05/are-bodies-superfluous.html>

For reasons I've stated in the past, I don't think stock objections to the resurrection of the body are impressive. But for the sake of argument, suppose the intermediate state *is* the final state.

**1.** One question is whether the resurrection of the body is superfluous. It seems to be unnecessary if a disembodied state can simulate an embodied state. Examples include a vivid collective dream. God inspires an eternal dream for the dead. That would make it stable, and give it a coherent plot and landscape. For the saints, it would be Edenic, and for the damned, it would be nightmarish.

A more hitech analogy is virtual reality, a la **THE MATRIX**, **HARSH REALM**. But it's the same basic principle. A psychological simulation that's indistinguishable from embodied experience.

There are certain prima facie advantages to this. For one thing, you don't have an overcrowding problem on the new earth, or natural disasters. It could be customized so that the saints can experience different historical periods, if they wish.

**2.** The obvious objection to this is that Scripture describes the final state as a reembodied state. And the resurrection of Christ is the template.

Suppose, though, we consider that depiction to be a divine accommodation. There really is a world to come. But it's incorporeal.

Now, what would be the most effective and convincing way to convey that to people?

**i)** Someone physically dying, being dead for about 36 hours, then coming back to life, is more convincing than a *promise* about the afterlife. And it's more convincing than a ghost or vision, which might be dismissed as a hallucination. So that would prove there really is an afterlife.

**ii)** In addition, if the afterlife is *like* physical existence, even though it's not physical existence, the simplest way to convey that idea is to describe the afterlife in physical terms. That gets the basic point across. After all, they're phenomenologically interchangeable.

By contrast, attempting to explain that the afterlife *resembles* embodied life in a physical environment, even though it's not actually physical, is more cumbersome to articulate, especially for ancient readers who haven't been raised on science fiction. It's hard to think of a simple way to express that idea. It would take a lot of exposition. So God describes the world to come *as if* it's physical, since:

**i)** They're comparable.

**ii)** It's the best way to communicate. Audience adaptation.

**iii)** Although they're metaphysically distinct, you can't tell the difference. The experience is identical. Psychologically

equivalent.

Moreover, eschatological imagery is often figurative. So where to draw the line?

Certainly we can draw a line with Christ, since my scenario affirms the physical resurrection of Christ.

## The metaphysics of glorification

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 reenter 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 magnet, 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?... From conception on, all of us are recycled elements.

Christians hold, however, that, once we rise, death will be no more. The exegetical justification is 1 Cor 15, where Paul foresees an imperishable body...Mortality will put on immortality...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 or not breathing will be matters of indifference.

If, as 4 Ezra avows, illness will be banished, we don'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.

The average human body harbors, according to recent estimates, at least ten thousand species of parasitic microbes...Many microbes, such as digestive flora, are required for healthy functioning...Won't our microbial ecosystems have to be resurrected, too? Without the bugs we host, the intestines won't work.

These days, even many professing belief in the resurrection don't believe it...They anticipate not repair but replacement...This isn't the dominant Christian tradition...Until recently, most theologians taught this. This 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.

The first large blips of doubt show up, as far as I've been able to learn, in the seventeenth century. John Locke...stressed that personal identity lies in continuity of consciousness, not in physical stability...Doctrinal revolutions, like all other revolutions, have manifold causes. D. Allison, **NIGHT COMES** (Eerdmans, 2016), chap. 2.

i) I'm struck by people who have the notion that immortality means a body must be intrinsically invulnerable. But the word "immortality" doesn't carry that specification. And that's not an implication of the concept. Are they getting that from "imperishable"? But Paul is piling on adjectives that function in context as virtual synonyms. Many of Allison's objections are premised on the dubious assumption that if a body is immortal, that means the body

is invulnerable to harm. But that doesn't follow. Allison says that nowadays, even many professing belief in the resurrection don't really believe it, but he's the one whose paradigm eviscerates the notion of a body. He acts as though the Biblical concept of a resurrected body is the "body" of a superhero or mutant. If that body was at ground zero during a thermonuclear explosion, it wouldn't even have a suntan. But that's not recognizably a human body. Heck, that's not even recognizably any kind of body. It's no longer organic. No longer protoplasm.

**ii)** Surely Bible writers didn't have a deistic view of immortality, where we no longer need God because we're safely ensconced within the impregnable fortress of a resurrected body. I don't think it means we'll be naturally incapable of dying from thirst or starvation. Rather, the saints won't die from drought or famine because we'll always have access to food and drink.

Likewise, to say illness will be banished doesn't imply that there will be no pathogens. It might mean we will have stronger immune systems and antibodies for more diseases. It might also mean that while some infectious diseases are still naturally hazards to humans, God will steer us clear of the danger zone.

I don't think it means the body will be naturally impervious to accidental death. Rather, God will providentially protect us from accidental death. I don't think it means we will be naturally immune to radiation or poison or snake venom. Just that God will providentially protect us.

In fact, I don't think God would be breaking any eschatological promises if a saint temporarily suffered an accidental death, but was miraculously restored to life. That

would be a salutary reminder that we remain ever-dependent on God for our being and well-being.

**iii)** I don't think it's "revolutionary" to deny that resurrected bodies must be composed of the very same atoms. It would be revolutionary to deny physical reembodiment. But I wouldn't say a particular model of physical reembodiment is revolutionary. These are variations within a common framework of corporeal reconstitution.

He himself admits that atoms are indistinguishable. It's not the atoms that distinguish one body from another, but the pattern, the structure.

**iv)** Moreover, what makes tradition the standard of comparison? What's wrong with modern-day Christians having a concept of the resurrected body that's independent of the church fathers? It's not as if they were in a special position to know something we don't. Why should we have to measure our position by their paradigm? How is that even relevant?

**v)** Although I'm a substance dualist, I wouldn't say personal identity is reducible to continuity of consciousness. We're designed to interact with a physical environment. We're designed to interact with other embodied persons. Moreover, the brain and body have a powerful conditioning influence on the soul. On how we experience reality. The soul is to nature as embodiment is to nurture. Embodied perception affects our personality, moods, memories, and character development. That has a formative impact on the soul by informing the soul.

There's no tidy distinction between embodiment and continuity of consciousness. For instance, memories are one way to ground continuity of consciousness—consider the sad

case of the senile demented—yet most-all of our memories are recollections of physical, sensory experience.

**vi)** Some theologians take the resurrection of Christ to be paradigmatic for the general resurrection, but while there's some value in that comparison, we need to distinguish between the process and the end-product. The corpse of Christ was only on ice for about 48 hours, so it didn't have time to undergo drastic necrosis. But in many cases there is no intact corpse, or even skeletal remains. It's fallacious to extrapolate from the case of Christ in reference to the *process* of resurrection. That would only be parallel in situations where you have bodies in a comparable state of preservation or decay. But the condition of a dead body, if any, ranges along a continuum from total disintegration to life-support.

## Coloring book

In substance dualism, I'd say the relation between soul and body is analogous to the relation between nature and nurture. The soul is the foundation of human personality. The source of character traits. Where memories are stored. And so on.

However, embodied experience has a tremendous conditioning impact on personality. Formative influences during maturation. Mood-altering hormones. Interaction with other humans. The sensible world as a frame of reference.

I don't think a soul is a blank slate. But embodied experience affects how we turn out. Take hypothetical scenarios about the kind of person I'd be if my mother died when I was young, if I was born in a different century, if I was born in a different country or different part of the country. Although I'd have the same core personality, I'd turn out differently if my formative influences were different.

To take a simplistic illustration, the soul is like a coloring book with line drawings. Innate patterns. The body is like palette which colors the line drawings.

That segues into the question of why the resurrection is necessary. An idealist would say that since a virtual world is indistinguishable from a physical world, what's the advantage of a physical world?

**i)** To begin with, if the physical world is illusory, why does God create a collective psychological experience that mimics a physical world, including the natural limitations of

physicality? For instance, we can do things in dreams that we can't do in real life. But if idealism is true, why isn't experience emancipated from what's physically possible—like a dream?

If everything is mental, and God is starting from scratch, why the apparent physicality of the template? Why not something more surreal?

**ii)** Many saints die before the age when embodied experience informs the soul. The resurrection gives them a chance to catch up.

## Atheism and immortality

There are atheists who try to make a virtue of necessity by saying mortality is what makes life precious. It's actually immortality that cheapens the value of life.

However, you have secular transhumanists who hope to achieve immortality by digitizing the mind, then uploading the contents into video games. An indestructible simulated paradise.

If atheists who say mortality is what makes life valuable had a shot at immortality, would they turn it down? Really? Eventually, they might become bored and commit suicide, but would they turn down the initial offer?

## Information and resurrection

It's clear from experience that information always comes embodied. What's less clear is that information can always be re-embodied. When matter that embodies information disintegrates, we are likely to think that the information is lost. And for the matter that did the embodying, it is. But this same information can, in principle, always be recovered and then realized in other embodiments. Information is *multiply realizable*. To say that information is multiply realizable is to say that the same information can be re-presented (that is, made present again) in numerous distinct embodiments. For instance, a musical composition can be realized as notes written in ink on paper, as an electronically scanned version of that document, as a live performance (provided it is without errors), or as an audio file on your computer, to name just a few possibilities. The material embodiment of information can always be destroyed. But information itself is transferrable to other embodiments. It is therefore indestructible and even eternal.

Information's multiple realizability may illuminate the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection...consider what has been called the "super supercomputer," attributed to statistician David Blackwell.<sup>7</sup> This computer performs its first computational step in half a second, its next computational step a quarter of a second, its next in an eighth of a second, and so on. In general, the  $n$ th computational step takes  $1/2^n$  seconds. Because the infinite mathematical series  $1/2^1 + 1/2^2 + 1/2^3 + \dots$  sums to 1, such a computer would therefore perform any computation whatsoever in a single second. Because it would have infinite

computational speed and memory, it could resolve any mathematical problem whatsoever. To an intellect endowed with such computational power, all mathematical truths would be immediately obvious, or, as Ludwig Wittgenstein would say, "surveyable" or "perspicuous."<sup>8</sup> Does God's mind have such computing power? Will humans, if bodily resurrected, be given minds with such computing power? Would having such computing power take the fun out of math for us? Who knows?

William Dembski, **BEING AS COMMUNION**.

HT: Patrick Chan

I think there's some value in Dembski's comparison. Certainly, if we view bodies as instantiations of abstract information, then there's an obvious sense in which a body that's destroyed can be the same body as a replica: they both exemplify identical information.

But there's a problem with Dembski's comparison. Supercomputers have more hardware. But you can't scale up the human body beyond a certain threshold. If the (human) mind is filtered through the brain, then that imposes an upper limit on cognition, because there's an upper limit to a physical structure like the brain, a living structure that depends on fit with a corresponding body to function or even remain alive.

Our brains age, wear out, and get damaged (as in Alzheimer's disease). In such cases, a destructive transposition occurs that undermines a person's ability to think, feel, and act...In the resurrection our embodied form is supposed not merely to be reconstituted but also to be transposed to a new reality

in which wounds are healed, sorrows are comforted,  
limitations are overcome, and aspirations are fulfilled.

It's true that glorification will repair physical damage.  
However, the resurrection of the body doesn't repair  
psychological damage or overcome natural limitations.  
Psychological healing requires a different principle than  
physical healing.

## Postmortem stages

The Bible distinguishes between this life and the afterlife. It subdivides the afterlife into the intermediate state and the final state. And it subdivides the final state into heaven and hell. The question is how to sequence these stages.

### **I. Traditional Protestant eschatology**

Every man has one of two eternal destinies. Every man is either heavenbound or hellbound. Those run on parallel tracks.

In addition, the traditional view has a two-stage postmortem eschatology: when a man dies, his soul passes into the intermediate state. Then, on the day of judgement, the dead will be resurrected. The saints will spend eternity on the new earth while the damned will presumably spend eternity at some alternative physical location.

The parallel tracks temporarily converge at the Parousia, where you have a common event (the general resurrection), then they diverge after that event.

There's a simple logic to the traditional position. On the one hand, men die at different times. On the other hand, the day of judgment is a one-time event which all men will experience at the same time. The intermediate state is sequenced successively and individualistically while the final state is simultaneous and corporate.

The only folks who don't experience the intermediate state are people alive at the time of the Parousia.

### **II. Catholicism**

In traditional Catholicism, those who die in a state of grace pass into Purgatory before they go to heaven, while those who die in a state of mortal sin are inexorably hellbound.

### **III. Universalism**

A universalist must do something with all the passages regarding eschatological judgment. In universalism, heaven and hell aren't parallel tracks, but successive stages: many decedents must go through hell to get to heaven. They first go to hell when they die: a purgatorial hell. Then they graduate to heaven.

### **IV. Annihilationism**

Annihilationists subdivide into dualist and physicalist annihilationists. They must do something with the passages regarding eschatological judgment.

According to physicalist annihilationism, the damned pass into oblivion at the moment of death. They are resurrected at the day of judgment, suffer a period of temporary punishment, and are then annihilated.

According to dualist annihilationism, the damned pass into the intermediate state at the moment of death, in which they suffer psychological punishment. They are resurrected on the day of judgment, and then annihilated.

Each position only has so many possible combinations, given the variables. There are only so many ways in which the variables can be serially arranged. So the variables fall into place, depending on the commitments of the adherent.

The traditional Protestant position is the most straightforward reading of Scripture. That's how Scripture lays things out. After you die, you either pass into a heavenly or hellish intermediate state. And the final state is a physical extension of one of those two conditions.

A challenge facing annihilationists and universalists is how to show that Scripture selects for their particular series of postmortem events. Universalists have a different sequence from annihilationists. Dualist annihilationists have a different sequence from physicality annihilationists. Does the Bible specifically outline one sequence of postmortem stages over another? Or is it the position in itself that dictates a specific sequence of postmortem stages?

## Is immortality a road to nowhere?

An unending life would be one that lacked any meaningful shape or pattern. It would resemble an infinitely long river that meandered eternally without ever reaching the sea. There would be no arch-shaped structure of birth, growth, maturity, decline and death. Although phases of the life might have their own internal structure, it would be as a whole (not that it could ever be grasped that way) completely shapeless. It would be a life that was going nowhere specific, and in which the people, projects, and aspirations that were important at one stage would be insignificant and forgotten at another. Geoffrey Scarre, **DEATH** (Routledge 2014).

i) To play along with his metaphor, boating down an infinitely long river means we'd never see the same scene twice. The scene would constantly change. And that would indeed be maddening.

But why suppose unending life must be analogous to *that*? Why can't eternal life combine variety with repeatable experiences?

ii) Scarre fails to distinguish between temporal ends and teleological ends, yet something that's endless can still be patterned. The Mandelbrot set is infinite, yet highly structured.

**FINNEGANS WAKE** has a circular plot. It has no real beginning or ending. In principle, you can open the book at any point and start reading. You can break into the circle

anywhere. Once inside the plot, repeated reading will deepen your understanding of the plot. Things you initially miss you will appreciate after going around a few more times. Of course, that could still become tedious, but we're just toying with metaphors.

Take the common experience of leaving home and returning home. That's repetitious and circular, yet it doesn't mean you're going nowhere. Moreover, leaving home enriches the experience of returning home.

Furthermore, if we lived forever we would need to be equipped with vastly more powerful memories than we have now to be able to recall our own distant pasts. McMahan might contend that it would not be important to be able to remember our origins or ancient history so long as we could remember our more recent past (say, the last century or so). But if we retained anything like our present psychology, we would feel ourselves deeply alienated from our own pasts if we had to consult the history books to learn about our former deeds. (Also think what an unsatisfactory sense of self one would have if one could no longer remember one's childhood or one's parents.) We care about what will happen to us in the future, and what happened to us in the past, because we see our past and our future as parts of one and the same life, chapters in the same narrative. No coherent, graspable narrative, however, could link together our existence over endless ages. Fischer has suggested that while an infinitely long life would not have "narrative structure, strictly conceived", the "literary analogue for such a life is not the novel, but perhaps a collection of short stories...with the same character appearing as the protagonist"

That objection seems to be based on immortality in the sense of never dying, rather than a Christian model, where there's distinct phases: life before you die, the intermediate state, and the final state. His objection involves an undifferentiated continuum. But on a Christian model, I don't think it would require a vastly more powerful memory to recall your life before you died.

And do we actually need a vastly more powerful memory to recollect what happens to us if we just keep on living? That's never been put to the test. Memory is already highly selective.

## Dawn of the dead

*51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many (Mt 27:51-53).*

This is a much-mocked text which I've discussed before, but I'd like to make some additional observations.

**1.** What exactly is the objection to this incident? In my experience, off the top of my head:

**i)** It's only reported in one Gospel

**ii)** It's weird

**iii)** Triggers popular associations with the Hollywood zombie genre

**iv)** If it happened, why isn't the incident more widely reported?

**v)** What happened to the raised saints?

**2.** At what point did this text become ridiculous or incredible? Historically, did Christians find this text incredible or ridiculous? Let's take a comparison:

**i)** Traditionally, in Christian cemeteries, corpses and coffins are buried pointing east. From what I've read, that's based on belief that Jesus will come from the east (Mt 24:27;

cf. [Isa 63:1](#); [Zech 14:4](#)). When he returns, the dead will be facing him. They will rise out of their graves, in his direction.

My immediate point is not to assess folk theology, but to note that traditional Christian burial customs reflect the same basic outlook as [Mt 27:51-53](#). Historically, Christians didn't find that absurd or unbelievable. That, in itself, doesn't make it true, but it's not as if the alleged absurdity of the account was the default impression of most readers or believers.

**ii)** By the same token, it's interesting to consult the historical witness of patristic expositions. Apollinaris says:

It is plain that they have died again, having risen from the dead in order to be a sign. For it was not possible for only some of the firstborn from the dead to be raised to the life of the age to come, but the remainder [must be raised] in the same manner. Manlio Simonetti, ed. **ANCIENT CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 14-28** (IVP 2002), 297.

While Jerome says:

Just as the dead Lazarus was resurrected, so also many bodies of the saints were resurrected. Thus they showed the Lord rising again. And yet, though the tombs were opened, they were not resurrected before the Lord was resurrected. thus he was the firstborn of the resurrection from the dead. Now we should understand the holy city in which they were seen when they were being resurrected either as the heavenly Jerusalem, or this earthly one which was previously

holy. 321. Thomas. P. Scheck, trans. **COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW** (CUA 2014), 321.

Theophylact says:

And those who were dead in sins arose and entered the Holy City, the heavenly Jerusalem, and appeared to the many who were walking the broad road [leading to perdition]. By appearing to them, they became an exemplary model of a good life and of repentance. For if one sees a man who was formerly deadened by many passions now changed and ascending to the holy heavenly City, he imitates that man in every way, and himself repents. These things have been explained in a rather elaborate manner; but you, O reader, understand that the raising of the dead which occurred at the Lord's crucifixion, also revealed the freeing of the souls in hades. Those who arose at that time were seen by many, lest the event appear to have been only an apparition. They arose as a sign from God, and it is evident that they again died. Some say that after Christ's resurrection, these arose and have not yet died; but I do not know if this should be accepted.

My point is not to evaluate their interpretation, but to document how ancient or medieval Christians took it seriously. Other examples include Matthew Henry and John Gill. My purpose is not to recommend their commentaries but to document how Christians in the past weren't embarrassed by this episode.

**3.** In his commentary, Evans takes the position that this pericope is a scribal interpolation. Craig. A. Evans, **MATTHEW** (Cambridge 2012), 466-68. For those who

regard the scene as inherently legendary, that explanation salvages the historicity of Matthew. But to my knowledge there's no text-critical evidence whatsoever that this passage is a scribal interpolation. If that's the case, it's hard to explain the uniformity of the MS tradition. How could a scribe add that to the original Gospel without generating diversity in the record of transmission? How did his interpolation win out, leaving no alternatives in the extant MSS?

**4.** Raising the widow's son is only recorded in Lk 7. Raising Lazarus is only recorded in Jn 11. So the fact that the incident under review is only reported in Matthew isn't suspicious compared to analogous accounts. If you're going to be skeptical, you need to be consistently skeptical.

**5.** Bart Ehrman likes to harp on high rates of illiteracy in the 1C Roman Empire. But in that case, how many witnesses to this event would be in a position to commit their testimony to writing? And even if they did, how many witnesses would be in a position to publish their testimony? It's not like they could contact a reporter at *The Jerusalem Post*. At best, their testimony would circulate orally.

**6.** Another question is how widespread sightings there were. That depends on many variables. How many saints were raised? What was the population of 1C Jerusalem? How many witnesses in relation to how many saints? How many people would be in a position to recognize the former decedents? Are we talking about a sprinkling of saints dispersed in the general population density of the city? How noticeable would that be?

## The bright morning star

*28 Do not be amazed at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice 29 and come out — those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment (Jn 5:28-29).*

As I've said on other occasions, when reading the Bible I think it's a good exercise to see it through the eye of a movie director. If you were filming the Bible, how would you envision these descriptions? Take the resurrection of the just.

Here's one way I imagine the scene. Jesus returns in the Shekinah ([Acts 1:9-11](#); [Ezk 1:4-28](#)). He hovers in the lower atmosphere. As the globe rotates, he appears over the horizon, like the morning star ([Rev 22:16](#); [2:28](#); cf. [Isa 14:12](#); [Num 24:17](#)). As light from the Cytherean Shekinah flashes across cemeteries, with graves facing east, towards the Christic morning star, bodies of the saints rematerialize in their tombs ("a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them," [Ezk 37:7-8](#)). Their bodies are then reanimated as the Spirit reunites body and soul ("and the breath came into them," [Ezk 37:10](#)). Then tombs open and they emerge ("and they lived and stood on their feet," [Ezk 37:10](#)).

While the Cytherean Shekinah repeatedly dawns over the rotating horizon, row after row of cemeteries, from east to west, in sidereal succession, will stir to life ("Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust,

awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead," [Isa 26:19](#)). Those who sleep in the dust will awake ([Dan 12:2](#))—in the twinkling of an eye ([1 Cor 15:51-52](#)). Myriads of recreated, rejuvenated saints, facing the Cytherean Shekinah, gazing at the Christic morning star.

Of course, not everyone is formally buried. Scripture uses graves and graveyards as a synecdoche for the dead generally. Although some of the imagery might be figurative, the oracle in [Jn 5:28-29](#) foreshadows Jesus raising Lazarus. That's a foretaste of an eschatological scene.

## Omphalos

A painter who depicts Adam and Eve must make a theological judgment call: did they have navels? Since they were created directly, should they have a vestige of a nonexistent umbilical cord? That was the launchpad for Philip Henry Gosse's famous or infamous book.

The resurrection of the body raises a similar question. When Jesus was raised, he retained his scars. If I acquire scars in this life, will that carry over into the world to come?

In many cases, the body completely disintegrates, so God must recreate the body from scratch. In that case there's no direct physical continuity between the original body and the new body. Rather, the new body is largely a duplicate (with certain enhancements).

Since the scars are unnecessary, incidental accretions, will our scars be reproduced?

Scars are a bit like landmarks and memorials. Reminders of things that happen to us in this life. A physical counterpart to memory.

I have a couple of scars from surgery. I have a faint scar on my lower lip from when I was chopping wood and a flying splinter cut my lip. I have a scar from where my sister's dog bit me on the finger as a very young boy. I have a scar from where I accidentally cut my thumb with a butcher knife.

These aren't traumatic memories. If I retain my scars in the world to come, that's evidence that while I now exist in the world to come, I didn't originate in the world to come. Rather, I originated in a fallen world.

It's kinda like stories about someone who travels to a parallel universe. Although he now inhabits a parallel universe, he has memories from his universe of origin. His counterpart in the parallel universe doesn't have those memories. Likewise, he might have scars from his universe of origin which he takes with him into the parallel universe. He didn't acquire them in the parallel universe. Residual traces of his origins.

Some scars might recall a traumatic memory. Some scars might be disfiguring. In those cases, God might erase the scars.

## The Implausibility and Low Explanatory Power of the Resurrection Hypothesis

I'm going to quote and comment on a long academic article attacking the Resurrection:

Robert Greg Cavin & Carlos A. Colombetti, "The Implausibility and Low Explanatory Power of the Resurrection Hypothesis —With a Rejoinder to Stephen T. Davis." *SHERM* 2/1 (2020): 37–94.

The article is somewhat challenging to comment on because the authors are responding to a variety of Christian philosophers and apologists, viz. Craig, Davis, Plantinga et al. I don't necessarily formulate the case for miracles or the Resurrection the way they do, so in some cases I may reframe the argument.

The authors also use abbreviations: (R=the Resurrection); (SM=the Standard Model of particle physics); (LCE=the law of conservation of energy)

for example, the natural regularity that water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. God is (by definition of "God") omnipotent and so Davis must agree that Necessarily, if God causes water to freeze at 76 degrees Fahrenheit, then water freezes at 76 degrees Fahrenheit.

**i)** That's ambiguous. If it freezes at 76°, is it still water or a different substance? If it freezes at 76°, does it have the same chemical composition as H<sub>2</sub>O?

A better question is whether God can cause a substance that performs the same function as water to freeze at 76°?

**ii)** Another question is whether an omnipotent God can naturally cause water to freeze at 76°? Or is this a miracle? If the latter, it might still be water.

**iii)** To perform its natural function, the freezing point of water must be consistent with other things in nature. In a system of physical cause and effect, other adjustments would be necessary for everything to work together naturally. And there may be a limited number of naturally feasible combinations of alternatives.

This states that SM entails that God does not cause SM to be false. Given the strength of “does not cause” as we have just seen above, this entails that God does not supernaturally interfere with the natural order to override the laws of SM. But, now, SM is a scientific theory that is exceptionally well-confirmed for the realm of familiar, everyday objects—which, of course, includes corpses and what happens to them. Now since Davis acknowledges that SM is very strongly confirmed for the everyday realm, he must also agree with our conclusion that it is impossible and therefore maximally implausible on SM that God supernaturally interferes (or intervenes) in that realm—a realm that includes corpses. For, as we will show in the next section below, SM entails that God (if he exists) does not do this.

The fact that SM is a well-confirmed theory creates no presumption for divine nonintervention. It simply describes outcomes in cases where there is no divine intervention. It's well-confirmed that vending machines don't dispense food

unless someone interacts with them. Left to their own devices, they just stand there doing nothing.

Divine intervention doesn't falsify SM because SM is about outcomes when nature is free to run its course unimpeded. SM may accurately describe that state of affairs.

Nor are we denying divine omnipotence, i.e., that God (if he exists) has the power to supernaturally intervene in the affairs of the physical universe, e.g., by raising Jesus from the dead. What we are arguing, rather, is that SM and R are inconsistent and, that, because they are, SM entails that God does not exercise his power to supernaturally interfere in the affairs of the physical universe so as to violate the laws of SM—most significantly, by raising Jesus from the dead. It is only in this special sense of “relative to SM” that that we argue that it is “impossible” and, thus, “maximally implausible,” i.e., “epistemically improbable,” for God to supernaturally interfere in the affairs of the physical universe covered by SM and, thus, raise Jesus from the dead.

Could Davis reply that SM entails  $\sim R$  only when the natural realm is left to its own devices, i.e., only when God does not supernaturally intervene? No. This is because SM entails that God never supernaturally intervenes in the affairs of the universe that lie within its scope.

There's a fundamental sense in which the Resurrection is *supposed* to be inconsistent with SM, not because SM is false, not because they can't both be true, but they can't both be operative in reference to the same outcome. If the Resurrection happened, then SM was in abeyance in reference to the Resurrection. They can't be simultaneously

operative in reference to the same outcome because the Resurrection is a supernatural event. But they are not inconsistent in the sense of logically contradictory principles. They're not logically mutually exclusive, but mutually exclusive in reference to the same outcome.

by consulting the reference works, research journals, and textbooks of physics, there actually is an answer to this question. This information appears in the very terms for the events, states, entities, properties, relations, etc. in which the equations of SM are formulated. For all these terms refer to what is physical and thus natural. Indeed, none refer to the supernatural, as we are certain that Davis must surely agree. Yet, contrary to what Davis thinks, it is precisely because of this that the equations of SM entail that only those things that are physical can interact with things that are physical and, in consequence,  $\sim R$ .

one finds no mention of supernatural intervention in connection with the equations of SM (and of physics more generally) in the reference works, research journals, and textbooks of physics.

Indeed, as observed above, the equations of SM only contain terms for events, states, entities, properties, relations, etc. that are physical and thus natural. With this, Davis must surely agree.<sup>32</sup> Yet it immediately follows from this that these equations entail that only physical things can interact with things that are physical. And it follows from this, of course, that SM entails  $\sim R$  since R hypothesizes the supernatural event of God raising Jesus from the dead.

Let us explain this further. Any scientific law containing only the aforementioned terms can have, accordingly,

only physical input variables and physical output variables and, consequently, only inputs and outputs that are natural, i.e., not supernatural.

Our first counterreply to the Proviso Objection is that the laws of SM, as these are actually stated in scientific reference works, research journals, and textbooks, do not contain the supernatural non-interference proviso R. These sources never state the laws of SM—or, indeed, any laws of physics—as conditionals having the supernatural non-interference proviso R as their antecedent. Indeed, one searches the scientific literature in vain for even a passing reference to R—even stated in different wording. All one actually finds are the equations of SM themselves—stated unconditionally and, thus, as laws that hold without this proviso. Yet one would surely think that, if R were an integral and essential component of these equations, as Craig and other defenders of R claim, it should be found to occur in at least one formulation of them within the entire corpus of this scientific literature. But the fact is: one finds mention of R only in the arguments of these Christian philosophers of religion and apologists. And this is telling.

**i)** Physics textbooks don't contain *ceteris paribus*-clauses about miracles because the purpose of a physics textbook is to teach students how to do physics, not how to perform miracles. You can't use physics to perform a miracle. For that matter, you can't be taught how to perform a miracle. It's not a skill, but a supernatural ability.

**ii)** There's also a genre distinction. A monograph on the philosophy of science ought to discuss *ceteris paribus*-clauses about miracles because its purpose is not to teach students how to perform scientific calculations and operations, but

the normal operating assumptions of science, as well as real or hypothetical exceptions or limitations.

**iii)** Keep in mind, too, that most physics textbooks are probably written by atheists, and even if they were written by Christians, a publisher would be unlikely to publish a physics textbook with a sympathetic excursus on miracles.

But then it follows on SM, contrary to what Davis thinks, that in the case of the Resurrection the input is entirely natural—the event of the body of Jesus being a corpse in some state of postmortem decomposition at the moment just prior to the alleged Resurrection—and the output is also natural and, thus, not supernatural—the event of the body of Jesus not being supernaturally raised from the dead by God at the next moment. For every natural input or output is, equivalently, an input or output that is not supernatural.

Even if the risen body of Jesus is a natural, it doesn't follow that the cause is natural.

Since the laws of SM have only natural inputs and outputs, it immediately follows that they have no supernatural inputs or outputs. Otherwise, they would be at least partly the laws of the supernatural—not the laws of nature.

The authors lean on the concept of natural laws, but that's a disputed concept in the philosophy of science. On one level or definition, natural laws describe what will happen if nature is free to run its course, but they don't cause or determine what will happen. On that view, they're not "lawful" in the prescriptive or proscriptive sense.

On another level of definition, "natural laws" are labels for natural forces, processes, mechanisms, and physical causes. On that view they are "lawful" in the prescriptive or proscriptive sense, but conditionally rather than absolutely, when the outcome isn't caused by an outside agent.

Contrary to Davis, moreover, SM is not merely inconsistent with R but actually inconsistent with it in three distinct ways. First, R states that the body of Jesus was raised from the dead supernaturally by God, whereas SM denies this, entailing that the body of Jesus was at the mercy of purely natural factors.

SM doesn't deny that. SM is neutral on what happens when SM is circumvented by outside factors that intervene to change the natural outcome. SM can't speak to that issue one way or the other because a supernatural outcome is naturally unpredictable.

Second, R states that the body of Jesus was raised as an immortal and imperishable soma pneumatikon, whereas SM denies this, stating that the body of Jesus was neither immortal nor imperishable but entirely natural. To be immortal and imperishable, the resurrection body would have to be ontologically sui generis—comprised of some mysterious non-physical "schmatoms" rather than the ordinary atoms of SM.

**i)** Which assumes without benefit of argument that a body can't be naturally immortal. It assumes that mortality is naturally inevitable. Maybe so, maybe not. It requires more analysis and argument.

**ii)** A body needn't be composed of something nonphysical rather than ordinary atoms to be immortal. Indeed, it wouldn't be a body if it was composed of nonphysical

constituents. Indeed, it wouldn't be composite at all if wasn't physical.

**iii)** What it needs to be immortal is that its vital functions never cease. There can be complete turnover in the atoms and molecules that compose the body, eventually replacing all the original atoms and molecules. It doesn't have to be the same body at the compositional level but the structural level. Preserving a particular combination of atoms and molecules. Preserving the physical pattern. Physical continuity rather than identity.

**iv)** In the context of Paul's usage, "imperishable" doesn't mean indestructible. He's just using it as a pleonastic synonym for immortality. Notice his use of synonymous parallelism. The glorified body isn't subject to death by the aging process. It has greater regenerative powers and resistance to disease. It may still be vulnerable to fatal harm, but God providentially protects or heals it in cases that exceed its natural resources. At least that's my own view. I'm not obliged to defer to the model of Cavin and Colombetti.

Finally, R states that the body of Jesus is able to dematerialize out of and materialize back into the physical universe from the moment of the Resurrection on, whereas SM denies this, stating rather that the body of Jesus is confined forever to the physical universe where it (perhaps over a period of billions of years) undergoes the complete course of postmortem decomposition. This is because, according to SM, a body is a collection of particles and these, in turn, are actually oscillations in various quantum fields, e.g., electron and various quark fields. It makes no sense on SM, accordingly, to state that a body can leave the physical universe.

**i)** That that glorified body of Christ is able to dematerialize out of and materialize back into the physical universe is not an implication of the Resurrection or Resurrection accounts, but an interpretation popularized by some Christian apologists. The inference that Jesus could walk through solid doors (which I've discussed before). Or examples of is appearing and vanishing.

But appearing and vanishing can be psychological in the sense that the observer's mind is prevented from perceiving a physical object even though it lies in his field of vision.

Or it can be an objective, instantaneous change of location, yet not due to his body having supernatural properties, but because Jesus has supernatural abilities.

**ii)** The body of Jesus may well be confined to our universe. Conversely, God may have made a multiverse, in which case his body might exist in a parallel universe.

**iii)** Once again, immortality doesn't require a body to contain the same collection of particles over time. It's the same body in the sense of having the same configuration of particles, not the same particles. A physical copy of an abstract blueprint. It doesn't require identity at the level of the individual constituents. At least, that's my own position. I'm not obligated to submit to the confused and arbitrary strictures of Cavin and Colombetti.

Would a being who, as even Christians concede, allows such horrors as the Black Death and the Holocaust, supernaturally intervene to raise Jesus from the dead? Would God send Jesus as his chosen prophet and messiah and then raise him from the dead as a sign to prove his divine authority? There seems to be no way

to answer these questions—other than by appealing to the equations of SM and receiving a negative answer.

To the contrary, the way to answer that question is through history, testimonial evidence, and revelation.

To rescue R, he might attempt to undermine that conclusion by arguing that there is insufficient scientific evidence to support the equations of SM. But this strategy will not work. For the scientific evidence for SM is overwhelming. Its equations have been subjected to an incredible number of experimental tests made over the last several decades. During this time, literally billions upon billions of confirmation instances for SM have been accumulated from the Large Hadron Collider alone. The data resulting from these experiments are as diverse and unbiased—and, thus, representative—as any sample used in scientific reasoning can be. And, significantly, all of these items of evidence have one thing in common. They are all cases in which both the input and the output events were natural. None are cases in which natural inputs were followed by supernatural outputs, i.e., cases in which agents supernaturally interfered. There is simply no case of any experiment in any lab to test SM that has yielded a miracle.

That's a red herring. There's no reason to expect supernatural outputs from these experiments. God and angels have no incentive to manipulate those outputs.

It is overwhelmingly probable given the billions upon billions of confirmation instances that have been accumulated for SM that the non-physical has no contact of any kind with the physical.

Actually, there are well-documented cases of demonic possession, poltergeists, angelophanies, and psychokinesis. Cavin and Colombetti are looking in the wrong places and consulting irrelevant literature. Atom smashers are not where to look.

For they argue that the laws of nature contain an implicit “causal closure” proviso to the effect that God or other agents do not supernaturally interfere.<sup>43</sup> And, of course, there would be no reason for them to so argue unless they realized that, apart from this proviso, the equations of SM are inconsistent with R.<sup>44</sup> Their opponents, however, hold the traditional view that the laws of nature lack the supernatural non-interference proviso.

First, his causal closure proviso is inadequate because it is limited to God alone. A causal closure proviso, however, must exclude all supernatural interference. Consequently, Plantinga’s proviso must be modified to exclude the supernatural interference of angels, devils, ghosts, witches, and the like.

That's true.

The second problem with Plantinga’s interpretation of the laws of the natural sciences is that it makes a mockery of the entire scientific enterprise. Are we really to believe with Plantinga that the scientists of CERN must first exclude the supernatural interference of God every time they perform their experiments? And, again, why stop there? What about the heptads of devils or impish faeries who seek to undermine the progress of humanity by foiling our experiments? The fact that scientists do not even think about—let alone take precautions against—supernatural interference

shows that they dismiss this as a “non-starter,” just as they should.

Plantinga’s interpretation of the laws of nature turns what are genuinely scientific laws into flaky metaphysico-theological principles. Indeed, if Plantinga were correct, both scientifically testing the law of conservation of energy and then applying it to everyday life would require—bizarrely—that scientists and the rest of us first show in every single case that no angels, demons, imps, ghosts, faeries, et al. are causally affecting the system in question. Since these beings, according to folklore, are typically hidden from our senses and escape our most sensitive scientific detectors (i.e., since they are for all practical purposes invisible, inaudible, and intangible), there is no way scientifically to show that the system in question is not being causally affected by them—except in those rare occasions in which they choose to reveal their malevolent or teasing activities to us.

Imagine what the world would be like. You could not know whether an ordinary glass of water would turn into poison until you first determined that no interfering demon was going to supernaturally change it.

this objection reveals a deplorable double-standard employed by Miraculists and defenders of R. They have no problem in letting “science decide” that the naturalistic rivals to R have low explanatory scope and power. Indeed, they appeal to the science of human physiology in the case of the Apparent Death hypothesis and to the science of human psychology in the case of the Hallucination hypothesis.

That's a variation on Lewontin's divine foot in the door. The problem is that Cavin and Colombetti are arbitrarily isolating their attack on Christian miracles from the Christian worldview. But the Christian worldview includes a doctrine of ordinary providence. By divine design, the physical world normally operates like a machine. Governed by second causes. We don't reach for a supernatural explanation if a natural explanation will suffice. If physical cause and effect are adequate to account for the outcome, we have no reason to go beyond that. It's only for outcomes that are naturally impossible or inexplicable, or (in the case coincidence miracles) outcomes which are too discriminating, opportune, and antecedently unlikely to be dumb luck, that we infer divine intercession.

Plantinga is thus forced into the awkward position of having to claim against this—and with absolutely no supporting evidence—that these laws nonetheless do contain a theistic causal closure proviso, but one that is merely “implicit” in them.

Depends on whether the source is definitions in physics textbooks or demonstrable events which show that nature is not a closed system but open to influence by agents with the power of mental causation to change the ordinary course of physical outcomes. The authors have it backwards. We should begin, not with textbook definitions, but the world. If there are miracles, then the "laws of nature" are factually required to include *ceteris paribus*-clauses. Definitions need to match up with reality.

God, being an immaterial spirit, is not physical and thus lacks energy. As a result, he and the physical universe cannot exchange energy in any form— since he has no energy to exchange. And the same holds for all other non-physical agents: angels, devils, ghosts, et

al. Moreover, those physical agents who possess energy but, nonetheless, allegedly perform supernatural actions (e.g., magicians, prophets, and witches) do not perform these actions by exchanging energy with their physical surroundings. Thus, in the case of all alleged supernatural actions, no energy is transferred between the agent performing the action and the physical system he or she performs it on, and yet the energy of that system nonetheless change In the Ascension, for example, no upward kinetic energy is transferred from God to the body of the Risen Jesus (or to his body from its physical surroundings). Rather, upward kinetic energy is supernaturally created in the body of the Risen Jesus by God. But this violates what is stated by the proviso-free formulation of the law of conservation of energy, viz., that any change in the kinetic energy of the body of the Risen Jesus must be equal to the energy transferred to it—transferred to it, that is, by its physical surroundings—since its non-physical surroundings, including God, have no energy to transfer.

**i)** Since the Ascension is a miracle, why presume the levitation of Jesus necessitated physical energy?

**ii)** Assuming for the sake of argument that miracles, or some miracles, change the amount of energy in the system, how much energy do miracles require, and is that measurable at a cosmic level? Would the infusion of new extra energy mess up the universe? How much would it take to have an appreciable effect?

**iii)** Does the universe have a uniform amount of energy or is it losing energy due to entropy and cosmic heat death?

**iv)** If, in addition, we have good evidence for miracles, and that conflicts with the conservation of energy law, then the law needs to be modified to bring it into conformity with what actually happens in the real world.

Craig, Davis and, indeed, Resurrectionists in general see no problem in their assertion that R, in contrast to its naturalistic rivals, can explain the sensory experiences had by the women, the disciples, and other witnesses of what they took to be the Risen Jesus physically appearing to themselves. Indeed, since Resurrectionists insist that the body of the Risen Jesus is physical, they see no problem for R in explaining these. Davis even thinks that, because of its physicality, the body of the Risen Jesus could have actually been photographed

This appeal to the physicality of the Risen Jesus surely explains the failure of Resurrectionists to ever give an actual argument to show that and how R can explain the appearances: they merely assume that it does and then, ironically, condemn its naturalistic rivals for their failure to explain these. Nonetheless, as we show in "Assessing," there is an insuperable problem here: R cannot explain the postmortem appearances of the Risen Jesus.<sup>72</sup> We explain this problem in greater detail now.

The problem, simply, is this: in order to function, the senses require physical inputs that are the physical outputs of the physical objects being sensed, e.g., photons in the case of the eyes, sound waves in the case of the ears, and physical contact pressure in the case of Meissner corpuscles of the epidermis

certain subatomic particles within them (the electron, electron neutrino, and the photon) are hypothesized never to decay, all other particles do, and the physical bodies constructed from them are thus neither immortal nor imperishable.

But now, R hypothesizes, in seeming contradiction to this, that the body of the Risen Jesus is both physical and a *soma pneumatikon*—a body that is both immortal and imperishable.

the body of Jesus after its resurrection lacks all of the physicalSM properties it had before that—most fundamentally, existence in the physicalSM universe. It thus exists in its own non-physicalSM universe and can have absolutely no contact with our physicalSM universe. As a result, it cannot appear in the Upper Room; walk across the floor; be seen, heard, or touched by the women and disciples; pick up and eat a piece of fish; appear to Paul in heavenly glory; etc. For, on SM, only those things that are themselves physicalSM can interact with things that are physicalSM.

This repeats the same objection I already addressed. They seem to construe the Greek phrase "*soma pneumatikon*" as an immaterial body. But as scholars have explained, the adjective has reference, not to the composition of the body, but to a corporeal existence conditioned by the Holy Spirit.

Let us first consider the earliest Gospel, Mark. Since L hypothesizes that the Easter traditions evolved as legend, it is not improbable on L that Mark would contain only the tradition of the discovery of the empty tomb and thus no traditions of appearances of the Risen Jesus to his followers. In contrast, this is unthinkable on  $\sim L$  since this hypothesizes that all of

the New Testament Easter traditions are historical fact based on eyewitness testimony. In fact, however, Mark relates only the discovery of the empty tomb and no appearances. This is in marked contrast to the other three gospels, which contain detailed and highly elaborate accounts of the appearances of the Risen Jesus. Call this difference between Mark and the other sources "L-." Then it is clear that L- confirms L to a greater degree than ~L. Some have attempted to argue that the original manuscript of Mark did contain a final section relating appearances of the Risen Jesus but that this was somehow lost in the later copies. Yet this would be virtually impossible on ~L given the supposedly extreme care the early church exercised in transmitting, maintaining, and copying its sacred documents.

**i)** Although Mk 16:6-7 contains no visual description of a Resurrection appearance, it contains a statement affirming the fact of the Resurrection.

**ii)** From what I've read, it's not uncommon for ancient MSS to lose pages at the beginning or ending. The front and back of MSS were especially vulnerable to damage. The Codex Vaticanus is a well-known example.

## The metaphysics of resurrection

There are different models of resurrection. I don't mean the resurrection of Christ, in particular. I mean the more radical case of resurrecting someone whose body completely disintegrated.

One model is replication. God creates a new body that duplicates your old body. The new body is discontinuous with the old body, although it's indistinguishable in the sense of being an exact copy of the original. (Of course, on any model, the resurrection body will be somewhat different because it lacks the same susceptibility to disease and senescence.)

This raises questions regarding personal identity. Is it the same you?

Since I'm a Cartesian dualist, I think the soul contains the core person rather than his body. That's not to deny the formative influence of embodied experience, which conditions our outlook. But that's imprinted on the soul (as it were). We take that with us when we die.

If the soul is immortal, then there's no gap between death and resurrection at that level. The person enjoys continuous existence. Resurrection reembodies the soul. The same soul is transferred to a new duplicate body.

There are, however, Christian physicalists (I use "Christian" advisedly in this context) who don't have that fallback. For them, brain death cancels out consciousness. On that view, there's a complete gap between death and resurrection. An interval during which you cease to exist.

Even if God recreates your body, the question is whether that's the same you. Due to the break in personal identity, is this still the original you, or is this a copy of you—a doppelgänger? Were you restored to life, or is the original you gone forever, while you were replaced by someone else with the same memories?

That's eerie, like those body-snatcher scenarios. Since I'm not a Christian physicalist, that's not my problem. But to be fair, I'm not sure that's an insuperable problem for Christian physicalism. If God stores your memories (in his own mind) during the hiatus, then uploads your memories to the new brain, is that still you? Perhaps.

But I think there's actually more to personal identity, even at a psychological level, than memory. A mind is more than its memories. A mind includes innate character traits, liquid IQ, &c. So a physicalist model of the resurrection requires God to recreate the whole package.

## "The Myth of an Afterlife"

I'm going to comment on two chapters from Michael Martin & Keith Augustine, eds. **THE MYTH OF AN AFTERLIFE: THE CASE AGAINST LIFE AFTER DEATH** (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2015). Much of the book consists of "scientific" arguments against Cartesian dualism, near-death experiences, and out-of-body experiences. There's lots of empirical evidence they disregard on that front, as well as philosophical objections to physicalism. But I'll bypass that discussion and focus on the objections of Michael Martin (chap 20) and Theodore Drange (chap 12), beginning with Martin.

I must say that for professional philosophers, I find their objections stupefyingly obtuse. They are completely lacking in philosophical imagination.

### The Traditional Doctrine

The traditional doctrine of Heaven can be elaborated in terms of the following theses:[2]

1. The reward thesis: the purpose of Heaven is to reward people whose earthly lives and behavior warrant it.
2. The permanence thesis: once one is in Heaven one does not leave.
3. The anti-universalism thesis: some people will not get to Heaven; and
4. The individual external existence thesis: Heaven is a place of individual conscious existence.

Regarding #2, if "heaven" is a synonym for the intermediate state of the saints, then they will leave heaven and return to an Edenic earth at the consummation. This is Martin's clumsy way of stating that the saints in glory can't commit apostasy.

The doctrine of Heaven I have outlined has at least three variants. In the most common variant the immaterial soul of a human being—not the body—goes to Heaven shortly after his or her death. In this variant Heaven is considered "a place" but not in time and space. In the second variant, the body of a dead person is resurrected shortly after death in an altered form in some different space—a space that is completely unconnected to the space in which human beings now live—and is rewarded in that space.[4] In a third variant—one that many scholars believe is the original Christian view—Heaven does not exist now but will exist in the future with the Second Coming. With the Second Coming people's bodies will be resurrected in an altered form but will be rewarded in the space in which we now live.

All three variants of the doctrine of Heaven have deep conceptual problems that affect their intelligibility. Take the immaterial soul variant. It is difficult enough to imagine even in a rough way what disembodied existence would be like in time and space. How would a soul move from place to place?

How does a dreamer move in the dreamscape? He has a simulated body. Or consider virtual reality—with simulated bodies in simulated motion.

How would it recognize other souls?

The same way you recognize dream characters. In the case of people you know, they have the same voice, same appearance. Or consider postmortem apparitions.

What would disembodied souls do all day long since presumably there would be no need to sleep?

That's just an extension of our waking state.

The problem becomes insuperable when it is combined with idea that Heaven is outside of space and time. All of our mental concepts--for instance, thinking, willing, desiring--are temporal notions that take time to perform and take place at some particular time. Nontemporal thinking and desiring are inconceivable. Yet on this variant, souls think and desire nontemporally.

I don't think the intermediate state is outside of time. Beyond physical space, but not a timeless state.

The two resurrected body variants are perhaps initially less problematic than the immaterial soul variant but they have conceptual difficulties of their own. There are two conceptual problems with the notion that when people die their bodies are immediately resurrected (although in an altered form) in a different space--a space completely separated from our space that is in principle impossible to travel to from our space. It is difficult to make sense of the idea of such a space. On the one hand, how can there be two separated physical spaces, spaces in principle unconnected by space travel. On the other hand, if the space inhabited by the resurrected bodies is not physical space, what kind of space is it? Second, why should we suppose that the body in this different space is that of the body of the

same person who recently died in our space rather than a replica of this person.

I don't believe our bodies are immediately resurrected at the moment of death. But to address the objection for argument's sake, if God made a multiverse, reembodied souls could exist on a parallel planet in a parallel universe.

Consider the variant that Heaven does not exist now but will exist in the future when people's bodies are resurrected in altered form but in space as we know it. Here we do not have the problems associated with the second variant: Heaven is in our physical space and there is only one body for each deceased person.

Martin is equivocal in how he defines "heaven". "Heaven" should be reserved for the intermediate state of the saints. That's a temporary, disembodied state. The final state is physical and earthly.

But still there are difficulties. Bodies that are buried decay and the atoms that constitute them might become dispersed. Indeed, some of these atoms might eventually become parts of bodies of people who are now living. And much the same thing is true of bodies that are cremated.

God creates a duplicate body. That's not a problem for personal identity if you're a Cartesian dualist since on that view the essence of personal identity is a perduring soul.

In view of problems like these theistic philosophers such as Peter Van Inwagen have argued that not even an all powerful God can resurrect a body that is completely decayed. But since human bodies do decay this is a problem. Van Inwagen has suggested a

solution to this problem so bizarre that, were it not for his status within the field, the idea would not warrant serious comment.[5] He has suggested that, despite appearances to the contrary, human bodies do not decay. Rather, God preserves our bodies--perhaps at the moment of death--and substitutes replicas that either rot or are cremated.[6]

Inwagen is a physicalist, so there are daunting metaphysical challenges to personal identity on his view if there's an interruption in physical continuity. That's not a problem for the Cartesian dualist.

One aspect of Heaven that I have not yet considered creates difficulties for such well-known attempts to solve the problem of evil as the Free Will Defense (FWD). The FWD is commonly used to explain the large amount of moral evil in the world. Since, however, the inhabitants of Heaven presumably have free will yet Heaven is presumably relatively free of moral evil, the existence of Heaven casts doubt on the FWD.

I agree with Martin that the impeccability of the final state poses a problem for freewill theism.

Moreover, one is inclined to say that by definition existence in Heaven is better than our earthly one. Better in precisely what respects is not completely clear, but the improvement surely must include freedom from all or at least most of the difficulties and evils of earthly existence. After all, Heaven is supposed to be a paradise. This means that it is free from death, sickness, suffering, and the ravages of old age.

The final state is an earthly state. That doesn't entail death, sickness, suffering, and the ravages of old age.

On the variant the gift of Heaven seems arbitrary and unfair. A father who bestowed unmerited gifts on some of his children and not on others would be considered unjust and arbitrary. Surely much the same thing could be said about God if He were to act in a similar way. But suppose we accept the standard view that going to Heaven is based on merit. It still seems unfair. Suppose that Heaven is a reward for belief, for example in Jesus as the Savior. Millions of people through no fault of their own have never heard of Jesus or at least have not been exposed to Scripture. These people's failure to believe is hardly grounds for punishment, that is lack of reward.

Moreover, even if people have been exposed and have failed to believe, why should they be punished? Many nonbelievers reject the Gospel message for the good reason that the evidence shows the improbability of many of the major doctrines of Christianity: the Resurrection, Virgin Birth, and Incarnation.[11] Even if these doctrines are true and not improbable in the light of the evidence, rational people surely can fail to be impressed by the evidence. It would be going beyond what the evidence dictates--if not being in conflict with the evidence--to accept Jesus as the Son of God. Furthermore, even if nonbelievers have misevaluated the evidence and it does indeed provide solid grounds for belief, many nonbelievers sincerely believe that evidence is lacking. Why would a good God want to withhold the gift of Heaven to a sincere nonbeliever who might lack sufficient insight, knowledge, or analytical skills to appraise the evidence correctly?

Suppose the reward of Heaven is based not on belief but on moral behavior. This is still unfair. Millions of

people have not been exposed to the moral teachings of the Bible. That they do not live according to Biblical standards is not their fault. Moreover, even those who have been exposed to the Bible may find its moral message unacceptable on moral grounds. God, as portrayed in the Old Testament, is often cruel and arbitrary and in the New Testament even Jesus is pictured as having a flawed moral character.[12] Moreover, even for those who accept the Bible the question is what behavior should be rewarded. What the Bible teaches concerning morality is subject to various conflicting interpretations. But how in all fairness can Heaven be a reward for following the correct moral standard of Scripture since what this represents is unclear?

Those are stock objections to inclusivism. Is Martin ignorant of the standard explanations? Moving on to Drange:

I take the afterlife to be a situation in which a person has died, but is still (or again) alive following that event. In order for such a situation to be conceivable, there must be some way for the identity of the given person to be established. Otherwise, there would be no way to connect him or her with anyone in a former life, and so there would be no way to conceive of that person as recently being in an afterlife. The question arises whether or not it is conceivable for the identity of the person to be established if he or she is bodiless...

That's ambiguous:

**i)** Does he mean "identity" in the metaphysical sense of personal identity? What makes an individual the same individual?

**ii)** Does he mean "identity" in the epistemological sense of how to recognize or ID an individual as the same individual?

**iii)** Does he mean self-knowledge or the ability of someone other than you to ID you?

1. Bodiless people would have no sense organs and no body of any sort.
2. Therefore, they could not feel anything by touch or see or hear anything (in the most common senses of "see" and "hear").

What about dreamers? Dreams simulate sensory perception. But there's no external stimulus. Dreamers have simulated bodies in their dreams. They interact with the dreamscape.

3. Thus, if they were to have any thoughts about who they are, then they would have no way to determine for sure that the thoughts are (genuine) memories, as opposed to mere figments of the imagination.
4. So, bodiless people would have no way to establish their own identity.

Skeptical thought-experiments are hardly unique to disembodied experience. We can toy with the same hypothetical scenarios (implanted false memories) in reference to embodied experience.

5. Also, there would be no way for their identities to be established by anyone else.

Sometimes we dream about people we know. The dream characters have a recognizable voice and appearance.

One main objection to NIA is that its step (2) does not follow from its step (1), because there can occur perceptions without sense organs and without any body of any sort...However, there are problems trying to conceive of such an experience. For one thing, what might seeing without eyes, and without a head, come to? If there is no head to block one's vision, then does one see in all directions (360 degrees in every plane) simultaneously? And, without eyelids, is the seeing forced, with no ability to shut it out? Normal seeing can be willfully discontinued by closing one's eyes or turning one's head. Also, would one be seeing from a certain location. If so, then what exactly is it that is located there to do the seeing? It would not be a body of any sort, so what, then could it be?

Once again, consider the spatial orientation of the dreamer. His simulated body gives him a line of sight or spatial viewpoint. A perspective analogous to actual sight. Same thing with video games and virtual reality.

And would the person be able to move from that location? If so, then what, exactly, is it that would move?

Once more, consider dreams. Simulated motion in relation to the dreamscape. Likewise, virtual reality and video games. Why is Drange oblivious to the most obvious counterexamples?

It might also be suggested that step (5) is false because a bodiless person might be able to communicate directly with others by mental telepathy, and that would allow those to identify the person? But how can communication occur in such a circumstance? How is mental telepathy supposed to work? For

example, how does the receiver of the telepathic message know who the sender is (or even that it is a message at all)? And how could the sender of the message direct it appropriately, especially given that the sender cannot see or hear anything?

Consider a dreamer speaking to a dream character, or vice versa. In the case of someone you know, they have a recognizable voice and appearance.

It might be argued that, even if bodiless people could not establish for sure who they are, they could nevertheless have identities and could have some good evidence that they are whom they think they are just by appeal to their memory. The trouble here is that what they take to be memory may not be genuine, but rather, a fake (or false) memory, perhaps deliberately implanted by someone else. Overall, it could very well be the case that bodiless people are simply hallucinating or dreaming and then misdescribing their experience as being an actual perception or memory rather than a hallucination or dream. There is no way to rule that out.

Once again, it's child's play to contrive analogous skeptical scenarios for embodied experience. Embodied agents hallucinate. If you're psychotic, you can't tell the difference.

[Price] tried to describe a disembodied afterlife as a kind of dream world created by a person who has survived death. The trouble is that Price merely assumes that the creator of the dream world is in an afterlife without explaining how that is possible.

From a Christian perspective, the intermediate state is like an inspired collective dream. God inspires disembodied souls-like visionary revelation.

## Notre Dame fire

I'll use the Notre Dame fire as a launchpad to reflect on some related issues. Why do many people become attached to handsome historic buildings?

One reason is that when you step into a building like Notre Dame, you step into the past. It's like a time machine. Not as good as a time machine, but since they only exist in science fiction, it's the next best thing.

Humans take an interest in the past. We're born into an ongoing story, and many of us are curious about other times and places. So ancient buildings connect us to the past. And that has a certain counterfactual appeal. It appeals to our imagination: what if I lived back then? What was it like to be around back then?

On a related note, it reminds us that human life is fleeting. People pass through the lifecycle but the building remains, It was there before you were born and it will still be there after you die. Walking through a Redwood forest can have a similar effect.

Depending on your worldview, that can be good or bad. If you deny the afterlife, then ancient buildings accentuate the insignificance of individual human lives. We're replaceable. Our absence, in death, is barely noticed.

On another related note, many people have visited sites like Notre Dame. They have fond memories. And these are shared memories. It's like popular movies. A common frame of reference.

So buildings like Notre Dame connect us to other people across time and space. Finally, many people find Gothic church architecture edifying.

At the time of writing I don't know the extent of the damage. Suppose the stained glass windows are intact. Then the damage should be reparable. It's a case of restoring the cathedral.

But suppose some of stained glass were destroyed. Then it can't be repaired or restored. At best, it can be rebuilt or replicated. Every square inch of the church has been studied and photographed. Of course, it would lose some of the charm of walking into a medieval cathedral. You wouldn't be stepping into the past, but stepping into a modern simulation of the past.

Why do I mention this comparison? Because it parallels different models of the resurrection of the body. I don't mean the resurrection of Christ, where there's an intact body with minimal necrosis.

If a human body has disintegrated, then it can't be repaired or restored, in a straightforward sense. And it's hard to see how the original parts can be reassembled. The atoms recycled into other things. They are now constituents of other things. They can't be removed and reallocated without destroying what they currently constitute.

Mind you, even in the case of a living body, there's a turnover in the atoms, organic molecules, and cells that compose the body. A body is a dynamic system in flux. It's just that "solid" objects vibrate at a slower pace than fluid objects (as it were). The difference between solid and fluid is a difference in degree rather than kind.

So it may be necessary to replace the old mortal body with a duplicate. Not even a strict duplicate. It will have some enhancements or improvements.