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Christian Philosophy and the Mind-Body Problem

William Hasker, Advisory Editor

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“FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING”

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DUALISM AND MATERIALISM: ATHENS AND JERUSALEM?

Peter van Inwagen

The thesis that dualism is a Greek import into Christianity and that the Christian hope of eternal life does not presuppose dualism has recently begun to win adherents. This paper is a defense of this thesis. One philosophical argument for dualism (that dualism best explains the phenomenon of sensuous experience) is briefly discussed and is rejected. The body of the paper addresses the relevant creedal and biblical data. The paper closes with a discussion of the question whether the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead, on which the Christian hope of eternal life is founded, presupposes dualism.

Most Christians seem to have a picture of the afterlife that can without too much unfairness be described as “Platonic.” When one dies, one’s body decays, and what one *is*, what one has been all along, an immaterial soul or mind or self, continues to exist. One then faces judgment and is “sent” to heaven or to hell. Christians who are particularly well-instructed (by current standards), will know that they are supposed to believe in something that doesn’t fit this picture too well, something called the Resurrection of the Dead; if pressed, they will perhaps say that the burden of the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead is that eventually God will give everyone a body again—one of those mysterious and apparently pointless procedures for which God no doubt has some good reason that He has mercifully chosen not to bother us with (like Confirmation).

This picture of the afterlife obviously presupposes Platonic or Cartesian dualism. I want to explain why I find this doctrine unsatisfactory, both as a Christian and as a philosopher. (But, as my title no doubt suggests, I’m going to have more to say about my religious difficulties with dualism. And my discussion of religious difficulties with dualism will be centered on the afterlife.)

I

I shall begin by discussing in a very brief, partial, and sketchy way, some of my philosophical difficulties with “Platonic or Cartesian” dualism. Many philosophers of mind today would classify the dualism of Plato and Descartes as “substance dualism,” a term that lives by its contrast to “prop-

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erty dualism." And property dualism is supposed to be the thesis that, although human beings are (or may be) physical or material objects of some sort, they have *properties*, their mental properties, that are non-physical. But what is a "non-physical property"? The obvious definition would be this: a property is non-physical if it entails the property of not being physical, if it is a property that cannot be had by anything physical. But it would follow from this definition that, if mental properties are non-physical properties, then anything that has mental properties is a non-physical thing; the obvious definition, therefore, does not capture whatever it is that property dualists mean by 'non-physical property'. While there is a good deal more to be said about this issue, I record my conviction that there is no way to make sense of 'non-physical property' and hence no way to make sense of property dualism. When I talk of dualism, therefore, I mean substance dualism: the thesis that there are both physical and non-physical substances, that you and I are and all other human persons are non-physical substances, and that each human person bears some sort of intimate relation to a certain living human organism, the person's body.

In my book *Metaphysics*, I presented some arguments against dualism that seemed pretty good to me. Oddly enough, few dualists were persuaded by them. I am, for the most part, not going to repeat these arguments here. I will say only that when I enter most deeply into that which I call *myself*, I seem to discover that I am a living animal. And, therefore, dualism seems to me to be an unnecessarily complicated theory about my nature—unless there is some fact or phenomenon or aspect of the world that dualism deals with better than materialism does (or, equivalently, I should think, unless there is some good argument for dualism).

If there is any argument that shows that Platonic or Cartesian dualism is not an unnecessarily complicated view of our nature, it will presumably take the form of a demonstration that you and I have properties that are not (or could not reasonably be supposed to be) properties of any material object. Is there any such argument? Are there any such properties?

I will consider only one such property or set of properties: those associated with what Leibniz calls perception—or, let us say, sensuous experience; experiencing a particular shade of red or the taste of Vegemite or the sensation of toothache. I believe that Leibniz has shown—in his famous thought-experiment in the *Monadology*—that it is very hard indeed to see how a material thing could have "sensuous properties" like being in pain or "sensing redly." I should, in fact, be willing to make a statement that most of my fellow materialists will regard as treasonous: Leibniz's thought-experiment shows that when we carefully examine the idea of a material thing having sensuous properties, it seems to be an impossible idea. If I am right about these things, do they provide me with a good reason for being a dualist? No—for the following argument-schema is invalid:

D or M

Q

It is very hard to see how it could be that Q if M

hence,

That Q is a good reason for believing that D.

Here is a counterexample. Suppose we know that Bill is either the Pope or the Patriarch of Constantinople, but we don't know which. And suppose we know that (for reasons that are hidden from us) he attends services at a Christian Reformed church every Sunday. It would be a mistake for us to reason as follows:

Bill is either the Pope or the Patriarch of Constantinople

Bill attends services at a Christian Reformed church every Sunday

It is very hard to see how it could be that Bill attends services at a Christian Reformed church every Sunday if he is the Patriarch of Constantinople.

hence,

That Bill attends services at a Christian Reformed church every Sunday is a good reason for believing that he is the Pope.

It may be that there is a valid argument-schema in, so to speak, the general vicinity of this invalid argument-schema. The schema that is got by replacing the third premise-schema with

It is significantly easier to see how it could be that Q if D than it is to see how it could be that Q if M

seems quite plausible. But the following instance of this schema is, I think, false:

It is significantly easier to see how it could be that we have sensuous experience if we are immaterial things than it is to see how it could be that we have sensuous experience if we are material things.

Any inclination that anyone may have to believe that this statement is true is, in my view, an illusion that is due to the fact that it is much harder for us to represent immaterial things in our thought than material things; for that reason, it is much harder to carry out the analogue of Leibniz's thought-experiment for immaterial things. But, if one perseveres through this difficulty—or so it has seemed to me when I have tried it—one will find that it is just as difficult to imagine an immaterial thing having sensuous experiences as it is to imagine a material thing having sensuous experiences (more difficult, in fact; but only because it is not very easy to imagine an immaterial thing at all). The hard fact of the matter is, sensuous experience is a great

philosophical mystery. Like the passage of time and self-reference and vagueness, it's just something we don't have a very good philosophical handle on. It is a mystery how a material thing could have sensuous properties simply and solely because it is a mystery how *anything* could.

II

Let us now turn from philosophical to theological considerations. What can be said about the question whether the Christian (*qua* Christian) is in any sense committed to dualism? The relevant considerations would seem to be what is found in the following texts, which I list in order of ascending importance:

- the writings of venerable but non-authoritative authors (particularly the Fathers of the Church);
- the three great first-millennial creeds;
- Holy Scripture.

Let us take these in turn.

When we consider the Fathers, it is incontestable that dualism triumphs. Almost without exception, the Fathers were dualists. I am not happy about setting myself against such a cloud of witnesses. Nevertheless, I believe that the anthropology of the Fathers is the result of an unfortunate marriage of Athens and Jerusalem, and, although I follow the Fathers on most matters about which they mostly agree, I am not going to follow them on this one.

I pass with relief to the Creeds. Here there is no trace of the "Platonic" picture of the afterlife. For the record, here is what the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed have to say about our post-mortem existence:

- I believe in...the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.
- I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.
- At whose [Christ's] coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

What is most worthy of note about these passages for our purposes is what they do not say. What they do not say is that in the interval between a person's death and resurrection, a person exists as a separated soul. Indeed, they have nothing whatever to say about that interval. The friends of dualism may answer that nothing in the creeds implies that we shall *not* exist as

separated souls between our death and the general resurrection. I agree. It is a quite plausible thesis that everyone responsible for the wording of the two later creeds was a dualist, and that nothing about the state of the soul between death and resurrection was put into those two creeds because every Christian in the fourth and fifth centuries—Catholic, heretic, or schismatic—was a dualist. (Thou hast conquered, Athenian!) I contend only that there is nothing in the passages I have quoted to make the anti-dualist uncomfortable.¹

Let us now turn to the Bible. I shall look first at the Old Testament and then at the New.

There is little to support dualism in the Old Testament, and much that the materialist will find congenial. God, we are told,

...formed man [adham] of dust from the ground [adhamah], and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. [Gen 2:7]

Later, when God's curse is pronounced upon *adham* and *adhamah*, God says,

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return. [Gen 3:19]

This Ash Wednesday theme, so to call it, the theme of humanity as dust is, of course, a common one in the Old Testament: "...shall the dust praise thee?"; "...they that go down into the dust..." The attempts I know of to give a Platonic gloss to this theme seem to me to be singularly unconvincing. Consider, for example, Longfellow's verse (and I don't think that any major philosopher or theologian has done a better job of Platonizing the dust of Genesis than the minor poet has):

Life is real and life is earnest
And the grave is not its goal.
"Dust thou art, to dust returnest"
Was not spoken of the soul.

Indeed it wasn't. But it *was* spoken of the living human beings Adam and Eve.

Dust is still present in the first biblical intimation of resurrection (I would not count Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones as an intimation of resurrection), in Daniel 12:2:

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

I suppose I should say something about Saul and the Witch of Endor and the summoning of Samuel from the dead. But I really don't know

what to say about this story. When I read it, I have only questions. Does the Christian dualist think that this story supports dualism? Can the Christian who believes that we exist in a disembodied state after death believe that there are necromancers, people who have the power to summon the disembodied dead and cause them somehow to assume a visible form? Is this not a difficult story for all Christians who take the Bible seriously? I'd like to hear what some others think about this story.

III

Let us now turn to the New Testament. I shall discuss both what I consider to be the general tendency of the New Testament and two passages that are sometime used as "proof texts" by dualists.

The New Testament is not a textbook of metaphysics. Nevertheless, the books of the New Testament—unlike the books of the Old—were composed in a world in which metaphysics was very much in the air, and there are passages that reflect this. It was the Greek proclivity to metaphysical speculation, I suppose, that was responsible for the celebrated and difficult passage in I Corinthians on, as we might say, the *specifics* of the Resurrection of the Dead. "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish man!" Paul's exasperation is evident, but he does not shirk the question, and, it seems to me, his answer provides the single passage in the New Testament that is directly addressed to philosophical worries about resurrection. Let us look at what Paul says, and let us not be bound by the conventions of New Testament translation, which make use of terms that are for us associated with all sorts of ideas that were not present in Paul's mind—or at least I should like to see some argument before I granted that they were:

What you sow will not be made alive unless it die, and what you sow is not the *soma* that will be, but a naked kernel [*kókkos*], as it may be of wheat or of some other kind; but God gives it a *soma* as he wished, to each seed [*sperma*] its own *soma*. Not all flesh is the same, for human beings have one flesh, and beasts another flesh, and birds another, and fish another still . . . So also the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is sown in corruption and raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a psychic *soma*, it is raised a pneumatic *soma*. If there is a psychic *soma*, there is also a pneumatic *soma*. So also it is written: the first human being Adam became a living *psuchè*. The final Adam became a life-giving *pneúma*. [15:36-45]

What is the "naked kernel" of which Paul speaks? The Christian Platonist will reply, "the soul, of course." But we should note that Paul does not think that the kernel of wheat that is planted in the ground is an immaterial *psuchè*. Indeed, Paul applies this word—and the corresponding adjective, which I have somewhat perversely represented by the English word 'psychic',—only to that which is sown and dies, not to that which is raised. I do not think it strains the text to say that Paul used the word '*psuchè*' to mean

'a human being alive with old life that comes to us from Adam'. (If Paul had wanted to talk of the "soul" in anything like the Platonic sense, we may wonder why he would use the only word available for expressing that sense with an entirely different meaning.) I would contend, similarly, that Paul used the adjective I have represented by the word 'psychic' to mean 'alive with the old Adamic life', and that he used the word '*pneúma*' ("spirit") to mean 'a human being who is alive with the new resurrection life' (and so, similarly, for the adjective I have represented by the word 'pneumatic').

A note on the word '*soma*'. I have no real objection to translating '*soma*' as 'body', so long as we do not understand the English word in what I may call its "strict, Cartesian sense." An example will illustrate what I mean. A present-day analytical philosopher, writing about the implications of keeping Alice's brain alive in a vat, may well speak of Alice, during her brain's time in the vat, as "not having a body," and may well go on to discuss the consequences of inserting her brain "into a new body." But a Cartesian will tell this philosopher that, strictly speaking, the brain in the vat *is* Alice's body, and that the projected surgery, strictly speaking, will not *supply* Alice with a body but will rather transform the rather minimal body she has in the vat into a body of normal size, shape, and capacities. (And one would not have to be a Cartesian to agree that, strictly speaking, this is how we should talk. Even the materialist may agree on reflection that this is how we should use the word 'body' if we are being careful.) Now suppose we convince a Cartesian that my interpretation of Paul is correct: that the "naked kernel" that is sown when Priscilla dies is not something immaterial but something that stands to the raised Priscilla as the seed stands to the new wheat. This Cartesian will say that if Paul is right, then Priscilla will never, even in death, lack a body—not strictly speaking. Rather, between her death and her resurrection, she will have a naked kernel (whatever exactly that may turn out to be) for a body. But this "strict, Cartesian" use of 'body', however defensible it may be on abstract, philosophical grounds, is not the same as Paul's use of '*soma*'. Paul's use of '*soma*' is much more like that of my analytical philosopher who writes about a brain's "getting a new body." For Paul, the *soma*-that-will-be is the living flesh with which God will cloth the naked kernel, as He clothed the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision—but flesh that is alive with the new life that He has given to us in Christ, and not with the old life that He breathed into the dust of which Adam was made.² In a sense, then, flesh and blood will inherit the Kingdom of God. But not *this* flesh and not *this* blood, which are perishable, but the imperishable flesh and blood that God will give us when we come to the wedding feast. (Some of us, having refused the new life, will have nothing to put on but flesh that is alive with the old life, but God will give everyone one flesh or the other.)³

I do not have the space, or the learning, to consider everything Paul says about resurrection. I do, however, have a question for the Christian dualist about the Pauline representation of death and resurrection. If, between one's death and one's resurrection, one exists as a disembodied Platonic soul, why does Paul repeatedly refer to death as a sleep? I by no means contend that the Christian dualist cannot come up with a satisfactory

answer to this question, but I do think that the dualist's answer, or answers, should be explicitly set out for examination.

I wish now to look at several passages (passages I regard as typical—I am still on the topic of general tendencies in the New Testament) in which Jesus is represented as using the word '*psuchè*'. Again, I will lay aside the conventions of New Testament translation.

For whoever wishes to save his *psuchè* will lose it, but whoever loses his *psuchè* for my sake shall find it. For what will someone be profited if he gains the whole world and forfeits his *psuchè*? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his *psuchè*? [Matt 16: 25, 26. Cf Mark 8:36, 37.⁴]

(One of the conventions of New Testament translation is to translate the first two occurrences of *psuchè* in this passage as 'life' and the second two as 'soul'.)

Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever has found his *psuchè* shall lose it, and whoever has lost his *psuchè* for my sake shall find it. [Matt 10:38, 39. Cf Mark 8: 35; Luke 17:33]

It seems to me obvious that in these passages, '*psuchè*' should be translated simply as 'life'.

There is a passage (also in Matthew) that uses the word '*psuchè*' in a way that suggests a Platonic view of the afterlife; although I speak under correction, I believe that it is the only passage in the New Testament of which this can be said:

Do not fear those who can kill the *soma* but not the *psuchè*; fear rather him who is able to destroy both the *psuchè* and the *soma* in Gehenna. [10:28]

This is what some would call "Q" material; it is worth looking at the corresponding passage in Luke:

...do not fear those who kill the *soma* and after that have nothing more that they can do; fear him who after he has killed has authority to cast into Gehenna. [12: 4,5]

I regard the Lucan passage as representing more accurately the dominical saying that underlies both passages. I would suggest that Luke's wording reflects an understanding of what is suggested by the Greek opposition of '*psuchè*' and '*soma*' that is superior to that of the author of Matthew. (Perhaps Luke cannot think of a good word to use as the direct object of 'cast', and for that reason uses the verb intransitively.)

I now turn now from the general to the particular, to the two "proof texts" I have promised to discuss. (By a 'proof text' I mean a biblical passage that is regarded by someone or other as a "clincher," a passage that

simply *settles* some theological question. Various people with whom I have discussed the Christian view of the afterlife have cited these two passages to demonstrate that the Bible teaches that the unresurrected dead think and speak and are aware. And, they argue, if the unresurrected dead think and speak and are aware, that implies dualism.) Both of the passages are from Luke (they have no parallels in the other Gospels), and both turn on dominical utterances.

The first is the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31). The argument for the conclusion that this parable represents the unresurrected dead as conscious and capable of thought and action is this. The rich man in Hell (*hades*) and Abraham converse in the present tense (across a "great gulf") about the rich man's still-living brothers; the rich man begs Abraham to send a messenger to them to warn them of what is in store for them if they do not alter their lives. Abraham tells him that this would do no good, but he does not dispute the rich man's assumption that, at the very moment they are speaking, his brothers are alive and sinning away.

Let us first note that this is a parable. I believe that the way to approach a parable is to ask what its central lesson is, and to draw from the parable no conclusions that are not closely related to that central lesson. We should not, for example, conclude from the parable of the thief in the night that God is liable to make off with our property when we least expect it, or from the parable of the unjust judge that the purpose of prayer is to annoy God till, just to shut us up, He tends to our needs. Here is a more substantive example. I would not draw from the parable of Dives and Lazarus the conclusion that the damned can desire the salvation of others (a conclusion that is not, I suppose, heretical, but is not what Christians have generally believed, either). I would not draw this conclusion because I do not think that the parable is addressed to the question whether the damned can have altruistic concerns. The central lesson of the parable (or rather the central lesson of the part of it I have summarized; the parable is complex, and makes several points) is that supernatural manifestations have no power to produce real changes in the lives of the wicked, of those who flout Moses and the prophets without the smallest pang of compunction. Jesus' resurrection itself—an allusion to that event is pretty clearly intended—will not, considered simply as a display of God's power, convert anyone who does not recognize the claims of the Law. I do not think that this parable licenses any theological conclusions that are not closely related to this lesson. And, I would argue, questions about the metaphysics of the afterlife are *not* closely—or even distantly—related to this lesson. (I want to stress the point that I am speaking only about how I think we should approach *parables*, pithy little stories told by a character in the biblical narrative to illustrate or illumine an abstract point by means of concrete imagery, stories told as recognized fiction; what I say is not addressed to any more general hermeneutical question.)

If you disagree, let me ask you a question. Suppose, safe on Canaan's side, you were to discover that you had been, well, just *dead* for a thousand years. Would you ask Jesus how he could have so misled you, in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, about the possibility of communication between the living and the recently dead?

The second text we shall consider is the story of the Good Thief (Luke 23: 42, 43). The argument for the conclusion that the unresurrected dead are aware of their condition is, of course, an obvious inference from Jesus' words, "Truly I tell you, today you shall be with me in Paradise."⁵

This utterance of Jesus does not occur in a parable, and what I have said in response to the previous "proof text" does not, therefore, apply to it. Neither, however, does it occur within a discourse on the nature of the afterlife. The words of Jesus are, obviously, supposed to be what The Book of Common Prayer calls "comfortable words." Let me ask a question in somewhat the same spirit as the question I asked a moment ago. Imagine that the Good Thief dies in agony; "the next thing he knows," as the idiom has it, he is in Paradise. He presently discovers that over three thousand years have passed since he died. Was he deceived? Was it somehow wrong of Jesus to say to him, "Today you shall be with me in Paradise"? If so, what should Jesus have said? Should he have said, "After the general resurrection, which will occur after an indefinite period that only the Father knows, you shall be with me in Paradise—but it will seem to you as if no time has passed"? Are there not circumstances in which taking extreme care to frame one's statements in words that express only the strict and literal truth is unsatisfactory from a pastoral point of view? And are there not, in fact, circumstances in which taking extreme care to frame one's statements in words that express only the strict and literal truth can impede communication? (I know that a certain large structure in Manhattan is a terminal and not a station; nevertheless, I don't generally call it Grand Central Terminal, because that's not what most people call it. And from my calling it Grand Central Station you cannot infer that I believe that it's a station rather than a terminal.) In any case, to suppose that Jesus and the Good Thief would have attached much importance to the distinction between the strict and the lax interpretations of Jesus' words—the strict being the one insisted on by those who are treating these words as proof text, and the lax being the one I'm pushing—seems to me to attribute an analytical cast of mind to two first-century Jews (in their extreme agony, let us remember) that is probably unwarranted.

Those who regard the two Lucan texts I have considered as proof texts will, no doubt, tell me that I am presenting a rather unedifying spectacle: twisting and turning, impaled on intransigent texts, flailing about, searching in vain for some way off the scriptural mount I am fixed on. Well, I have to admit that I wish these texts were not worded quite as they are. But I have questions I can ask them in return. Can they do any better with the dust of Genesis? With Paul's repeated representation of death as "sleep"? I do not regard *these* texts as proof texts—although I can't resist the temptation to point out that if I did, my proof texts would be much more numerous, uniform, and straightforward than theirs.

Drawing theological conclusions from Scripture is a complicated matter, just as drawing scientific conclusions from Nature is a complicated matter. In fact one can hardly ever *draw* conclusions from either—not, at any rate, highly abstract and theoretical conclusions. What one should do if one's interests are highly abstract and theoretical is to formulate abstract and theoretical positions (theological or scientific, as the case may be) and to see

what sense they make of the data (the words of Scripture or the phenomena of Nature). I think that, all in all, what the Bible says about death and resurrection makes more sense if we assume that death is but a sleep. I regard the two proof texts I have examined as recalcitrant data. (It is, of course, quite common in science for the best available theories to confront various recalcitrant data.)

There is one New Testament datum that Platonic dualism does rather poorly with that I have not yet mentioned: the New Testament treats death as something horrible. In a famous essay⁶, Oscar Cullmann has eloquently contrasted the death of Socrates and the death of Jesus. We are so familiar with both stories that the contrast between them may escape our notice till someone points it out to us. Although it is true that the judicial murder of Jesus was considerably more brutal than the judicial murder of Socrates, I do not see how we can possibly attribute the striking contrast between the agony in Gethsemane and the calm, measured discourse of Socrates in *Crito* and *Phaedo* to that fact alone.⁷ In my view, in the death of Jesus we see a man facing death who understood death (we see an absolutely perfect man facing death *on his own*, without the illusions about death that comforted Socrates and without the presence of the Holy Spirit, Who comforts Christian martyrs). Socrates' illusion was this: that it was not *he* who would die but simply an adjunct, his body—a thing that was not only not himself, but a prison, a coil to be shuffled off with relief. Jesus, however, knew that it was he himself, and not another thing, who would die, who would become a corpse, who would be composed of non-living matter. Therein lies the suffocating horror of death. At least this seems very real to me. When I think of the fact that I shall one day be composed of dead flesh, it is then that I appreciate the full power of the words of the medieval song: *Timor mortis conturbat me*. This is, by the bye, a very different experience from fearing nonexistence. It may be that the anticipation of endless nonexistence is frightening, but I find the anticipation of being even temporarily composed of dead flesh frightening. I am, after all, an animal, and this prospect is the prospect of a total violation of my animal nature.⁸

IV

An important philosophical argument for dualism remains to be addressed, an argument that, unlike the argument we examined in Part I, proceeds from Christian premises. This argument perhaps represents the primary philosophical reason that most Christian dualists would adduce for their position. In a nutshell, it is this: the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead presupposes dualism. For if I am not something immaterial, if I am a living animal, then death must be the end of me. If I am a living animal, then I am a material object. If I am a material object, then I am the mereological sum of certain atoms. But if I am the mereological sum of certain atoms today, it is clear from what we know about the metabolisms of living things that I was not the sum of those same atoms a year ago. Plainly I must have been the mereological sum of a different set of atoms a year ago—one that hardly overlaps the set of atoms whose mereological sum I am today.⁹ And the fact that the atoms of which I am composed are in continuous flux is a

stumbling block for the materialist who believes in resurrection.

Suppose that a thousand years from now it is Time and God brings the present order of things to an end and inaugurates the new age. But how shall even omnipotence bring *me* back—me, whose former atoms are now spread pretty evenly throughout the biosphere? This question does not confront the dualist, who will say that there is no need to bring me back because I have never left. But what shall the materialist say? From the point of view of the materialist, it looks as if asking God to bring me back is like asking Him to bring back the snows of yesteryear or the light of other days. For what can even omnipotence do but *reassemble*? What else is there to do? And reassembly is not enough, for I have been composed of different atoms at different times. If someone says, "If, in a thousand years, God reassembles the atoms that are going to compose you at the moment of your death, those reassembled atoms will compose you," there is an obvious objection to his thesis. If God can, a thousand years from now, reassemble the atoms that are going to compose me at the moment of my death—and no doubt He can—, He can also reassemble the atoms that compose me right now. In fact, if there is no overlap between the two sets of atoms, He could do both, and set the two resulting persons side by side. And which would be I? Neither or both, it would seem, and, since not both, neither.

"God wouldn't do that." I daresay He wouldn't. But if He were to reassemble either set of atoms, the resulting man would be who he was, and it is absurd, it is utterly incoherent, to suppose that his identity could depend on what might happen to some atoms other than the atoms that compose him. In the end, there would seem to be no way round the following requirement: if I am a material thing, then, if a man who lives at some time in the future is to be *I*, there will have to be some sort of material and causal continuity between this matter that composes me now and the matter that will then compose that man. But this requirement looks very much like what Paul gives us in his description of the resurrection: when I die, the power of God will somehow preserve something of my present being, a *gumnos kókkos*, which will continue to exist throughout the interval between my death and my resurrection and will, at the general resurrection, be clothed in a festal garment of new flesh.

V

I have asked the question, What can be said about whether a Christian is committed to dualism? I think that the answer must be that the Christian is not committed to dualism—not simply in virtue of being a Christian. I would not want to defend any stronger thesis than the following: it is permissible for a Christian to believe, it is a possible point of view for a Christian to adopt, that dualism represents a false picture of human nature (a picture that became a part of the worldview of most Christians because Greek metaphysics pervaded the culture in which the young Church developed). Indeed, it seems to me to be ludicrous to suppose that any stronger thesis than this could be right. However good the arguments against dualism may seem to *me* to be, I have to admit that God has allowed dualism to

become the dominant view of human nature among Christians. An essential part of my own contrary view of human nature and the afterlife—that "death is but a sleep"—was condemned at Trent, but no ecumenical council or denominational synod or inquisitorial office or faculty of theology, no Pope or archbishop or reformer, has, to my knowledge, condemned dualism *per se* (I believe that some forms of dualism have been condemned by Rome). Since God has allowed dualism to dominate Christian anthropology for two millennia, I can only conclude that if dualism represents, as I believe, a false view of our nature, this view is not perniciously false: a widespread acceptance of dualism does not distort or impoverish the Gospel. (I must make an important distinction. I do believe that there is an inherent *tendency* in dualism to distort some aspects of the Gospel. But I should be foolish indeed if I argued that the same was not true of the thesis that we are breathing dust and death a sleep. It is not an unfamiliar situation in theology for all of the possible answers to a certain question to be dangerous. Christian theology is almost by definition a dangerous enterprise.) What I would have you believe is that dualism and materialism are like the various incompatible theories of Atonement: what one believes about dualism and materialism is a matter of Christian liberty: Christians may, in fear and trembling, make up their own minds about whether to be dualists or materialists—or if they are able (but this ability is a gift that is not often given to philosophers and theologians) simply to accept the scriptural statement that we are made in God's image and likeness and simply to accept the Gospel promise of eternal life and not to concern themselves with metaphysical questions about human nature and eternal life.¹⁰

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NOTES

1. The friends of dualism may also want to point out that although the soul is not mentioned in creedal statements about eschatology, the soul is mentioned in the part of the Athanasian Creed devoted to the human nature of Christ:

...and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul [*anima rationabilis*] and human flesh subsisting.

The human soul also figures in an analogy that is supposed to clarify the nature of the union of the divine and human natures in Christ:

...for as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ.

But it is not clear to me that the phrases 'of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting' and 'as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man' must be understood as a Christian Platonist would understand them; it seems to me that an Aristotelian interpretation is also possible. We should remember that Augustine (whose spirit is present throughout the Athanasian Creed) attempted to illumine the nature of the Trinity by comparing the Father, the Son, and

the Holy Spirit with the psychological operations of intellect, understanding, and will. But no one would take this as evidence that Augustine believed that Socrates' intellect, Socrates' understanding, and Socrates' will were in any sense three separate (or separable) existences.

2. Cf. II Cor 5.

3. I would agree with Augustine [*De Civ. Dei*, XIII, 20] that when Paul says that we shall receive a "pneumatic *soma*" or "spiritual body," he does not mean that the visible, tangible flesh we have now will be transformed into or replaced by invisible, intangible flesh; he means, rather, that we shall be given visible, tangible flesh that is perfectly subject to spirit, to the intellect and will that have been perfected in Christ. (When Paul has a spiritual body, he will no longer have to say, "I see in my members a different law. . . .") Augustine offers an analogy: Just as we call a spirit "carnal" when it is subject to the flesh, so we may call a body "spiritual" when it is subject to the spirit.

4. The wording of the parallel passage in Luke (9:24) is worth taking note of: "For what will someone be profited if he gains the whole world but loses or forfeits *himself*."

5. As far as purely grammatical considerations go, it would not be impossible to translate this as "Truly I tell you today, you shall be with me in Paradise"; I have to admit, however, that it does not seem at all likely that this was the meaning Luke intended.

6. "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" in *Immortality and Resurrection*, Krister Stendahl, ed., (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), pp. 9-54.

7. The suggestion of Harry A. Wolfson ("Immortality and Resurrection in the Philosophy of the Church Fathers," in the volume cited in the previous note) that the agony of Jesus is to be attributed to Jesus' awareness that he was a sinner who must face judgment simply has no basis whatever in the text of the New Testament.

8. I of course believe, as a Christian, that death is a defeated enemy. Well, Hitler's Germany was a defeated enemy in 1944: its final destruction was then inevitable and assured. But it was still frightening and it still had terrible things to do.

9. I am assuming various metaphysical theses here—that it is possible for one and the same thing to be the mereological sum of different things at different times; that it is *not* possible for any things to have more than one mereological sum at a given time; that human beings like me can strictly and literally endure through time; and many others. There are a lot of such assumptions. I could write a book.

10. When this paper was read at the Notre Dame conference on the philosophy of mind for which it was written, Dean Zimmerman was the commentator. I wish to thank him for his thought-provoking and insightful comments. The paper was also read at a Pacific regional meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers. The members of the audiences on both occasions—and particularly William Hasker and Daniel Howard-Synder—are thanked for their questions and comments.