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Editorial

This edition of Faith&Thought comprises the papers delivered at our 2016 Symposium on the subject ‘What Survives Death?’. Sally Nelson addressed the sensitive and highly personal subject of Disability and Resurrection; what does healing and identity mean for differently-abled people. Gordon McPhate gave personal testimony and an overview of the literature concerning Near Death Experiences, while Keith Ward spoke on the Philosophy of Death. The Symposium was well attended and recordings of the talks are also available on the website for download. We are preparing and looking forward to our 2017 Symposium which will seek to explore the vexed question of violence in the narrative of the Old Testament. Does the God of the Old Testament have similarities with the ‘god’ of Islamic Extremism? Enclosed with this journal are two A5 sized flyers / posters for you to use to publicise this event at your place of worship, work or education.

In addition, there is a short paper from Pieter Lalleman concerning Dionysius and the dating of the Christian Calendar and we have a selection of letters and book reviews. Once again, if you have anything you would like to contribute to future editions then we would be delighted to receive such material sent to the editor at drapkerry@gmail.com

Open Symposium 2017

Handling Biblical Violence

*Is the God of the Old Testament
'Nasty, brutish and capricious'?*

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church London WC2H 8EP

14th October 2017 10:30am to 16:00pm

More details at www.faithandthought.org.uk

Faith&Thought

RELATING ADVANCES IN KNOWLEDGE TO FAITH WITHIN SOCIETY

David Instone-Brewer, Senior Research Fellow in Rabbinics and the New Testament at Tyndale House, will speak on New Testament and early Christian interpretations of violent bible stories.

Stephen Agilinko, Baptist Minister in Tottenham, will speak on Islamic matters

Other Speakers to be confirmed at this time.

**The event is free to members of Faith and Thought (or those joining on the day).
Otherwise just £10 (£7 concessions)**

Annual General Meeting for 2016

Saturday 8th October, 2016
Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftsbury Avenue,
London WC2H EP

Council members present:

Rev R Allaway (Chairman)	Rev J D Buxton (Hon. Treasurer)
Dr A P Kerry (Hon. Secretary)	Mr R Luhman
Mrs J Mead	Mr T C Mitchell

16 other members were present at the Symposium, and remained for the AGM.

OPENING Rev R Allaway welcomed members to the meeting

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING Copies of the minutes of the 2015 AGM were made available. The chairman read a summary which was approved and the minutes were signed.

ELECTION The meeting agreed to the re-election of:

- President (Sir Colin Humphreys),
- Vice-Presidents (Prof. Malcolm A. Jeeves, Prof. Kenneth Kitchen, Prof. Alan Millard, Prof. J. W. Montgomery)
- Honorary Treasurer (Rev John Buxton).

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS The annual accounts were presented by John Buxton. A summary sheet was circulated and the full accounts were available for members.

- The accounts were accepted.
- The financial situation is satisfactory.
- Some tax refund is due and will be claimed in the forthcoming year.
- The treasurer was thanked for the time he devotes to these matters

RESIGNED FROM COUNCIL The meeting noted that Dr Michael Collis had stepped down from serving as a Council Member. The meeting recorded its sincere thanks for his faithful service in this role since 1978.

CLOSE The meeting closed with the General Grace

Disability and Resurrection

Rev Sally Nelson

Sally Nelson is a Baptist Tutor at St Barnabas Theological Centre, Sheffield, teaching doctrine and pastoral studies. She completed a PhD in theology focused on the question of suffering. These interests are rooted in the dual experiences of having a special needs daughter and working in hospice chaplaincy.

*'He speaks, and, listening to His voice,
New life the dead receive,
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.*

*Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb,
Your loosened tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come,
And leap, ye lame, for joy.'*

This familiar hymn helps us to pose the question: instinctively, for what do we hope in the life to come?

The issue has particular resonance for those who live with disabilities in this life, and especially for those who experience pain, suffering or discrimination as a result of these disabilities.¹ This paper is offered as a theological reflection rooted in the experience of disability, making use of some models from Alistair McFadyen (on personhood), Dorothee Sölle (on suffering), and Amos Yong (on disability theology). Other theological approaches of course offer important and complementary insights on this mysterious question, and this paper only offers a snapshot from one disability perspective. In it, I will argue that developing a habit of intentionally reading human identity 'forwards' rather than 'backwards' may help, seeing someone's story as a dynamic and reflexive narrative that can integrate experiences of pain and suffering and at the same time facilitate a reinterpretation of possible expectations around this life and the life to come. Published material on bodily resurrection will fill out this picture more fully.²

Some experience-based reflections

My own thinking about the resurrection of the body has developed over the past 18 years, as I have reflected on the implications of the severe and complex disabilities

of my daughter, in conversation with the writings of theologians of disability as well as more mainstream theology. Experience, while not alone sufficient without insight from the Christian tradition, is surely a valid starting point, since we cannot escape our human condition as embodied, created and contingent.

In the early days of discovering I had a child who was always going to be different, I wrote an article entitled *Pink ballet shoes and the worship of God*.³ This piece was prompted by reflecting on a gift of dance shoes for my daughter, which she was never able to use. I wrote from what I might now describe as the ‘place of pain’ (Jean Vanier’s Valley of Achor)⁴ about how I hoped she would dance in heaven – and I would now use different language to talk about her future in God. Many disability theologians would view automatic expectations of resurrection healing as (a) dismissive of the embodied state of humanity, which after all was graced by incarnation, and (b) reinforcing the message that a body with disabilities is an inferior human state, and our best hope is for the physical removal of such disabilities.⁵ There is also a subtle connection to the notion that disability is part of the broken, sinful world, in need of redemption, and has no place in the life of holiness to come, with the implicit sinister link that disability is necessarily a consequence of sin. Therefore the removal of disability in this world – by medical treatment and even by the abortion of fetuses – can be legitimated. Amos Yong says, ‘the normate perspective which expects the eschatological elimination of such disabilities essentially devalues the lives and experiences of such people...’, and goes on to suggest that the root of this expectation is bias and fear (which I would call ‘backward’ focused identity), not true compassion⁶ (which I would term ‘forward’ focused).⁷

My experiential response in *Pink ballet shoes...* was not, however, completely unreflected. I was able to recognise that the possibilities of dance shoes represented *my* dreams for my child, and I had no idea what God’s dreams for her might be, other than that she fulfil her potential as a human being, created to be in relationship with Godself. This raises the question of how much of the pain around her disability was *her* pain?⁸ How much was mine, because of my expectations? How much was God’s pain? And did God’s pain originate in what we might perceive to be God’s ‘faulty product’ (the disabled body), or in the inability of other people, without evident disabilities, to love and relate to this small, broken, child made also in God’s image? All of these ideas might impact our hopes for the resurrection body.

In disability theology, much attention is given to the biblical testimony that Jesus retained his scars after Easter Day: his risen body is visibly ‘damaged’. I teach disability inclusion in some places to trainee ministers, and this idea often attracts a

considerable amount of discussion. While those who have experienced or observed discrimination may primarily feel vindicated by the idea of Jesus' solidarity with the broken, others may find quite objectionable the possibility that a person could still be disabled in some way in his/her resurrection existence – rightly reminding us that Revelation 21:4 tells us that in the heavenly city, 'There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'. In addition, Jesus' earthly ministry *could* be argued to be characterised by his healing of, not his acceptance of, disability. This tricky discussion is not advanced much by taking the view that technically we are all disabled as a generic human condition – true enough, but most of us are not visibly and negatively affected by our 'disabilities' in daily life.

Two stories

The question can be illustrated by two well-known stories from theologians of disability. First, John Swinton tells the story of a class on pastoral care:

*'...the class was made up of people with differing backgrounds and perspectives. Among these was one person who had no sight and another who was profoundly deaf and spoke through an interpreter. At one point in the class, people were sharing their various spiritual experiences. The woman who was deaf, Angela, began to tell us about a dream she'd had. In that dream she had met with Jesus in heaven. She and Jesus talked for some time, and she said she had never experienced such peace and joy. "Jesus was everything I had hoped he would be," she said. "And his signing was amazing!"'*⁹

We could read this dream metaphorically,¹⁰ as revelatory of the value judgements on others that bedevil our earthly existence, yet which are absent in heaven (whatever 'heaven' means); or we could say more prosaically that it is a vision of physical disability being present in heaven, without being disabling (much as Jesus' scars seem to be in scripture).

The second story is from Frances Young, speaking of the prospect of healing with respect to her son Arthur, who has had profound disabilities from birth:

*What sense would it make to hope for 'healing' ...Suppose that some faith healer laid hands on Arthur tomorrow and all his damaged brain cells were miraculously healed, what then? Brains gradually develop over the years through learning....The development of our selves as persons is bound up with this learning process... 'Healed' he would be a different person.*¹¹

Will there be disability in the resurrected body, or not? There is a particular challenge here for those with congenital conditions, or for whom the disability is so much an integral part of those persons that it is also part of their identity.¹² Yet can we really wish someone to live a resurrected life with, say, cystic fibrosis, which causes pain and physical limitation? To what kind of God would that point? Theologian Amos Yong, whose brother has Down's Syndrome, deals with this question by noting that we should not assume that the resurrected life is 'static' (so change in a dynamic resurrected state, which is appropriate to that state, might be possible and even probable – so none of us would be 'stuck' as we are for eternity);¹³ and also that glory in heaven is in fact the *other-centred* glory of Jesus (focusing on relational qualities of love and community), not some human interpretation of 'glory' that might imply physical beauty, power, strength *etc.* He says, 'Is it possible to conceive that the glory and power of the resurrection body will derive not from some able-bodied ideal of perfection, but from its being the site of the gracious activity of God's Spirit? In this case, might not the unending journey of the resurrection body also be from glory to glory and from perfection to perfection?'¹⁴

The resurrection of Jesus is the only example of resurrection that we have, and it has to bear a lot of theological and analogical weight. Yong is keen that we remember the vital importance of treating all aspects of Jesus' life as revelatory of God's self, '....I will suggest that Jesus Christ's body should be the theological norm for our understanding the image of God, and that this has normative implications for a more inclusive vision of the people of God not only in the present (ecclesially) but also in the afterlife (eschatologically)'.¹⁵

The Bible, significantly, indicates *continuity and discontinuity* between this life and the resurrected life, which is communicated in several ways: the risen Jesus keeps his unique scars (which identify him as the crucified and risen One), although in many other ways he is not initially recognisable; and in the resurrection appearances, the acknowledgement that it is indeed Jesus comes not visually, but rather when he speaks, breaks bread, or teaches scripture. Furthermore, his resurrected body has 'superphysical' properties, passing through walls while yet being able to eat and drink.¹⁶

John Polkinghorne suggests that 'the laws of its [the redeemed universe] nature will be perfectly adapted to the everlasting life of that world where 'Death shall be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away' (Revelation 21:4), just as the laws of nature of this world are perfectly adapted to the character of its freely evolving processes, through which the old

creation has made itself'.¹⁷ In other words, there is a hopeful sense that God's reality is always 'fit for purpose', whether it be here and now, or in the redeemed creation. This 'fit for purpose' may well mean that disability is no longer disabling; or that physical reality 'there' is simply quite different from the physical reality we currently understand. Jesus' resurrection body is arguably MORE embodied than ours, because he is MORE fully human (more open to God, more addressable, more filled with the Spirit...) than we are. Growing into this image is our calling and our destiny.

Learning to read life forwards

Commonly we examine past events and experiences to find likely trajectories into the future. This is true both of historical and of scientific method, although historical events tend to be singular (like the resurrection) while scientific explorations often deal with the repeatable. It is, in most areas of life, very helpful and practical to look back in order to identify 'causes' and 'effects' and then try to predict what will happen next, based on experience – but what happens to those living with disabilities if this becomes our dominant paradigm for interpreting life to one another?¹⁸ There is an assumption built into this process that our future state is contingent at some level upon our present state. If our present state is perceived to be unsatisfactory or painful, then the implication is that either the future will also be unsatisfactory or painful, or there needs to be an intervention to improve things. While this argument is in no way intended to condone a fatalistic approach to disability, or to dismiss vital research that is designed to address and assist those whose bodies are affected, it is important that we do not allow a value judgement to be formed in this life, or to assume that the future (in heaven) will be predicated upon this past.

This is where the cult of normalcy¹⁹ can shape our theology of resurrection, if we do not address it critically. What if a person's identity is understood not as what s/he is *now*, but what s/he is to *become*? In particular, how might personal identity 'continue discontinuously' beyond the grave, such that we are recognised, but not diminished, by *who* we are? What does resurrection 'embodiment' mean?

It is important that we take the resurrection body seriously. Jesus had one; although this is commonly overlooked even in Christian circles when discussing heaven, as Tom Wright explores in *Surprised by hope*.²⁰ But to what extent is the 'material' of the body necessarily conserved in the resurrected body? If a (disabled) body is resurrected, and is not transformed into some kind of spirit, then is it the same (damaged) body 'material'? Did Jesus' resurrected body comprise the same carbon, hydrogen and oxygen atoms as the one that was crucified? If we remember the

biblical evidence for discontinuity, then we do not need to assume this. Timothy Wall has produced a very helpful paper on this subject, explaining that our bodies (over the period of about 6-7 years) are completely regenerated anyway – cells die and regrow, and we don't keep the same physical material, yet we are still recognisable as 'us'.²¹

In *The God of hope*, John Polkinghorne²² discusses notions of the human soul – not a disembodied spirit, as it is often wrongly understood, but some kind of psychosomatic unified entity. He explores the fact that damage to the body can be shown to affect the personality, and (like Wall) that the body itself is not static but is regenerated throughout life, while still being recognisable. So we do not need to argue for exactly the same elements of body to be resurrected. Polkinghorne advocates the idea that the soul is a complex 'information-bearing pattern', which, in addition to embodied physical morphology, is the aspect that makes 'me' as an adult in this life the same 'me' as I was as a child. It is this information-bearing pattern that survives death and is re-embodied by God in the resurrection. Our destiny beyond death does not lie in the promise of the immortal soul, but in God's promise of death and resurrection as an archetypal sequence.

So we have a biblical precedent that Jesus' resurrection body is ultimately identifiable as Jesus (albeit with continuity and discontinuity both present), and a hope that you will be identifiable as you, and I will be identifiable as me, so that relationships will still have meaning (although not the same meaning, according to Jesus in Matthew 22:30 and par). What, then, is it to be a 'person', created and recreated in God's image?

Alistair McFadyen produced some years ago a model of personhood that he calls 'dialogical'.²³ His argument in essence is that we are formed as persons through our dialogues with others ('dialogues' mean verbal and non-verbal expressions of relationship, good and bad). By conducting 'dialogues' – issuing a 'call' to, and receiving a 'response' from, another – we begin over time to grasp the gist of the person each of us projects socially, and to consolidate its identity. Primarily we are called into being by God, but every interaction we experience with another being contributes to our self-understanding and our communal understanding by others. Our sense of self is both developed and reinforced by the way in which others dialogue with us, a dynamic and 'sedimented'²⁴ process. Each dialogical experience can build us up (a healthy dialogue), or destroy us a little (McFadyen calls such dialogues 'distorted'). For someone with a disability, the dialogue will be affected (and, in some cases, fully mediated) by that disability. McFadyen understands our physical embodiment not as definitional, but as an essential material location of the

self. The self does have identifying physical features but these are not in themselves an explanation of ‘who’ I might be.²⁵ Our identities continue to be formed in a dynamic sense throughout our lives and form our personal narratives.

Thus if I am always addressed as a person who is a victim, that is how (in this life) I will usually identify myself. If I am always addressed as a person with mobility and learning difficulties, that is the person I will become. My identity will be consolidated as such in the dialogical interaction matrix. What we could helpfully remember is McFadyen’s insistence that our primary identity is to be called into being by God – so full personhood is about the extent of our ‘addressability’ by God (or openness to relationship with Godself), and is thus essentially future-oriented. The creative Word, calling us into existence, is also the redemptive Word, and is not only mediated by Christ, but IS Christ.²⁶ Jesus is the divine Word, and is thus both God’s address to us AND the perfect human response to God. His dialogues are not distorted. To be fully in the image of God is therefore to be ‘in Christ’,²⁷ and thus to walk in the pattern of life, death, resurrection.

This model is infused with hope. There is ALWAYS the possibility of the redemption of a person. The next dialogue that someone has may be the one that is transformative. There is always hope that a pattern of negative dialogue can be reframed by love. It is a model about someone’s potential, about what s/he can be, about what s/he is called to be: not just what s/he is or appears to be now. This aspect of Christian faith is deeply countercultural: the modernist project encourages us to address the future by looking back: ‘I am like this because of that’. The Christian worldview is concerned with the transformation of what IS, into its God-conceived future – and that might be beyond our understanding.

This transformation has an ethical dimension for us and for our treatment of, interaction with, and expectations for, others. Writing on ethics, John Colwell notes that we are identified now by what we are *called to be*:

Moreover, we too are not yet as God ultimately intends us to be—or rather, we are and we are not at the same time but in different senses: we are already defined by the humanity of Jesus; already through baptism and by the Spirit we participate in his true humanity; already we are called to be as he is within the world (1 John 4:17)—but God has not finished with us or in us yet; we are not yet what we shall be. In a society where we are so often defined by our past or our present—our family, our background, our education, our employment, our salary—disciples of Jesus are defined by their future even though that future is qualified by a ‘not yet’.²⁸

The process of discipleship (or fullness of life) is to grow into the image of Christ, and this has an unstoppable forward momentum. Moltmann comments that ‘From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionary and transforming the present’.²⁹ To evaluate ‘the other’ on the basis of his/her present can be unwise, unethical, and unbiblical unless accompanied by a humble acknowledgement of hope in Christ’s transformative resurrection victory, and all that it indicates.

Karl Barth insists that ‘Christianity that is not entirely and altogether eschatology has entirely and altogether nothing to do with Christ’.³⁰ The Christian hope is that the future will *transform* the present, yet it does not *negate* the present – just as the NT fulfils, but does not replace, the OT. The future is not just more of the present; neither is it the ‘improved’ present, with the bad bits ironed out (as in the modernist project). It is a transformation in the power of the Holy Spirit of God (Ezekiel 37: 9-10) - and it is a matter of divine justice that the resurrected life addresses the good and bad of this life. The resurrection of Jesus is a miracle, a wonder, but also a judgement of God on evil: that evil cannot stand in the redeemed universe.

Thus I find it helpful, for thinking about disability and the resurrection body, that we should read our identities ‘forwards’, not ‘backwards’, as we grow into the image of Christ. This forward dynamic is arguably especially difficult for those of us in the West,³¹ tending to be dismissive of the past and anxious about the future, yet sadly ill at ease in the present moment and struggling to cope well with the challenge of the characteristically liminal human condition: life is a mixture of good and bad and never feels ‘complete’. On this ‘forward’ personhood model – that is exactly as it should be! We just need to learn to live in the process: this is discipleship, journey, *following* Christ wherever he goes next.

Integrating the experience of suffering

Reading identity forwards, and taking seriously the idea of a dialogical personhood, which is constructed from layers of experience, thus requires two things: firstly, that we are comfortable with the idea that the person is dynamic and ‘unfinished’, and secondly, that we can deal constructively with formative experiences that may not be positive. This is one way of expressing the previously noted continuity and discontinuity of the resurrection pattern.

I have had a personal interest in exploring the experience of suffering from a narrative perspective, arising initially from hospice work, but tangentially applicable to disability studies (not because we assume that disability implies suffering, but

because of key issues around marginality). There is a useful dynamic description of the experience of suffering in the work of Dorothee Sölle.³² Sölle finds three movements in the experience of suffering: (1) silent agony; (2) articulation; and (3) change.

This process has an implicit forward momentum. Sölle's observation is that suffering initially isolates a person,³³ but if it can be articulated it becomes the property of the *listening community*. Individuals can get stuck in Sölle's stages 1 and 2 for a variety of reasons – usually because articulation is suppressed (by others), or repressed (by one's own choice)³⁴ – and then the suffering turns inward and becomes a damaging internal force (bitterness, violence, or depression). Either damages our personhood, our God-intended ability to be in healthy dialogues with others.

Jean Vanier says:

I once visited a psychiatric hospital that was a kind of warehouse of human misery. Hundreds of children with severe disabilities were lying, neglected, on their cots. There was a deadly silence. Not one of them was crying. When they realize that nobody cares, that nobody will answer them, children no longer cry. It takes too much energy. We cry out only when there is hope that someone may hear us.³⁵

The narrative of suffering MUST find a sympathetic ear, or it becomes a destructive narrative. If it can be shared, then there is always a possibility of it becoming a transformative narrative. The telling of the story itself reveals a deep well of hope, towards transformation, in the human soul. We tell the story because we desire change.³⁶ I would go further and say that this process is redemptive, because the more we desire the transformation of our stories, the more we are opened to our need to grow into Christ. Adriana Caverero³⁷ comments that humans are defined by the desire to hear their own stories, which interestingly cannot be done alone; we cannot narrate our own stories entirely by ourselves, but need the corroboration of others, particularly at the point of birth and of death. We are made to be in community and the marginalisation and silencing of any group (such as those with disabilities) is a form of death; while resurrection is the listening and transformation of the story.

Reinterpretation

The final step is to have the freedom to reinterpret life and death, knowing that it is dynamic, that the next thing that happens can change all that went before. Quite simply (and obviously!): because of Jesus' resurrection, we know that our futures

are not prescribed by our pasts. Jesus' resurrection was THE event which provoked the early disciples' serious reflection on his death and life, leading to a new understanding of the divine, a new interpretation of his works and teaching, an integration of the apparent disaster of the Cross into a key hermeneutical pattern for human suffering, and the identification of God's redemptive purpose in the unexpected life of a carpenter from Nazareth. From this process of reflection and reinterpretation developed the community of those who wished to live in the same way (the church).

So here, in summary, are three key points of reinterpretations for those with disabilities in the context of this discussion.

1. *Forward identity and dynamic personhood.* The person is not determined by his or her past or current experiences or biological features, but is perceived to be in a state of potential 'addressability' by God and others (also called 'dialogue'), which can be transformative. The person is defined only by what s/he is called to be in Christ. We can play our part now by re-examining our assumptions and expectations of disability in the resurrection – is this person really in need of 'healing' in the sense of removing his/her disability? Or is it the assumptions of normalcy?
2. *Pain, suffering and disfiguring features.* If we take seriously both the embodied humanity of Jesus with his ability to feel pain and isolation, and the retention in his resurrected body of the crucifixion scars that are unique to him and are a witness to his mission, then we have a metaphor³⁸ for the retention and integration of identifying disabilities (for example, the facial features of Down's Syndrome) in a manner that is identifying but no longer disabling. Polkinghorne speaks of the resurrected body being perfectly adapted to the resurrection life. The physicality in the resurrection may have recognisable continuity and discontinuity with the physicality we currently experience – but it will not, in the redeemed life, be a physicality that diminishes any human person. Furthermore, the integration of suffering into a life (rather than its rejection), exemplified by the centrality of the Cross in the story of Jesus and his mission, is by analogy key to any human story and we ignore it at our peril.
3. *Marginalisation and dialogue.* Perhaps the most challenging idea for western culture is the shift away from the culture of the individual. In this

paper there has been discussion of the dialogical formation of the person (McFadyen) and the need to share the story of suffering in order to begin to integrate it (Sölle). Both processes are about hope, redemption and change; both are communal experiences. In our churches we often adopt a medical or social model of disability, both of which focus on the problems that the individual's disability poses for normalcy. The natural response is then to pray for healing, perceived as the only possible solution: 'Make him/her normal, like us!'. Amos Yong rightly draws our attention to the story of the Great Banquet in which the poor, crippled, blind and lame are brought to the table and included in the meal *as they are* (without washing, healing or new clothes).³⁹ At this table, with its unavoidable eschatological inferences, disability and poverty are not problems but are sources of revelation. The inference is that, far from needing to make each individual whole, together we can see the glory of God.

Jesus' resurrection represents the complete reinterpretation of all that has gone before, but primarily, I think, must be understood as an act of divine justice. Jesus' trial and death (with which any marginalised victim can at some level identify), were unjust; but the resurrection is a judgement in eternity on sin and evil. This interpretation can be read back into ethics and praxis now.

To return to the beginning: the question becomes not whether our disabilities will persist in the resurrection, but whether we can allow the resurrection of Jesus to function, as hope, in our narratives now as it did for the writers of the NT? The gospel narrators wrote to interpret the meaning of Easter Day, which forced a re-evaluation of everything in the light of God's resurrection of the Sinless One. These early writers imply that a miraculous discontinuity within reality is revealed through the christological continuity of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, and that this constitutes Good News, because it is about eternal justice, eternal hope and eternal love. Every majority assumption must be reinterpreted in the light of this singular and life-changing event.

¹ It is not necessarily the case that someone with disabilities perceives him/herself to be suffering. I would also note that I have not engaged with a theology of healing of those with disabilities in this life – this article deals with those who will die with their bodily disabilities.

² For example, Tom Wright, *Surprised by hope*, London: SPCK, 2007, and N.T. Wright, *The resurrection of the Son of God*, London: SPCK, 2003; Paula Gooder,

Heaven, London: SPCK, 2011 and *Body*, London: SPCK, 2016; John Polkinghorne, *The God of hope and the end of the world*. London: SPCK, 2002.

³ Sally Nelson, *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, October 2002, pp3-6.

⁴ Jean Vanier, *Befriending*, pp5-6, says: 'We are often frightened of reality because reality can be painful and a source of disappointment. We tend to escape into a world of illusions and to seek refuge in dreams. We bury ourselves in ideas and theories...We run away from our Valley of Achor which is the place of our greatest and most intimate pain. Yet that is the very place that God calls us to enter so that it may be transformed into a door of hope'.

⁵ See for example, Amos Yong, *The Bible, disability and the church*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2011, chapter 5.

⁶ Compassion in the true sense of 'suffering with', not 'having pity on'.

⁷ Yong, *The Bible, disability and the church*, p 121.

⁸ Interested readers might like to explore models of disability; the 'medical' model understands disability as a problem to be fixed; the 'social' model as a problem imposed by mainstream society on the minority with disabilities. Roy McCloughry's *The enabled life* (London: SPCK, 2013) covers this material.

⁹ John Swinton, in his Introduction to Stanley Hauerwas & Jean Vanier, *Living gently in a violent world: the prophetic witness of weakness*, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008, pp12-13.

¹⁰ We do not in fact know what heaven is like, or what 'physical laws' might operate there, and so we do not know what heavenly embodiment might entail.

¹¹ Frances Young, *Face to face*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990, pp 61-62.

¹² Personal identity is not determined by embodiment, but neither is it independent of the body in our lived experience.

¹³ Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, Baylor UP, 2007, p 278ff.

¹⁴ Amos Yong, *ibid*, p 282.

¹⁵ Amos Yong, *The Bible, disability and the church* p 125.

¹⁶ In this context there are many useful explorations of the seed and plant metaphor used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 – the seed 'is and is not' the plant; the seed is the necessary precursor with all the necessary potential within it.

¹⁷ John Polkinghorne, *The God of hope*, p 115-116.

¹⁸ Our expectations of those with disabilities (and indeed, those without) can be shaped primarily by what they have so far been, rather than what they might become, thus 'S/he will never be able to....'.

¹⁹ A term used by disability theologians, describing the majority (able-ist) inability to see things differently, and underpinning the medical and social models of disability which see disabilities as problems to be solved.

²⁰ Wright identifies confusion around post-mortem embodiment; around the notion of heaven as a 'separate place' from earth rather than the biblical concept of a renewed creation; and around the idea of Jesus taking individuals away rather than a general resurrection of the dead.

²¹ Timothy Wall, *Resurrection and the natural sciences: some theological insights on sanctification and disability*, in *Science & Christian Belief*, 2015, **27**, 41-58.

²² See chapter 9.

²³ Alistair McFadyen, *The call to personhood*, Cambridge UP, 1990.

²⁴ 'Sedimented' meaning not a 'static sludge', but a layered and incremental development of the self that is always open to growth. Dialogues can be modified by subsequent dialogues, or can themselves modify previous dialogues.

²⁵ Adriana Cavarero comments that the question, 'WHO am I?' is never fully addressed by 'WHAT I am' answers – so to respond to 'who are you?' by saying 'I am a mother, headmistress, have brown hair, blue eyes etc' simply tells us 'what', not 'who?'. 'Who?' is only given when we start to tell stories.

²⁶ McFadyen, *Call to personhood*, pp 45-46.

²⁷ McFadyen, p 47.

²⁸ John Colwell, *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, October 2016, p19.

²⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of hope*, SCM 1967, p 16.

³⁰ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, OUP, 1933, p 314.

³¹ Tom Wright explores this idea in *Surprised by hope*, the accessible version of his study of resurrection.

³² Sölle, *Suffering*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

³³ McFadyen addresses this problem as the need to *dialogue* – once stuck in 'monologue', we are condemned to distortions of the human self because selves are created to be relational.

³⁴ For example, suppression might be the forcible silencing of the Jews by the Nazis, or the emotional silencing of a partner within an unhappy marriage; repression might be an inability to articulate one's feelings, maybe because of a refusal to trust.

³⁵ J. Vanier, *Becoming human*. New York: Paulist Press, 1998, p9.

³⁶ Sölle's discussion can be found on pp68ff of *Suffering*.

³⁷ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating narratives: storytelling and selfhood*, Oxford: Routledge, 2000.

³⁸ And we must use metaphor to speak of that which lies in the mystery of God.

³⁹ See Yong's discussion of the eschatological banquet in *The Bible, disability and the church*, pp130ff.

What Survives Death

Professor Keith Ward

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Recent theologians have tended to emphasise that Christians believe in the resurrection of the body, and not in the immortality of the soul. There is good reason for this, since the idea of an immaterial soul which is the true inner self, and the destiny of which is to be liberated from the body and live in a purely spiritual realm, is not one which is characteristic of Jewish, Christian, or Muslim mainstream thought. Plato called the body the tomb of the soul, and many religious traditions make it their ultimate goal to escape the limitations and ills of the physical body.

That was not a Jewish ideal. In early Hebrew thought, the soul (*nephesh*) was breathed into the body as a principle of life. It was characteristic of all living breathing animals, not just of humans. When the body stopped breathing, that was the end of life. For many Jews there was no life beyond death, and it is still possible to be an orthodox Jew and deny any form of afterlife.

Nevertheless, a belief in life in the world to come entered into Jewish thought, and when it did it was usually in terms of some sort of embodied existence. Jesus agreed with the Pharisees that there was a place of the dead, Sheol, and that figures like Moses and Isaiah continued to live in a more attractive realm, Paradise.

He also thought that there would be a resurrection of the body. But, though Jesus of course experienced resurrection, there was no agreement among Christians on what sort of embodied existence this was. There have probably always been those who thought that the afterlife body would be the same as the earthly body, but made free from disease and decay. Perhaps the resurrection would take place on this earth, but only when earth had been transformed by God after 'the great and terrible Day of the Lord'. The dead would rise in healthy, shining and glorious, bodies and carry on with their lives in an earth much as before, except that their world would now be filled with the clear and vivid presence of God and of the saints and angels.

Paul, however, is not so sure. In the classic Pauline passage, 1 Corinthians 15, he writes, 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (verse 50). That pretty clearly implies that whatever the resurrection body is, it will not be flesh and blood. That means it will not be physical. It will not be the same body that people have during earthly life. He says of the body, 'It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body' (44). The words in Greek are *soma psychikon* and *soma pneumatikon*. These Greek words are hard to translate, for they literally mean 'a psychic, or mind-like, body' and a 'spirit-like body'. The distinction of 'mind' and 'spirit' in Paul is an obscure one, about which there is much debate. One possibility – but it is only one – is that 'mind' refers to the mind as it relates to sensory experience and is concerned with the needs of survival, eating, drinking, and propagation of the species. 'Spirit' refers to the more purely intellectual capacities of the mind, to creative thought, moral decision-making, and relationships with other persons and with God.

When Aristotle taught about mind, his thoughts were gathered in a text called 'Peri Psyche', often known by its Latin title, '*De Anima*', which means 'On the Soul' or 'On the Mind'. Paul was a pupil of the rabbi and philosopher Gamaliel, and could have been influenced by Aristotle's distinction of Psyche, the sensory mind, which died with the physical body, and Nous, the intellectual mind, which could possibly continue after bodily death (though it is unclear whether Aristotle thought it did). Aristotle did not believe in resurrection, but perhaps Paul was adapting Aristotle's thought to affirm that individual human personalities (not just 'pure intellects') can exist after death, but without physical bodies.

Paul writes, 'You do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed...but God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body' (37 and 38). The physical body is like a seed, which is to germinate in the world to come. In that world, God will bring the seed to maturity, giving it a new kind of body, appropriate to each seed.

If we ask what kind of body this will be, if it is not a physical body, Paul just says, 'Fool!', which appears to put an end to the debate. But that it will be radically different does not seem to be in question. He does, however, also say some positive things about the spirit-body. It is imperishable, immortal, glorious (beautiful), and powerful. Such characteristics cannot belong in this physical universe. A basic law of our universe is the second law of thermodynamics, the law of entropy. It states, to put it briefly, that everything decays, and that the whole physical universe will one

day run down and cease to exist. Perishability is a basic law of our universe. So if spirit-bodies are to be imperishable, they cannot exist in the physical universe at all.

For Paul, it seems that there is a spiritual universe, whose laws are quite different from the laws of this physical universe, and in which we, the very same persons, will exist, and come to possess to the full all the capacities we had on earth, but in a more vital and developed form. Then we will see our earthly lives as mere seeds, which can only produce what is potential in them when they come to exist in a spirit-universe.

The resurrection of the body, according to Paul, is not the resuscitation of these physical bodies at some future time. It is the entry of human persons into a quite different spirit-universe, finding themselves in non-physical bodies, with vastly expanded capacities and possibilities of existence. This is certainly an attractive idea. Of course, we should not forget that it is not just an idea. It is based on Paul's reflections on the resurrection of Jesus, who, he believed, appeared as a blinding light, not a physical body, on the Damascus road. Jesus did appear as a physical body to the disciples, but even then, according to the Gospels, he appeared for short periods behind locked doors, was not recognised immediately, and disappeared instantaneously again. This was no ordinary physical body. On available testimony, it seems to have been a fully physical appearance of a reality that was already beyond the laws of the physical universe. We might say that the miracle of Jesus' resurrection was not that his physical body walked out of the tomb and came to life again. It was that his physical body disappeared, and after that there were for a relatively short time a number of appearances of his spirit-body (his 'risen body') in various physical forms.

If we take these accounts seriously, we shall have to say that there are spirit-bodies in a spirit-universe, and that humans will be given such bodies as fulfilments of the potentialities present in their physical bodies on earth. This, however, raises the difficult philosophical question of whether it is possible for the very same person to have, successively, very different kinds of body in very different universes. It is, surprising as it may seem, more like re-incarnation than like re-duplication. Some physicists have fantasised that in the far future intelligent beings will have the capacity of re-creating the DNA of all presently existing humans. Then they can bring these humans back to life – like the dinosaurs brought to life in 'Jurassic Park', and that will be the resurrection of the dead. But such a scenario would completely

miss the point of the New Testament view of resurrection. The New Testament does not want us to have our old bodies back again. It wants us to have different bodies, spirit-bodies, in a spirit-filled universe.

But is such a thing even logically possible? If we are to be the same persons, but with different bodies, our identity cannot consist in our physical make-up. It must lie in something distinct from the physical. And this is the cue for looking again at that frequently demonised philosopher Rene Descartes. He is usually called the arch-dualist, and dualism is thought to be both wrong and terribly harmful. It is time to set the record straight (I am not the first to do is, and I recommend the work of John Cottingham to those who are interested to know what Descartes really thought). Descartes is a dualist, in the sense that he thinks mental events are different in kind from physical events. Physical events are locatable in space, are usually publicly observable, and are composed of collections of minute particles (or, nowadays, of waves and fields of force) subject to the laws of physics and explainable in terms of such laws. Mental events are not locatable in space, are not publicly observable, are not completely explainable in terms of laws of physics, and are often greatly concerned with feelings and values, with which physics has no direct concern.

I think Descartes is entirely right to make this distinction. When I dream of being in the Bahamas, the content of my dream is cognised by me, but it is not in space. Nobody else can see my dream, or see me lying on a sunny beach, as I can. Physics can describe what is happening in my brain when I dream, but it cannot experience or fully describe the content of my dream. And in general, the contents of my conscious life, its joys, sorrows, efforts, and tribulations, are in fact the most important things about me. They constitute my inner life, and they make me what I am.

Does my physical body make me what I am? Of course my body is important to me. It helps to shape my character and sets limits on my capacities. My brain, in particular, must be in good working order if I am to have anything like a normal human life. If I am ill, I cannot function as well as I should. If my brain becomes disordered, my conscious life will be seriously affected. There is no question that my physical body and brain are necessary to my living a properly human life on earth. Body and mind go naturally and properly together, and do not function in different parallel universes.

But Descartes never said they did. In fact he was clear that body and mind cooperate together so as to form one compound unity, one thing. In that sense he was not a dualist at all. He was more like what philosophers today might call a double-aspect monist. He believed humans were unitary beings with a physical and a mental component that normally and naturally are closely inter-related.

We can, however, properly pose the question: could the mental and physical components exist apart? The body obviously can exist without the mind and without consciousness. It often does. But can consciousness and mind exist without a body, or, more relevantly, without a brain? It is harder to find instances when it does so, but I think it is easy to think of it doing so. I can, as a thought-experiment, imagine my brain and body disappearing while I go on thinking and even perceiving things around me. There are difficulties about this – how would I have visual perceptions without eyes or brain? But they might just spontaneously appear. After all, we can induce perceptions by stimulating the brain electrically, so eyes are not necessary. What about the brain? With the present causal laws of the universe, the brain is necessary to perception. But those laws are contingent; they do not have to exist. If the laws were different, we could still have perceptions. We could be, for instance, disembodied consciousnesses which received perceptual data by some form of telepathic communication from a more advanced mind. We do not think this happens. But it could happen. It is a logical possibility. And the point is that consciousness may depend on many things, but it does not have to depend on the precise physical laws that governed the formation of our brains. In other words, the mental does not necessarily depend on the physical – though, like Descartes, I have no doubt that our minds do, as a matter of contingent fact, depend on the working of our physical brains.

As Christians, we might think of it like this: God is a non-embodied mind, let us say. God is a consciousness which is fully aware of everything that ever happens – God is all-knowing. If so, then God has mental properties without having any physical properties. This is easily imaginable, and I think it is a fact. So it seems possible that humans too could have mental properties without having any physical properties. During life, this does not happen. But when our brains die, we may go on having mental experiences. Whether we do or not is a matter for investigation. No philosopher or neuro-scientist can deny it.

When humans die, they may continue to have memories and a sense of their own identity. But if they are to have new experiences, to communicate with other persons, and to be identifiable by other persons, they will have to have something like bodies. Because bodies are the means by which information about an environment is selected and presented to consciousness; bodies are the means by which others can identify us as continuing individuals; and bodies are the means by which we can act and do things in an environment. Bodies are important to beings like us, precisely because we are continuing social individuals who learn from and act in an external environment.

But is it important that we should always continue to have the same body? I think the answer to this must be no, because most of us do not continue to have the same body throughout our earthly lives anyway. We start off with the body of a baby, and we end with the body of an old person. These are not the same, and every atom of our body changes during the course of our lives. There is, of course, a continuity in time and space. We do not disappear in one place and suddenly reappear in another. But we could do so, and we would soon get used to the experience, though it would seem odd at first.

Suppose that I instantaneously change from a child to an old person, or suppose I have a terrible accident or illness that changes my appearance completely. My body would have changed perhaps out of all recognition. But I could still be the same person. I would have very much the same memories, thought-patterns, feeling, and hopes. I would know that certain experiences happened to me that no-one else knows anything about, but that I am the same person now as the one who had those experiences.

There is, then, reason to think that we could live in a different form of body, as long as we retained the same mental content and sense of continuing identity. Like Paul, I think we cannot now know what form of body that will be, except that it will have some causal continuity with any earthly body that we had, and it will find itself able to explore possibilities that were present in the earthly body but were inhibited or limited in certain ways, and it will perhaps find itself, at least in the first instance, in a community of other persons with whom one had relations on earth.

When will such a resurrection occur? The New Testament contains different views about this, but there are some hints about beliefs that were held at least by some in

the early church. Jesus spoke to Moses and Elijah on a mountain (Mark 9,4). He said to the penitent thief, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23, 43). The creedal belief that Jesus descended into Hell is based on a text that speaks of Jesus preaching to 'the spirits in prison' – that is, the dead (1 Peter 3, 19 and 4, 6). At least some of the dead speak, hear, and live in the presence of Christ, while others exist 'in prison' or a place of punishment.

These passages fit a belief that some form of resurrection, or existence in a spirit-body, occurs immediately at death. There are various sorts of post-death existence, from a punishing and purifying fire to the bliss of Paradise. Doctrines of Purgatory and eternal Hell were later developments of this belief, but we may think, and I do think, that it is more consistent with the idea of a God of unlimited love to think that punishments can always be ended by repentance, even in the after-life.

So we may think, like the early theologian Gregory of Nyssa, that there are various sorts of existence, and various sorts of bodies, in the spirit-world. It is God's will that all should be saved (1 Timothy 2, 3), and even death cannot separate us from the love of God (Romans 8, 38-39). So God will never cease to offer repentance and salvation even to those who reap the consequences of their earthly hatreds and injustices in bodies which suffer torment. What God wills for all is Paradise, and if any do not attain it, it is because of their own hatred, greed, and ignorance.

On such a view, there are many circles of Hell, but it is possible (I do not say inevitable) to move through them, aided by the grace of God in Christ, and finally to enter into a Paradise where an infinity of delights await. This final stage was called by Gregory the apocatastasis, the regeneration of all things. That could be called a 'new creation'. Just as our physical bodies will be transformed and fulfilled in the possession of spiritual bodies, so this whole physical creation may be transformed and fulfilled in a spiritually infused universe. A different form of universe, but a fulfilment of what was embryonic in this physical universe, and that brings out all the beauty and goodness that the physical universe has originated and foreshadowed. The writer of 2 Corinthians speaks of our physical body decaying, while our spiritual being is renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4, 16). It is possible to see this earthly life as a preparation for a future existence in which all pains and sufferings will be ended, and all the good things of this world are brought to fulfilment. That final apotheosis of the world will not occur in this universe, or immediately after physical death. It is impossible to assign it to any time in this universe. It is the

completion of a long spiritual journey, which begins here and continues in worlds yet to come.

Is all this dreaming and wishful thinking? It is certainly speculation, and imagination. But for Christians it is founded on the appearance in our world of the resurrected Jesus, on experiences of the Spirit of God which is able to transform us at least in part in this life, and on belief in the primacy of a spiritual reality, God, which has created this universe in order to bring into existence values which are unique and imperishable. What matters, of course, is how we react now to the demands and promises of Christ, and of goodness. But if, in our lives, we experience something of the loving presence of God and of the love of Christ who died to liberate us from evil, then we may hope for such liberation as the proper completion of our lives. All philosophical reflection can do is try to show that such a hope is not absurd or impossible. More than that requires the commitment of faith.

Out-of-Body Experiences and Near Death Experiences.

Two OBE's and One NDE in the light of Neuroscience and Rejection of Dualist notions of Human Being.

The Very Revd Professor Gordon McPhate

Gordon McPhate is Dean of Chester Cathedral. He is also a trained Pathologist and a member of the Royal College of Physicians, who has had a near-death experience himself.

We human beings are analytical by nature, dividing wholes into parts, and finding out how things work. We are also aesthetic beings and ethical beings, dividing the beautiful from the ugly, identifying the best bits from the ordinary bits, sorting the good from the bad. Turning attention to ourselves, we naturally develop a dualistic stance, dividing ourselves into Body and Soul, Matter and Spirit, Brain and Mind, two irreconcilable substances. This dualistic tradition runs through our Scriptures, our theology, our philosophy, and our cultural history.

For example, let us turn to the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. I quote first from the Order for Burial of the Dead:

“Almighty God, with whom do live the Spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the Faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the Flesh, are in joy and felicity....”

Clearly, the material human body is envisaged as a prison for the Soul of the individual. Next, I quote from the Articles of Religion, the first of which speaks of God in these terms:

“There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without Body, parts, or passions....”

In other words, God is pure spiritual substance, without a body, outside time and outside matter. Does this not encourage us to understand the process of becoming more spiritual ourselves, as being closely linked to the process of rejecting matter, the things of this world, and our own human bodies?

Dualism is uncompromising, it seeks to divide reality into two parts. One part is good and pure and permanent. The other part is bad and corrupted and temporary.

Any union between these two kinds of reality is a false entity, and only separation makes ultimate sense.

Two other extreme traditions flank Dualism. Spiritualism rejects matter and the physical world as illusory; whereas Materialist Reductionism recognises only the reality of matter, and reduces everything we experience to physics and chemistry – including biology and psychology.

But does our propensity for analysis not take us too far? Let me give two examples, one from science and one from literature. The humble and simple molecule water, basis of all life on Earth, consists of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom bonded together. We know that even the bond angles between these atoms are critical for the properties of the water molecule. We also know from our own experience that the properties of water vary considerably with temperature, as liquid or solid or gas. We know the full range of chemical reactions possible between the water molecule and a myriad of other molecules. Analytically, we can split the water molecule in two ways; either producing oxygen gas and hydrogen gas, or producing a hydrogen ion and a hydroxyl ion. Each of these four products of the division of water has a completely different behaviour and chemistry from those of water itself. The parts are not the same as the whole, and could not predict the behaviour of the whole.

I turn now to novels, or rather famous novels. A young person, preparing for an exam in literature, can buy a summary of the story line of a great novel, or watch the dramatised film version of it, instead of actually reading the novel itself. This is done in the belief that it is the story that matters, not the medium of the words chosen by a great author to tell that story. Alternatively, you can buy an analysis of the author's style and technique as a wordsmith and literary artist, without reading their books. Both of these approaches seek to divide story and author; whereas what we recognise as great in a famous novel is the combined greatness of medium and story. The whole is greater than the parts.

A plan of this paper

Forty-three years ago I myself had an Out-of-Body experience, which was also a Near Death Experience. It led to a change of life, conversion to Christian Faith, and a vocation to Priesthood. Ever since, I have tried make sense of that experience both as a former research scientist, and as a priest. Making sense of that experience must take account of the traditions of Gnosticism and Dualism in theology and philosophy, but also the more recent rejection of Dualism by the Church. It must also take account of the experiences of those who have had OBE's or NDE's

themselves, the uniformity of their reported experiences, and the interpretations and explanations of these experiences.

I propose to begin with theology, philosophy, and history. I will then recount my own OBE and NDE, followed by reports of another OBE and another NDE by two people known to me. Finally, I will survey conclusions about interpretation and explanation of these phenomena. The reason for my approach is simply this: OBE's and NDE's imply a separation between consciousness and embodiment which best fits into a dualistic framework, but intellectually and existentially such Dualism brings its own deficiencies and difficulties which must be recognised.

A history of dualist thought

In St. Matthew's Gospel we encounter this dualistic statement:

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the Body, but cannot kill the Soul.”

However, it is the Gospel of John which is the most dualistic book of the Bible, linked as it was to the Essene Qumran Community and the dualistic tradition within Judaism, envisaging apocalyptic conflict between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness. John speaks of Jesus as the pre-existent divine Logos and Light of the World, contrasted with the World itself as darkness and death, and speaks of the disciples effectively as resident Aliens. John also speaks of God as Spirit. I quote three verses together:

“It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail. That which is born of the Flesh is Flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.

If you were of the World, the World would love its own; but because you are not of the World, but I chose you out of the World, therefore the World hates you.”

St. Paul in his Epistles seems to develop a dualistic opposition of Flesh against Spirit, but his purpose is simply to contrast ways of living, as he makes clear in the Letter to the Romans:

“For those who live according to the Flesh set their minds on the things of the Flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.”

In fact, Paul has a strong theology of the Body; indeed he speaks of the Body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and the need for a spiritual Resurrection Body to replace our physical Body after death. However, in 2 Corinthians Paul contrasts the

transitory and impoverished nature of embodied physical life when compared with the life to come. I quote these words, again combining verses:

“For we know that if the earthly Tent we live in is destroyed, we have a Building from God, a House not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

We know that while we are at home in the Body, we are away from the Lord.... we would rather be away from the Body and at home with the Lord.”

It is Paul who gives one of the first reports of a possible OBE in 2 Corinthians, using the expression *Ectos Tou Somatos*, out- of –the- body, in his description :

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the Body or out of the Body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up in Paradise....and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.”

The Greek view of human beings as Body and Soul Dualism contrasts with the Hebrew view of human being as Psychosomatic Unity, and derives from Socrates, as presented in Plato’s dialogue Phaedo. In the dialogue, Socrates contrasts Body and Soul in defining them thus:

“The Soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable.”

“The Body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble, and never self-consistent.”

In short, Soul good, Body bad! Socrates then explains that Soul and Body separate at death and good Souls go to a place that has the same characteristics as themselves – glorious, pure, invisible. These Souls go into the presence of the good and wise God. Through Socrates, Plato explains the basis for a moral distinction between Souls after death, in these words:

“The pure Soul, at its release, carries with it no contamination of the Body, because it has never willingly associated with it in life, but has shunned it and kept itself separate as its regular practice....but if, at the time of its release the Soul is tainted and impure, because it has always associated with the Body and cared for it and loved it, and has been so beguiled by the Body and its passions and pleasures that nothing seems real to it but those physical things which can be touched and seen and eaten and drunk and used for sexual enjoyment....(then it will be)....weighed down and dragged back into the visible world, and hovers around tombs and graveyards.”

The message conveyed is that the Body is a prison for the Soul such that escape is welcome, and that the corruption of the Soul by the Body may interfere with the natural destiny of the Soul. Plato also contrasts an upper eternal World with a lower temporal World.

The Pre-Nicene church father, Origen of Alexandria, fused Platonism with Christianity. He believed in the pre-existence of Spirits with God from eternity, and that this world is simply a testing place for fallen Spirits, followed by post-mortem spiritual states of Purgation. For Origen, the divine Logos is the guide of Spirits on their journey of spiritual perfection. In Origen's Exegesis of the Book of Numbers we read this:

“The Soul has freedom of choice and the option of moving in whatever direction it wants. But when the Soul takes its departure from the Egypt of this life in order to move to the Promised Land, it necessarily goes by certain paths and through certain stopping-places. The Soul also has a Guide, not Moses, but the Pillar of Fire and a Cloud, namely the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. Such then will be the ascent of the blessed Soul, when all the Egyptians have been drowned, so that travelling through the different stopping places, or many mansions, it is more and more illumined, until it becomes accustomed to bear the brilliance of the true Majesty.”

Notice that for Origen the Body is not mentioned. Life and death are both concerned with the spiritual Journey of the Soul towards the Promised Land of heaven, where God the Father reigns in majesty. It is a journey of increasing ascent upwards, and of increasing light, with stages, and guided by the two other Persons of the Holy Trinity. Preparation of the Soul for heaven through ascent, through illumination, through stages and guidance, contains all the key elements of Gnosticism, an all-pervasive diffuse movement which developed alongside Greek dualist concepts of human being.

For Gnostics, progression on the Soul's Journey was dependent on obtaining secret knowledge which gave power to its possessor, who would join the ranks of an intellectual elite of super-Souls. This progression was equated with salvation by the Gnostics, motivated by the desire for escape from the evil and frustration of bodily existence, the desire for purity, and the desire to be superior to others. In their rejection of the Body, the Gnostics could either abuse it or indulge it or become ascetics.

The Gnostics misinterpreted St Paul's distinction between Flesh and Spirit in Galatians 5 to mean that our Bodies are evil, but our Souls are good, thus

scapegoating the Body and matter itself. In various guises, the heresy of Gnosticism is still alive and well today!

Continuing with this history of Dualism, I turn next to the Cathars of the 14th century, in the South of France. For them, matter is corrupt, and so the Body is corrupt; therefore God had nothing to do with creation, being a spiritual god of purity and light. The heresy of Catharism was to identify the visible as evil, and the invisible as good; and to identify salvation with sainthood, and Hell as earthly re-incarnation. The Cathars even embraced Platonic pre-existence in their belief that human beings are really Angels tempted out of Heaven, who through living as so-called “Perfects” can get themselves back to Heaven.

Undoubtedly, the fusion of Platonism and Christianity influenced the development of alchemy, with notable practitioners such as Paracelsus in the 16th century, and Sir Isaac Newton in the 17th century. The key principles were those of transformation of elements (parallel to transmigration of Souls) and purity of elements by separation (parallel to separation of Body and Soul). As Paracelsus tells us in his *Volumen Medicininae Paramirum* of 1520:

“Alchemy is nothing but the Art which makes the impure into the pure through fire. It can separate the useful from the useless, and transmute it into its final substance and its ultimate essence.”

We have yet to consider the acknowledged champion of Dualism, arguably the founder of modern philosophy, René Descartes. Convinced of the prime importance of Reason, and haunted by the need for certainty, he concluded that his own existence was obvious to himself even when he was engaged in the act of doubting, famously stating *Cogito Ergo Sum*, “I think therefore I am”. In other words, Descartes recognised himself as “thinking substance” or *Res Cogitans*. From this, he developed a proof of God’s existence as a perfect being, and then for the reality of the World as so-called “extended substance” or *Res Extensa*. The Dualism of Descartes therefore divided “thinking substance” from “extended substance”, and so divided Mind from Body.

In response to Descartes, his contemporary in the 17th century, Benedict de Spinoza, argued that although Mind and Body are clearly different, there is no need to give a dualist account of nature, such as there is irreconcilable division between the two. Therefore, Spinoza said, there must be a correlation between a mental event in the Mind and a physical event in the Brain.

The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has extensively researched the influence of emotional pathways on rationality, through studies of brain-damaged patients,

demonstrating that body-brain mutual interactions are essential for rational decision-making, for conceptualisation of the external world, and for the internal conscious Self. His work challenges the dictum of Rene Descartes, suggesting that there can be no isolated “thinking substance” or Mind, and that thinking itself is inseparable from the Body, with both rational and emotional components. In his own words, from his book *Descartes’ Error*, Damasio says this:

“This is Descartes’ error: the abyssal separation between Body and Mind, between the sizeable, dimensioned, mechanically operated, infinitely divisible Body stuff, on the one hand, and the unsizable, undimensioned, un-pushable, non-divisible Mind stuff; the suggestion that reasoning, and moral judgement, and the suffering that comes from physical pain or emotional upheaval might exist separately from the Body. Specifically: the separation of the most refined operations of Mind from the structure and operation of a biological organism.”

Recent media attention to the experience of recovered Persistent Vegetative State patients, and those with Locked-In Syndrome, has confirmed Damasio’s conclusions and lends further support to the Psychosomatic Unity view of human being.

Dualism is required to provide an explanation of the “causal gap” between Mind and Body. Descartes suggested that the Pineal gland may be the liaison organ, but this was mere conjecture. The neuroscientist Sir John Eccles instead proposed the existence of the liaison brain, which could bridge the “causal gap” between the brain’s external or internal senses, and the Mind itself, including the psyche, the self, the soul and the will. To achieve this, he postulated the existence of special liaison neurones, called Mental-Neural Event or MNE neurones, which would be capable of responding to either neuronal brain inputs or pure mental event inputs. He found some experimental support for his hypothesis in the Supplementary Motor Area of the cerebral cortex.

In a recent and important book, the psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist has provided detailed and extensive evidence for a developing split in human consciousness between the once-dominant but inarticulate Right cerebral hemisphere and the now dominant articulate Left cerebral hemisphere. McGilchrist argues that this growing split between the hemispheres is not to be caricatured as two divided Minds in each of us, but that the history of Western culture demonstrates increasing dominance of the Left hemisphere and less cooperation between the hemispheres; although interaction between the hemispheres remains essential because the hemispheres are each specialised in different ways.

In terms of the link between consciousness and the Body, important for explanations of OBE's particularly, McGilchrist reminds us of the difference between the Right hemisphere's relationship with the Body, and the Left hemisphere's relationship with the Body. In his book, *The Master and His Emissary*, he says this:

“The Right hemisphere is deeply connected to the self as embodied. The Left hemisphere carries an image only of the Right side of the Body (so) when the Right hemisphere is incapacitated, the Left part of the individual's Body virtually ceases to exist for that person. For the Left hemisphere...the Body is something from which we are relatively detached, a thing in the world like other things. Interestingly, when there is Right hemisphere damage, there appears to be a removal of normal integration of Self with Body: the Body is reduced to a compendium of drives that are no longer integrated with the personality of the Body's owner.”

Incapacitation of either Right or Left cerebral hemisphere can be permanent or semi-permanent due to Stroke, or can be temporarily produced by selective anaesthesia of a single hemisphere. It is tempting to conclude that if the two hemispheres were uncoupled, the consciousness of the Right would accord with a Psychosomatic integrated understanding of Self, whereas the consciousness of the Left would accord with a Dualist understanding of Self. However, this speculation is probably redundant, because it is likely that self-consciousness is only possible in the Left hemisphere, as only it has language and speech centres.

Having reviewed the history of Dualism, we are brought to the very kernel of the so-called Mind-Body problem. Admittedly, a dualist understanding of human beings readily explains phenomena such as OBE's and NDE's. The difficulty is that Dualism cannot easily explain how Mind interacts with Brain in ordinary life, such that the causal gap is bridged. Dualism means irreconcilable juxtaposition of two very different independent substances; Soul and Body, Mind and Brain, Spirit and Matter.

By contrast, Psychosomatic Unity readily explains the interaction of Mind and Body in ordinary life, because Mind is seen as an epiphenomenon of Brain. There is no causal gap to explain. However, Psychosomatic Unity cannot explain phenomena such as OBE's and NDE's.

OBE and NDE case witness accounts

It is now appropriate to consider three cases of OBE or NDE, the first of which is my own experience.

“On a summer day in 1969, during my first University vacation, some friends invited me out for a drive. We piled into a small car. Then disaster struck. Our car collided head-on with another car in a quiet country lane. I have no recollection of the accident itself. All was blackness. When I became conscious, I was faced by an incredible shock. I seemed to be floating above a green field. As I looked down, I saw two men in uniform stooping over what appeared to be a lifeless dummy. But the dummy had a face, and on zooming my attention downwards, I realised it was my own face!

I was looking at my own body; and so at that moment I was disembodied consciousness! Impossible, I thought! It must be a vivid dream, unlike any dream I had ever had before! Yet I still felt I had a body, because I was still able to see, but not hear.

There was more. I felt I was free to move anywhere! Suddenly I moved away, and seemed to enter a cloud which was filled with dazzling light. And in that light I met a Person, with whom I felt totally at peace, and happy, all anxiety gone. I just wanted to stay there. No words were spoken, yet somehow we communicated. I learned somehow that I was to go back. I resisted. I did not want to go. Darkness followed, accompanied by the sound of thundering in my ears and the sensation of going downwards into a tunnel or a plughole.

I woke up in a hospital bed winched up to traction apparatus for the treatment of my fractured pelvis. My friends had suffered relatively minor injuries and were soon to be discharged. Both of the people in the other car had been killed. Apparently I had suffered a cardiac arrest on being moved from the wreckage by ambulance men.

Gradually, I absorbed the enormity of what had happened to me. In those days OBE's were not reported or widely known. I decided not to talk about it. No one would believe me! Yet for me that experience had profound significance. It opened up the possibility of the supernatural, to which my rational mind had always been closed. The person I had encountered in the light communicated a love and a peace beyond anything I had ever known. That experience was not for me proof of life after death, because it can only have lasted a matter of minutes, and because I came back. Rather it was the stimulus for beginning a religious quest. At university I was training to be a scientist and a doctor, but science and medicine were incapable of analysing that experience. Only religion could make sense of it.”

A brief commentary on my own case, which combined an OBE and on NDE. It was primarily a visual experience, without sound, until I was returning to my body. I still felt embodied somehow, yet much freer to move, and to direct my gaze in what felt

like a zooming fashion. My thought processes felt normal, in fact I felt much more aware of everything, analysing the situation as it unfolded. About four months after my OBE, I was back at University and had a single repeat episode of OBE while resting, in which I found myself briefly out of my body and half-way up the wall of my student bedroom. There has been no recurrence since then.

I turn now to a second case of OBE, narrated by a lady who heard me give a talk on my experience two years ago. She was undergoing a surgical operation, and had been duly anaesthetised. During the operation she regained consciousness and found herself behind the two operating surgeons, looking at her own body from the side, not above. She remembered the conversations between the surgeons and the other theatre staff, continued to watch the operation, and at some time returned to her body. The operation seemed to have occurred without incident, and so the OBE was not a NDE.

In this case the woman still felt herself to be embodied despite looking at her own body, and felt herself to have normal thought processes; but the experience itself was both visual and auditory despite having no functioning eyes and ears!

Finally, a third case of NDE reported by a member of my congregation who sustained two cardiac arrests in quick succession while in hospital. During the first cardiac arrest he had the following experience described in his own words, after which he produced a detailed drawing of it.

“I was in a cool dark tunnel and floating towards this figure dressed in a dark gown, pointing to a very big bright light at the top of the tunnel. Lots of things that looked like rugby balls were flying past me very fast, hundreds of them, going towards this bright light. They seemed to shoot off sparks from the rear as they flew towards the light, and the wind they caused was very strong, yet warm and not frightening.

I was floating, and would not go with the flow. I hesitated. I wanted to go to the right instead, where I saw a tunnel into a bright flowery garden which was beautiful. But a dark monk-like figure, who was huge but himself chained, was obstructing me from going into the garden.

As I hesitated, I felt I had to go back to help the old guy who was lying nearby to my left. He seemed in a bad way. I looked at this body, but did not recognise it as me. As I started to go and help the nurse, I saw myself join a dusty cloud entering this body. It felt like I was entering a cage or box or something that was going to restrict me, but I could not help myself, and went on into the corpse.

I am told that when I regained consciousness I asked for paper and a pencil, and I drew what I saw. After that I fell asleep. When I awoke the doctor came to me with the drawing, and asked me to sign it. I asked who drew it. The doctor told me I did. But I cannot draw. I am not afraid of death now, as it is such a lovely and free feeling.”

My commentary on this case. The drawing of the experience shows a threefold choice: to move towards the light, to move beyond the blocking monk-figure into the garden, or to move into the lying corpse in the cloud of dust, indicated as entering the body through its chest. Two additional features are depicted which were not described. In addition to the face-on monk-like figure blocking entrance to the garden, there is a side on view of another monk-like figure, also with hood up, pointing towards the flow of objects streaming upwards towards the light, as if inviting the observer to go there. The face of the blocking monk-like figure, who is chained with a big thick chain around his waist, is missing. Instead of a face, he seems to present a circular entrance or mouth leading into a tunnel, the centre of which is a single dark spot.

The second additional feature depicted is the face of what looks like a child, staring at the observer, and situated above the corpse.

This combined OBE and NDE shared elements of my own. Autopsy began my experience, but ended his. Re-entry to the body was perceived by both of us as difficult. His experience was primarily visual, as was mine, and we were both aware of some kind of choice to be made. His vision was more explicitly religious in content than was mine. His experience also involved a bright light. Tunnels featured much more in his account; whereas he makes no reference to watching resuscitation efforts on his body, nor does he depict them.

Medical Scientific Research Studies

In a period of 30 years more than 40 studies of NDE, including OBE, have been published in scientific and medical journals, involving nearly 3000 patients. These have demonstrated remarkable uniformity in the content of the experiences themselves and the conclusions drawn from the studies. Some have also commented on the transformative effects of the experiences on the lives of the participants. Most studies have been retrospective, but newer studies are likely to be prospective in design. It is now estimated that about 5 percent of the general population may have an NDE at some time in their lives, and around 15 percent of cardiac arrest survivors will report an NDE. Also, the younger the patient, the more likely they are to have an NDE. Otherwise, no other factor such as background, class, education or religion seems to be significant.

A variety of scientific explanations for NDE phenomena have been proposed. Certainly, electrical stimulation of the temporal lobe is well known to simulate NDE, indicating that the brain itself may be involved; however in thousands of patients not one genuine OBE was reported.

The most common explanation for NDE is oxygen deficiency causing endorphin release from the brain, producing a hallucinating effect. This does not explain the increased level of consciousness reported by many, nor the NDE's which occur when oxygen deficiency is absent. A study of oxygen deficiency generated by placing fighter jet pilots in a massive centrifuge did produce a version of NDE in participants.

Hypercapnia, or excess carbon dioxide, has also been studied as a possible explanation, and Meduna has shown that this can produce a version of NDE, but with several features missing. This explanation could relate specifically to cardiac arrest survivors, but would predict that all cardiac arrest patients should experience NDE, because all will be hypercapnic.

It is known that the anaesthetic drug ketamine can block NMDA receptors in the brain, and so cause hallucinations. It is likely that any NMDA blocker could do the same, including self-produced molecules in the brain, and these may be related to NDE phenomena. Also, a variety of psychoactive drugs can compete with the neurotransmitter 5-hydroxytryptamine (5HT) in the brain, causing a hallucinatory effect. One of these, dimethyltryptamine (DMT), is naturally produced in the Pineal gland, at the base of the brain. This DMT molecule can be released in large amounts, in response to extreme stress situations, by means of the stress hormones cortisol, adrenaline, and noradrenaline. A cardiac arrest or road traffic accident could produce such release, and so cause an NDE type hallucination due to interruption of the interface between Mind and Brain.

Dr Pim van Lommel is a physician who has made extensive studies of NDE and OBE. I have relied on his evidence criticising physiological explanations for the phenomena. In respect of other explanations he says this:

“A summary review of the psychological approaches prompts the conclusion that expectations, depersonalisation, dissociation, personality traits, hallucination, fantasies, deceit, fail to explain the empirical features of an NDE.”

Lommel himself conducted the first large prospective study of NDE, involving 344 patients in Holland, of whom 12 percent reported NDE, and all of whom had been clinically dead. Those who reported deep NDE were far more likely to die within

one month of it. The 62 patients who reported NDE experienced one or more of the following at the level of 15-20%: OBE, moving through a tunnel, communicating with light, perception of colours and/or a celestial landscape, life review, presence of a border, and meeting dead friends or relatives. No consistent physiological or psychological factors could be correlated with the NDE's. Participants were followed up for 8 years, and those who had NDE's were significantly different from those who had not in terms of positive attitude to life and other people, transformation of life, and generosity.

Ring and Cooper researched the NDE's and OBE's reported by blind people, and found that half of those with NDE visualised their own body, as did 7 out of 10 with OBE. Otherwise, the group studied experienced visions such as radiant light, otherworldly landscapes, angels or religious figures, and dead relatives, to the same degree as sighted people with NDE's and OBE's. This appears to be critical evidence of some form of extrasensory perception.

Beyond the "Dying Brain" or oxygen deficiency explanation of these experiences, hallucination is the second explanation most favoured by materialists, who equate Mind and Brain. The psychiatrist Bruce Greyson has analysed the evidence for this explanation in these terms:

"The major advantage of the hallucination model is its compatibility with the materialistic worldview favoured by the majority of neuroscientists. The major disadvantage of the hallucination model is that it fails to account for the phenomenon of accurate perceptions, and is plausible only if we discredit or discount much of the data. But disregarding disagreeable data is the hallmark of pseudoscience, not science."

Perhaps the most scientifically interesting aspect of the NDE is the reporting of accurate perceptions of the immediate environment, obtained by OBE observers, which can be corroborated by an independent witness, whether relating to an event or an object. Research of 107 such reports by Holden revealed that 37 per cent of these reports were clearly authenticated by the objective evidence, and a further 55 per cent were almost certainly accurate too. Hallucinatory explanations could only be attributed to 8 per cent of these cases. A previous study by Sabom identified 6 cases of OBE in which accurate corroborated details were reported by patients. These studies provide a very limited amount of objective evidence in a field which otherwise depends upon anecdotal reports.

Michael Marsh is a former research physician and now theologian who has analysed all of the available literature on OBE's and NDE's in a major study, recently published. He affirms his commitment to the scientific orthodoxy that Mind equals Brain. He also affirms the Christian theological orthodoxy that human beings are

Psychosomatic Unity, and that belief in the Resurrection must mean real death, a true discontinuity of existence. I summarise his concluding criticisms here :

“My first objection to the notion of these experiences representing Mind operative outwith Brain is, notably, their triviality. Clearly, there were no dead brains. We should be reminded of more recent experiments in cognitive psychology pertinent to the ability of subjects to perceive without consciously being aware that they had done so...What we need is some robust indication that Mind was capable of exhibiting entirely different, coherent mental accomplishments away from the Body.

My second objection is the incisive issue whether the total personality of any subject could capably enjoy the corporeal independence claimed without the neurological underpinning of the Brain.”

OBE's and NDE's offend against scientific and theological orthodoxy, so let us review the facts. First, a great many credible witnesses report enhanced consciousness and extrasensory perception of the real world, independent of their bodies, during cardiac arrest when there is no measurable activity in the brainstem or cerebral cortex. Second, there is no adequate and comprehensive explanation for these experiences, either in terms of cause or content. Third, the materialist thesis that Mind arises from the matter of Brain is contradicted by the new science of epigenetics, and by neuroplasticity.

Epigenetics has shown that experience, through molecular memory encoding, is capable of altering DNA function, and such changes may be inherited by succeeding generations. This represents Mind over matter. Neuroplasticity is the phenomenon that brain structure and function at the microscopic level can be remodelled in response to a variety of agents, including trauma, alcohol and addictive drugs, and mental activity. Again, Mind over matter.

Conclusions

I began with a critical reassessment of Dualism and its conceptual history, noting the explanatory difficulty it poses, and the fundamental and damaging consequence of rejection of the human body. Nevertheless, we accept other paradoxical dualities which are irreconcilable. Classical physics gives a good account of the macro-world, and quantum physics gives a good account of the micro-world, yet the two are irreconcilable. Light is experimentally found to behave like particles sometimes, and like waves at other times, yet it cannot be both. We claim Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine, yet the two natures seem irreconcilable.

It seems to me that OBE's and NDE's do not necessarily provide evidence for life after death, because by definition those who report them are survivors. It also seems to me that embodiment is central to our identity, both in this life and in the life to come, and that ideas of escape from embodiment are misguided. I therefore prefer to focus attention on the relationship between the Brain and consciousness, and how dissociation or delocalisation of consciousness might be possible, offering two admittedly speculative explanations.

The first is a version of Emergent Dualism, consistent with the philosophy of Descartes, in which Mind and its consciousness may arise from Brain as an emergent property in the process of human evolution, and so originally dependent on its interactions with the Body in Psychosomatic Unity. However, through its learned experience both of Body and world, the Mind may develop the capacity to operate independently of Body and its Brain, in dualistic manner, under extreme circumstances and for short periods of time, using extrasensory means of perception.

The second more radical explanation offered is a version of Panpsychism, akin to Pantheism or Panentheism, which is consistent with the philosophy and theology of Spinoza. We assume that matter and energy are fundamental in the universe, and that consciousness is some kind of biological epiphenomenon. It could be the reverse, such that consciousness may be universally fundamental, and that matter and energy are epiphenomena of it. Think of cyberspace, empty of matter but full of information. We know from use of the internet that almost unlimited amounts of information can be encoded in electromagnetic fields, and decoded on our screens as information in both sound and vision.

If universal consciousness could communicate both personal and general information to us through electromagnetic fields, irrespective of time or space, bypassing ordinary sensory pathways, then extrasensory perception of the world and other realities might be possible in extreme circumstances. Thus, rare access to a higher consciousness might be afforded, against the ordinary consciousness of everyday life generated by Psychosomatic unity. Quantum physics could provide the theoretical basis for such an explanation.

If even one of the many thousands of NDE's and OBE's reported is a real experience, then both scientific and theological orthodoxies are challenged. Specifically, critical questions are raised about the possibility of extrasensory perception, and extracorporeal consciousness, which I have attempted to address. A question is also raised about survival of death, although I have not tackled this possibility.

I conclude that a version of Dualism may be acceptable as an explanation of these phenomena, provided it does not imply rejection of the fundamental importance of embodiment, notwithstanding the negative cultural history of Dualism in the western world. I also conclude that Panpsychism may actually be a bigger version of Psychosomatic Unity capable of explaining the cause and content of these experiences.

Who says it is AD 2017? It is probably AD 2022!
Dionysius the monk and the emergence of the Christian Era
Rev Dr Pieter J. Lalleman

The Christian calendar was not introduced right at the birth of the Lord Jesus. In that year nobody stood up to stop the clock and to say, 'Let's start counting our years from this year, beginning of course with Anno Domini (= the year of the Lord) 1.' The initiative for a Christian era came hundreds of years later and it is widely known that the actual count is some five or six years out. Yet only few people know the name of the person who did the actual calculations which gave us the Christian chronology and who was thus responsible for the calculation error. This article is a brief introduction to this person, the monk Dionysius Exiguus, and his work. For the sake of clarity: all years are given according to the Christian era (Before Christ and Anno Domini), also retrospectively.

No counting

In New Testament times people did not generally use numbers for years. The Romans called the years after the two consuls who had governed in a given year. Consuls were the annual rulers from 509 BC until Augustus became emperor in 27 BC; but even afterwards, when Rome was governed by emperors, there were also still two consuls each year. Thus, for example, 63 BC was the year of Marcus Tullius Cicero and Gaius Antonius Hybrida, and AD 33 the year of Livius Servius Galba and Lucius Cornelius Felix.

(For full lists see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Roman_consuls.)

Unlike what one would think, the foundation of the city of Rome in 753 BC was not the starting point of a calendar. It was only taken as such much later, well into the Christian era: around the year AD 400 the Spanish Christian Paulus Orosius wrote the history of the world in seven books, in which he consistently counted the years

from the foundation of Rome (Latin: *ab urbe condita*). In Egypt another calendar was in use, which began with the first year of the emperor Diocletian, that is, AD 284; Ambrosius in Milan also used this calendar. Finally some, such as the church father and historian Eusebius of Caesarea, counted in Olympiads (periods of four years).

As far as we can see, nowhere did any group at that time count the years from the creation of the world (*Anno Mundi*), although some calculations of the year of creation existed, the most important one of which was done by Sextus Julius Africanus in AD 221. The Jews have probably been counting the years from creation only since the seventh century AD and this system was finalised by Maimonides in AD 1178. The Jews are now in AM 5777.

The church father Augustine was unhappy with Orosius' use of the counting *ab urbe condita*, because he wanted to develop a thoroughly Christian view of history and in fact produced one in his book *The city of God* (*De civitate Dei*). Augustine thus prepared the way for the idea of a Christian chronology, and it was Dionysius who filled this gap, albeit only a century later. Dionysius' work shows that, like Augustine, he no longer expected the return of the Lord Jesus any time soon. Instead, it was presumed that Jesus' first coming had inaugurated a new era in world history which might last for at least 1000 years and which deserved its own chronology.

Dionysius Exiguus

About the person of Dionysius we know very little. He originated from Scythia, present-day Romania, but from about AD 500 he lived and worked in Rome. Pope Gelasius had ordered him to come to the city so that he could sort the ecclesiastical archives there. Dionysius was a monk and referred to himself by the nickname 'The Little One' (Latin *Exiguus*) out of modesty. His knowledge of both Greek and Latin was excellent, and he passed on much of the culture of the Greek-speaking churches in the East to Italy and the rest of the West. Thus he can be regarded as one of the founders of the medieval Western Church. He probably died around AD 540-550.

It is a curious fact that the Christian calendar was no more than a by-product of another project, namely the calculation of the Easter dates. In AD 325 the Council of Nicaea had decided that the Christian Easter should no longer coincide with the Jewish celebration of Passover, and therefore would be celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon in spring. For that reason it became necessary to calculate

the phases of the moon in advance, using these to work out on which date Easter would fall year by year. At first various systems were used to do so, with the result that in different countries Easter was observed on different Sundays. Therefore in AD 525 Pope John I asked Dionysius for a list of Easter dates for the period from AD 532 to 627. Dionysius obliged, but he unexpectedly added to this list of Easter dates another list, the calculation of the era Anno Domini. In this he had put the birth of Jesus Christ on 25 December of the year 752 ab urbe condita and called it the year 1 BC; it was immediately followed by what should henceforth be known as AD 1, because at that time no one ever counted from or including 0. In a later comment on his work Dionysius wrote that he had wanted to count the years 'from the incarnation of the Lord, in order to make the foundation of our hope better known and the cause of the redemption of humankind more conspicuous'.

Slow introduction

To our surprise, the calculation of the Christian era by Dionysius did not immediately have a huge impact everywhere. Most Christians initially stuck to the Era of Diocletian, which they called the Era of the Martyrs because emperor Diocletian had shed more blood of Christians than any other persecutor; in doing this they venerated the martyrs. In fact, it took over 200 years before another monk, the Brit the Venerable Bede, picked up Dionysius' work and popularised it! Bede used the Christian calendar consistently in his Ecclesiastical History of the English People of 731. However, it was not until the tenth century that the popes adopted the Christian era. From then onwards it found general acceptance in the Western world. In China it was only introduced in 1949 by – of all people – the communist Mao Zedong.

In the Christian church, Dionysius' reputation as a scholar is based less on his chronological calculations than on his other achievements. He won fame as the translator of many Greek works into Latin and as the editor / publisher of all texts on ecclesiastical law that were in existence at his time, such as the decisions of the councils and the decrees of the various bishops of Rome. This collection of church law (canons), also called Dionysiana, became the basis for the canon law of the Roman church. In fact, Dionysius was a man of many gifts. In addition to ecclesiastical law he was master of mathematics and astronomy, he had a fabulous knowledge of the Bible and he was an accomplished speaker.

Misled by Luke?

For all that, we now know that Dionysius' calculation of the year of the birth of Jesus was incorrect. Other sources such as Josephus clearly show that King Herod 'the Great', who was responsible for the murder of the little boys in Bethlehem after Jesus' birth, died in the year that according to Dionysius was 4 BC; therefore the birth of Jesus must have taken place somewhat earlier, probably in 6 BC or 5 BC. The era is 5 or 6 years out.

How did the monk's mistake come about? We do not have his calculations or any account of what he thought he was doing, so we cannot be certain. What we do know is that others before him, less openly, had also ended up pointing to the same year: Jesus was born in the year 753 ab urbe condita. Apparently Dionysius' error was in the air and although he worked independently, his calculation had the same outcome.

I suppose that he was led astray by the evangelist Luke, who in 3:23 writes that Jesus began his public ministry when he was 'about thirty years old'. And Luke 3:1-3 says that the public activity of John the Baptist began in the fifteenth year of Emperor Tiberius. Tiberius' reign began in 14 BC. When one takes 'about thirty' as 'thirty' and then combines these two data, one ends up saying that Jesus' public ministry began in AD 29 or 30, and that his birth fell thirty years earlier, so in 1 BC. Is Lucas then wrong? No, that is unlikely. If Jesus of Nazareth was born in 5 or 6 BC – as the year of the death of Herod suggests – and he began his work in AD 29, he was at that time still 'about thirty years' of age. Luke's wording allows for this margin. At his death in AD 33 he would have been about 37 years.

I would be interested to hear if my explanation of Dionysius' mistake is convincing or if it can be improved.

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Letters and Discussion

Was Adam Created Mortal or Immortal?

In a recent book, John Walton argues that Adam was created mortal.¹ He has been followed by Sam Berry² and Bob Allaway.³ John Collins, however, takes the opposite view.⁴

Walton's argument is based on Genesis 3:22–23. This describes God evicting Adam from the Garden of Eden 'lest he reach out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat and live for ever.' Walton concludes from this that Adam's immortality depended on him eating from the tree of life, so that he must have been, by nature, mortal.

There is, however, another way of reading Genesis 1–3. This is to take Adam as having been created immortal (part of God's 'very good' creation), and then being punished with mortality following his disobedience (3:17–19), and prevented from reversing this by him eating from the tree of life (3:22–23).

On this reading, the tree of life has a broader function than imparting eternal life to mortals. Before Adam and Eve sinned, while they were still immortal, its function was (I suggest) to embody and signify eternal life (it itself living for ever), and to confirm eternal life to Adam and Eve whenever they ate from it.⁵

There are several lines of support for this reading:

- (1) There is no indication in Genesis 2 that Adam needed to eat from the tree of life in order not to die.
- (2) The angry tone of God's pronouncement of death in 3:17–19 ('dust you are, and to dust you shall return') suggests that physical death was not part of his 'very good' creation, and points to a more radical physical change than simply leaving nature as created to take its course.
- (3) The tree of life has a broader function in Revelation 22:2.

These arguments give some credence to the traditional Miltonian understanding of the Fall.⁶

P.G. Nelson

¹ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 98–100.

² R.J. (Sam) Berry, 'Adam or Adamah?', *Science and Christian Belief* 23 (2011), 23–48.

³ Bob Allaway, *Faith and Thought* No. 60 (2016), 32–3; No. 61 (2016), 20–22.

⁴ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2006), 160–2; *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 62, 115–6.

⁵ Cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 62.

⁶ P.G. Nelson, ‘Genesis 1–3 as a Theodicy’, www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/nelson/theodicy_nelson.pdf

Reply to P. G. Nelson by Bob Allaway:

The view that Adam was not created immortal is based on more than the interpretation of Genesis 3:22. We need to ask, what would have happened if Adam had not disobeyed?

Jesus liked to call himself ‘Son of Man’, meaning ‘the Man’. Paul speaks of a parallel between Christ (Jesus) and Adam.

We all share earthly, perishable, corrupt, animal bodies, but believers will be resurrected in heavenly, imperishable, glorified, spiritual bodies, like the risen Christ [1 Corinthians 15:42-49 (my own translation of *atimia* and *psukhikon*) There is a similar view in Genesis Rabbah 14, Midrashim 3 & 5]

Jesus seems to speak of such a two stage existence when he says, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels”. [Luke 20:34-36] Since the first humans were commanded to “Be fruitful and increase in number” (Genesis 1:28), does that not imply they were created as those of “this age”? Believers who are alive at Christ’s coming will be changed into their new bodies without passing through death. (1 Corinthians 15:50-54) Is that what would have happened to the first humans, had they remained faithful?

Many creatures pass through a limited, larval stage before reaching their final form. The crawling caterpillar becomes the flying butterfly. The fish-like tadpole becomes the amphibious frog. It is possible for a defect in development to mean a tadpole just continues to grow, trapped in that form.

Was our present existence only ever meant to be the larval stage before something greater? Has our sin left us trapped in that stage? I hear Christians speak of the ‘Fall’. But I don’t see Adam’s disobedience called that in the Bible. Am I wrong to say that he did not ‘fall’ from eternal life, he fell-short of it, just as ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23)?

Such a developmental view of humanity's creation was held by the earliest theologians, such as Irenaeus. What we call 'the Fall' was the later view of Augustine of Hippo, based on a misinterpretation of his Latin Bible translation.

Bob Allaway – Chairman of Faith&Thought

Book Reviews

The Dazzle of Day Molly Gloss (Tom Doherty Associates, New York, 1997)

This book has been around for a long time, but I only recently read it. Its backstory is that the wealthy have created orbiting habitats to escape an increasingly polluted earth. They excluded from these all the pests, etc., that humans dislike, but their ecosystems have collapsed. Since no one else wants the abandoned habitats, the 'peace churches' (Mennonites and Quakers) have moved in. Because they are prepared to embrace **all** of nature, **their** ecosystems survive. One of these Quaker habitats has been turned into an interstellar spaceship, to seek a new home in another star system. Things like its drive mechanism (a vast network of 'sails' to catch the 'solar wind') are very well conceived and described. The bulk of the book pictures people's reactions as it approaches a possible destination planet.

For a book written by a believer (I presume) it was disappointing to note only one passing reference to Jesus Christ. But it is refreshing to see a technological community portrayed in which, for many, God and the Holy Spirit undergird all reality. Far more radical than the advances in science envisaged, is the idea that a star-ship could be directed, not by a Captain Picard seated on his throne in the bridge, but by gatherings of ordinary fallible humans waiting in silence for the Spirit's guidance. There is, I believe, a deep theological truth in its picture of God's word to open up a situation coming through an apparently broken human being.

Incidentally, the title is a quotation from Walt Whitman:

After the dazzle of day is gone,
only the dark, dark night shows to my eyes the stars;
after the clangour of organ majestic, or chorus, or perfect band,
silent, athwart my soul, moves the symphony true.

And that is how **I** feel after much contemporary 'worship'!

Reviewed by Bob Allaway – Chairman of Faith&Thought

***The Destruction of Sodom: A Scientific Commentary* Graham Harris**

(Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2015. 191 pp. pb. £20.00. ISBN 978-0-7188-9368-2)

This is the best reconstruction I know of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The author, Graham Harris, sadly died in July 2014, before his book was published. He was a professional geologist whose work as a consultant included assignments over a ten-year period to study the sediments and geology of the Dead Sea region. So the author has extensive first-hand knowledge of the Dead Sea and its surroundings.

The account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the book of Genesis, and the transformation of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, are among the best-known bible stories. Many people, including biblical scholars and theologians, believe the stories to be a myth and the cities to be legendary. Those that believe the cities existed disagree on their locations. Graham Harris combines archeology and ancient history with his geological expertise to argue that an earthquake-induced landslide transported Sodom to the depths of the Dead Sea. Before Sodom was destroyed he suggests that the mainstay of Canaanite commerce in this region was the exploitation of the bitumen resources of the Dead Sea, that the Sodomites were among the world's first chemical engineers and that large quantities of bitumen were exported to Egypt.

The book is written for both the general public and for scholars, with extensive references. Harris sites Sodom in the Vale of Siddim in the southeastern extremity of the North Basin of the Dead Sea in today's Jordan. He suggests that the remains of Sodom now lie in these waters at a depth of between 300 and 700 meters. He concludes that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain, was an actual historical event. His reconstruction, based on detailed scientific evidence, supports the biblical account. He dates the destruction to 2350 BC (I found this dating to be the weakest part of the book). As noted above, he says the catastrophe was a consequence of earthquake-induced liquefaction of the soil, the first in Judeo-Christian history (interestingly I note that a later event, the Israelites crossing the River Jordan at the time of Joshua, was probably enabled by an earthquake-induced landslide). In the case of the destruction of Sodom, Harris concludes that the landslide involved a massive amount of material which slid beneath the surface of the Dead Sea, generating a tsunami wave which would have swept away all the shoreline settlements. The sequence of events, from start to finish, would have lasted no more than about twenty minutes. Harris says that there is evidence of a 'scar surface' in the North Basin of the Dead Sea suggestive of a major underwater landslide involving a volume of 3.5 cubic kilometers (i.e. 3.5

billion cubic meters) of soil, a massive event. He gives the grid references to debris mounds at the foot of the landslides and says that this is where the remains of Sodom are most likely to be found. So Harris makes a testable prediction of the location of the remains of ancient Sodom.

I found this book a pleasure to read and a mine of interesting and useful information. Harris writes with authority and I find his arguments persuasive (with the possible exception of the 2350 BC date that he gives). The final sentence of his book is: 'The Biblical account is exactly what one would expect from untutored observers in the dawn of history, passed down through the ages by oral tradition.' If you are interested in the biblical account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, buy this book!

Reviewed by Colin Humphreys - President of Faith&Thought

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