



Resurrectionism and the Bodily Criterion of Personal Identity from Early to Reformation-Era Christianity

Michael J. Sigrist¹

Received: 2021-09-22

Accepted: 2022-01-08

Abstract

This paper explores early and Reformation-era Christian attempts to render the idea of an afterlife coherent. The specific focus is on early **Reformed Christians' unequivocal belief in a bodily criterion of personal identity** and a physical afterlife. This article shows how Jewish divisions are partially responsible for the differences from this endeavor. Lending focus and structure to this broadly reconstructive project is a sustained **critique of Princeton philosopher Mark Johnston's recent agenda-setting series of lectures** published as *Surviving Death*. My general conclusion is that Christian resurrectionism—or at least, the most persuasive forms of it as presented by some of the more astute Reformed Christian thinkers—is at least a coherent idea regardless of whether or not it is true.

Keywords

Resurrectionism, Christianity, Personal Identity.

1. Department of Philosophy, George Washington University, Washington: DC 20052.
sigrist@gwu.edu

* J. Sigrist, Michael. (2021). Resurrectionism and the Bodily Criterion of Personal Identity from Early to Reformation-Era Christianity. *Journal of Theosophia Islamica*, 1(2), pp. 7-29. Doi:10.22081/JTI.2022.60991.1021

Introduction

Christian thinking about the afterlife and immortality can be traced to two conflicting sources. The first is the Pharisaic doctrine of the resurrection. Not all Jews during the early Roman Empire believed in an immortal soul or an afterlife. The Gospel book of Mark records that during his trial, a group of Sadducees attempted to confound Jesus by putting to him questions that made the notion of an afterlife conflict with the laws of marriage (proof, thought the Sadducees, that resurrection was impossible) (Mark, 2010). By contrast, the Pharisees—notably, the Apostle Paul was a committed member of this group—believed in resurrection, an explicitly material afterlife in which the bodies of the dead are physically raised and reconstituted. The reconstituted body was clearly understood to be the same person as had died. The notion of an afterlife that will call following accepted precedent— ‘resurrectionism’ clearly presupposes a bodily criterion of personal identity. Immortality in the afterlife is achieved by the fact that one will enjoy the same body after the Great Day as one enjoys now.

The second source of Christian thinking about the afterlife comes from Greek philosophical and especially Platonic influences. While it is unlikely the earliest Christians (from the first century CE) were very conversant in Hellenic philosophy, by the fourth and fifth centuries—significantly, the time which witnessed the important Councils from Nicea to Chalcedon—the Church ‘doctors’ who would decide what the basic orthodox tenets of the Christian religion (most notably, Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine of Hippo) certainly were. From these sources and Plato especially that the notion of an afterlife came to rest upon the idea of an immaterial soul that could not be destroyed and therefore would survive the body's death.

These two traditions vie uneasily throughout pre-Reformation Christianity. The first portion of this paper (roughly a third) briefly

outlines and comments upon the juxtaposition of these conflicting sources and remarks upon attempts by Catholic philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas and Anselm of Canterbury to marry them in ways that were not explicitly inconsistent. However, the majority of the paper focuses upon the fundamental rethinking of the matter enabled by Reformed Christian thinkers who would reject accepted Catholic doctrine.

Specifically, Reformed Christian and Lutheran thinkers nearly universally rejected the Platonic conception *in toto* and resolutely affirmed the Pharisaic tradition of resurrectionism. That is to say, almost all Reform Christian thinkers of the 16th and 17th centuries insist upon a bodily criterion of personal identity vis-à-vis the afterlife. Histories of this era that touch upon matters of a dispute over the afterlife tend to explain the emergence of resurrectionism mainly by appeal to doctrinal forces: a desire to return to a conceived 'early church' and an associated deep mistrust of anything Hellenic. By contrast, philosophical work on personal identity rarely reaches back to sources such as the early Reformed Christians due to the professional burden that arguments should not rest upon assumptions about the supernatural. This research, therefore, turns to these texts and history with a philosophers' eye and re-constructs attempts by early Reformed and Lutheran Christians to develop an entirely physical conception of the afterlife based upon the bodily criterion of personal identity assumed by resurrectionism.

This latter, longer portion of the paper is organized around the recent attempt at refutation of Christian physicalism by Mark Johnston. Johnston claims that the very idea of personal identity by bodily identity after death and physical corruption is 'incoherent.' As examining the writings and arguments of Reformed Christian resurrectionists and mortalists (those thinkers who believe that the

person ceases to exist from the period after death to the period of Judgment Day, at which time God brings the person back into existence) in order to show that (1) they are aware of the sorts of objections which Johnston raises and (2) offer rejoinders that, while not refuting Johnston's argument, subject them to reasonable rejection. Specifically, Johnston offers a moral argument that he claims is based upon a wholly 'mundane' notion of necessity. He claims that the mundane laws of necessity hold regardless of one's supernatural views. This paper provides an argument to show that Johnston's demonstration of this claim is weak. Therefore, how one views the supernatural, most significantly the purposes and nature of God, influences how one conceives of the afterlife. An examination of writings further reinforces this point precisely by Reformed Christians (which partly explains why esoteric disputes in this area were regularly heated). This research lays out the problem as early Reformed Christians determined what constitutes the same body and why the same body can be understood as being the same person.

The foundation of the Christian belief in an afterlife is supposed to be guaranteed by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christians believe that, like Jesus, they too will die, but also like Jesus, that they will be resurrected again in the world to come. This much is settled Christian doctrine. Less universally agreed upon is any understanding about what exactly this means. This paper intends to analyze the doctrine of resurrection in light of the bodily criterion of identity and briefly discuss the historical and scriptural bases many, especially Reformation-era Christians, offer to support this interpretation of resurrection. Then turn to examine some of the philosophical difficulties this interpretation faces, and offer no opinion on the truth of the doctrine, but argue that some of the most important criticisms of it can be defeated and that the doctrine can be interpreted in a manner

consistent with the bodily criterion of identity.

Resurrectionism is a religious doctrine that a person will die but come to be again through a re-quickening or re-animation of the dead body. The origin of this doctrine is clouded behind millennia of lost texts, political upheavals, and civilizational tumult. There seems to be some consensus that resurrection emerged originally among the Zoroastrians and came to Judaism sometime during or just after returning from exile (Swain, 1986). There is some disagreement about exactly *when* the doctrine involves *personal* immortality, but most scholars agree that it is a belief commonly found in Judaism (Swain, 1986; Ferguson, 2003).

Resurrectionism in Judaism

The Christian doctrine of resurrectionism, as with most things Christian, is, in fact, a Jewish notion. There was hardly a consistent view on the afterlife and the nature of the soul in Judaism even after the return from exile. There was some agreement that the dead gather in a great cavity in the earth (the *Sheol*), but this may have been something like the old Roman view that the souls of the dead were not personal and became in death part of an impersonal *manes* (Ferguson, 2003). The idea might have emerged from pressure to acknowledge that life after death is a *reward* for virtue in this life—a doctrine that becomes essential for rabbinical orthodoxy. Importantly for later disputes, this entails that the soul is not *by nature* immortal (Stendhal, 1965). This point will be necessary for argument later in the paper.

The Pharisees, who figure prominently in the New Testament, argued for a bodily resurrection that would be much like daily life in the present, only better in the world to come. They were challenged on this claim by the Sadducees, who also figure prominently in the New Testament but deny both the immortality of the soul as well as

personal resurrection. During his trial, Jesus is questioned by the Sadducees in a way designed to lead him into an inconsistency, which avoids subtly changing Pharisaic law. Matters naturally are always fraught interpretatively, but Jesus probably held a view of the afterlife that was closest to the Pharisaic doctrine of resurrectionism, and it is important to note that Paul (or Saul) was himself a Pharisee.

Resurrectionism in Catholicism

By the second and third centuries, early Christianity thinkers such as Tertullian and Origen had begun to force some systematic coherence onto Christian doctrine. Christian philosophy, in other words, was starting to supplement and strengthen but, of course, also alter Christian dogma and doctrine. Issues such as the nature of the trinity, the status of Jesus, original sin, and the organization and authority of the clergy and church itself were by no means settled, nor is it a history of purely theoretical conflicts. All the same, the world in which these developments took root was the Greco-Roman world of the Imperium Romanum, a world that, among the educated and intellectual citizenry, certainly had become used to the doctrine of the immateriality of the soul even if there was not universal agreement.

By the time of the First Council of Nicea (325 ACE), Hellenistic philosophical language had become a common source for explicating many theological concepts (these sources, in turn, come from early Orphic and Pythagorean systems of thought). Thus by the end of the fourth century, Augustine could defend the doctrine of the soul's immortality by appealing to its immateriality and doing so along *explicitly Platonic lines*. The soul must be immaterial and therefore immortal, Augustine at one point argues, because it can grasp immaterial objects, for anything able to grasp an immaterial object must itself be immaterial. This, of course, is an argument found

in Plato's *Phaedo*. Notice that a Platonic doctrine is not being used to justify or lend further support to a doctrine already clearly articulated in scripture. There is no talk of an immaterial soul in the New Testament. Augustine is importing a belief into Christianity to make sense of a specific doctrine, in this case, resurrectionism. Catholic thinking on the subject remained more or less stable, if also contentious, throughout the millennium following Augustine's death. Resurrection is easily accounted for in a Platonic doctrine because, in this case, the soul survives the body's death. After all, it is not essentially embodied. The body can cease to exist while the person survives. Resurrectionism then, if it is admitted to be material, is the re-incorporation of an immaterial soul into a new body.

Indeed, the most significant change during this period was the introduction of Aristotelian rather than Platonic concepts. Aristotelianism can do justice to the basic idea of resurrectionism without rejecting *tout court* the soul's immateriality. According to the Aristotelian doctrine found, for example, in Aquinas, the whole person is a union of form and matter. However, the soul is a person's tangible form and can exist independently of the body. Aquinas' considered position seemed to be that at death, the *rational part* of the soul would find itself in purgatory, suffer the fires of iniquity to be purified for paradise, and unite again with the body on resurrection world to come. The benefit of this hylomorphic theory of immortality is that it returns the momentousness to the fact of the resurrection. The problem with this version complements its benefits: is *someone* in purgatory? If the point of purgatory is to do penance for the sins of one's life, then it would have to be *that person* doing penance, and if so, then the problem is just repeated within the hylomorphic framework.

Aquinas confronted one more problem that will be of interest to us later: suppose, he asks, that there exists a community of

cannibals wherein each generation gets sustenance by eating the remains of the previous generation? (Aquinas, 1989). According to Aquinas' hylomorphic doctrine, the whole person is the union of matter and body. Drawing from Aristotle, it is a *matter* that individuates forms into particular substances. So while the matter in its pure state may be pure potency (and therefore nothing), it is important that, if a substance is to be the substance it is, it retains the same matter. The problem the cannibal community poses for this model is that if the son eats the father, and the grandson the son, and so on, to whom, for example, does the liver go at the day of resurrection into the world to come? Aquinas' answer here is that *God's Justice* will not allow this to happen. Such an eventuality is perhaps *possible*, but God will not allow it to occur. Aquinas speculates that some essential part of the father will be only a superfluity in the son and that God will guarantee that an essential part will remain for each person, even if a part of the other persons, out of which the original person will be resurrected.

Resurrectionism in the Reformation

The end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries was an exciting time for the doctrine of the soul's immortality. For example, in Northern Italy, the re-discovery first of Aristotle and then of his Arabic-speaking commentators—importantly, Avicenna and Averroes—lead to a lively re-thinking of the nature of the soul, person, and immortality and the afterlife. Pietro Pomponazzi, to take just one case, was an important philosopher at the University of Bologna between 1511 and his death in 1525. Pomponazzi looked at the Aristotelian concepts we have just seen Aquinas use to explicate the doctrine of immortality and the afterlife but drew a scandalous conclusion: that the soul, and therefore persons, are mortal. The soul cannot exist without the body, Pomponazzi reasoned, since thought requires a

body—specifically, the phantasmata—to actively think and therefore exist; without the body, the soul has no actuality and hence is not.

Pomponazzi knew that this doctrine—known as Christian mortalism—was controversial because it directly contradicts the decrees of the fifth Lateran Council on precisely this matter known as the *Apostolici regiminis*. In response to both the rise of mortalism as well as the Averroist doctrine of a single possible intellect for all souls (denying personal immortality), the *Apostolic Regminis* decreed that the natural immortality of the soul and that each body has its soul to be a matter of revealed truth and immutable Church doctrine. As a way of hedging his argument, if not his well-being, Pomponazzi had concluded his work on the matter—*Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul*—by acknowledging that his conclusions were only probable and that Christian faith as known through revelation teaches us otherwise.

Pomponazzi, however, had no interest in leaving the Catholic faith. This is not true for his nearly—contemporary transalpine reformers in Germany, Geneva, and elsewhere. Chief among these is Martin Luther. The *Apostolic Regminis* was issued in 1513. In 1517 Luther had nailed his 95 theses to the doors of Wittenburg Castle, and by 1521 had been excommunicated from the church. Luther, therefore, felt little need to rectify his teachings with the Lateran decrees.

Nothing is said directly about the doctrine of immortality or resurrection in the 95 theses themselves. Luther does, however, offer qualified and tepid, yet all the same clear, assent to the doctrine of purgatory. His contention in the theses is not over the existence of purgatory but instead on the power of official clergy, and especially the Pope, to direct intercession on behalf of the souls there residing. It should be obvious that purgatory poses a problem for a materialist or

mortalist theory of resurrection. Whatever the nature of purgatory, it is clear that purgatory is not a place on earth and certainly nowhere where dead bodies are found. Therefore, it is difficult—as we have already seen in the case of Aquinas—to maintain a belief in the existence of purgatory without also believing that the soul is in some sense immaterial and hence able to migrate to some place where the body is not.

By 1530, however, Luther had rejected the doctrine of purgatory outright. Nevertheless, he still has a problem maintaining the doctrine of physical resurrection. These problems are based on scripture, not philosophy: on the one hand, Luther thought that both the Old and New Testaments were clear that judgment occurs immediately upon the moment of death. Souls do not undergo, as Catholics taught, a period of purgation and penance prior to judgment but after death. However, resurrection into everlasting life is not supposed to occur until the advent of the world comes. So how can it be the case both that one is judged immediately and yet not resurrected until the return of Christ and arrival of the world to come? Luther's answer is ingenious, if not wholly compelling. On scriptural grounds, he rejects the notion that resurrection occurs after judgment. If judgment were to occur after death but before the resurrection, we (our souls) would have received all that is decisively important before this (Althaus, 1966). Resurrection and the arrival of the world to come would not be, in this case, momentous events. On the last day, the person, not the person's body, is resurrected. On this very point in the entertaining and important *Tischreden* Luther declares: "If one says Abraham's soul lives, but his body is dead, this is rubbish! The whole man shall live!" (Luther, 1857). Elsewhere he protests his commitment to a material soul, commenting: "It is my opinion that the soul is not added from outside but is created out of the matter of the semen" (Luther, 1857). To make sense of both immediate judgment and to

wait for the arrival of resurrection, Luther evokes a doctrine later known as 'soul sleeping':

Thus, death is called sleep in the Scriptures. Just as one who falls asleep and wakes up unexpectedly the following day does not know what happened in the meantime, so we will suddenly rise on the Last Day without knowing that we were in death and have passed through death (Luther, 1857).

There are problems, of course, with this account. One that Luther addressed comes from the account in Luke of the thief on the cross. There Jesus says to the thief: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke. 23:41). Doesn't it follow from Jesus' promise that the thief will be in paradise with Jesus *today*, not after a long nap? While there have been attempts to read 'today' as qualifying the time of utterance rather than the promised event, Luther deals with this problem in a different way, one familiar to apologists throughout the centuries: this is a mystery not because the soul-sleeping doctrine is unsound but because we have a limited concept of time. God reminds his fellow diners (this is again from the *Tischreden*), is the God of the living, and confusions like that are the rubbish that results when "philosophy is introduced to theology!"

Even if arguments *ad mysterium* suffices for rectifying Luther's doctrine of soul-sleep with the proclamations of scripture, they hardly suffice for rectifying the philosophical issue at hand. One problem is that the body does not retain its identity after death. The body decays; its parts are scattered over the existence and become the parts of other things, and significantly, other substances. We have seen this problem already with Aquinas. Milton, fired by religious zeal as much as any Lutheran or Calvin, addressed this question directly and drew a rather radical conclusion. Milton agreed with Luther and much of the reform Christian thinkers that the Catholic doctrine on the

soul's natural immortality was wrong philosophically and wronged theologically. Death, according to him, is neither the result of natural causes nor something that happens to the body alone; death, instead, is the wages of sin. In the supernatural order of things, the punishment of death is not eternal suffering, but something, to the mind of many at least, far worse: utter extinction. "For what could be juster," Milton writes, than that he who had sinned in his whole person should die in his whole person? Alternatively,... that the mind, which is the part principally offending, should escape the threatened death?" (Milton, 1825). Milton concludes that, between earthly death and the Day of Judgment, the person, the whole of body and spirit, ceases to be. The person is not asleep; the person is extinguished. How are we to think of the identity of the pre-death and post-death person? What makes them the *same* person? Milton's answer is again that dissatisfying argument *ad mysterium*: "Since then this mystery is so great, we are admonished by that very consideration not to assert anything respecting it rashly or presumptuously, on mere grounds of philosophical reasoning... If we listen to such passages and are willing to acquiesce in the simple truth of Scripture, unencumbered by metaphysical comments, to how many prolix and preposterous arguments shall we put an end?" (Milton, 1825).

Among Milton's near contemporaries was Thomas Hobbes, who agrees with Milton that death is the wages of sin. The eternal life humanity was intended to enjoy in the Garden of Eden was not a spiritual or other-worldly place; it was a real place, here on earth, with rocks made from minerals and humans from flesh and blood. Life in the world to come likewise will be of the same. Hobbes believes that it will be this very earth. All talk of spirit in the scriptures is too readily misunderstood, Hobbes argues:

In the most general acceptance, the word body signifieth that

which filleth or occupieth some certain room or imagined place; and dependeth not on the imagination, but is a real part of that we call the universe. For the universe, being the aggregate of all bodies, there is no real part thereof that is not also body, nor anything properly a body that is not also part of that aggregate of all bodies, the universe. The same also, because bodies are subject to change, that is to say, to a variety of appearance to the sense of living creatures, is called substance, that is to say, subject to various accidents: as sometimes to be moved, sometimes to stand still; and to seem to our senses sometimes hot, sometimes cold; sometimes of one color, smell, taste, or sound, sometimes of another. Furthermore, we attribute this diversity of seeming, produced by the diversity of the operation of bodies on the organs of our sense, to alterations of the bodies that operate and call them accidents of those bodies. Moreover, according to this acceptance of the word, substance and body signify the same thing; therefore, substance incorporeal are words which, when joined together, destroy one another, as if a man should say, an incorporeal body (Hobbes, 2002, p. 293).

Like Milton, Hobbes is committed to a physicalist interpretation of personal identity and, therefore, to a physicalist doctrine of the resurrection. However, when we examine pose the question to Hobbes, What happens to the body between the time of death and the moment of Resurrection? Furthermore, How can one be sure that it is the same body? We find not an argument *ad mysterium*, but no argument at all! Persons are bodies, plain and simple, Hobbes contends. At the resurrection, this body is resurrected, and in being so resurrected, *you* are resurrected. That is the doctrine, but we do not find any defense that might satisfy the contemporary metaphysician.

So while this paper shows how the Reform-era Christians were

committed to a bodily criterion of personal identity and a physicalist understanding of the resurrection, it remains to see whether this doctrine is conceptually feasible. We do not think that Luther, Milton, or even Hobbes have done a sufficient job showing it. The chief obstacle this account suffers is making an account for the identity of the pre-death and post-resurrection person. It has to be said that the consensus among philosophers is not in favor of the doctrine. Among philosophers today who argue on behalf of the bodily criterion of identity—that a person is a body—most believe this entails death. When the body dies, the person dies. As we have seen, Milton agrees with this but argues that this same person is yet resurrected—reborn, as it were—in the world to come. Hobbes and Luther suggest that some perpetual continuity is maintained but are vague as to what exactly it is that underwrites this perdurance. Luther has the most specific answer—the person is asleep—but hardly answers how such sleep is metaphysically possible. So let us now turn to examine the bodily criterion of identity and see if it can be consistent with the resurrection doctrine.

Resurrectionism for Philosophers

Here is a typical statement of the bodily criterion of identity:

(1) For any x and y , x is the same person as y only if x has the same body as y .

The problem most commonly thought to confront defenders of the bodily criterion of identity is that scenarios are at least conceivable that violate the criterion and yet seem, intuitively, to maintain personal identity; conversely, some scenarios are, again, at least conceivable, but seem to imply a loss of identity and yet satisfy the criterion. Relying solely on the bodily criterion—arguing that not only is bodily sameness over time necessary for personal identity over time, but *sufficient*—

thus is often thought to untenably challenge certain other criteria for personhood that we—philosophers and the public alike—are reluctant to give up. For example, consider a person who has entered into an irreversible vegetative state. Many would say that while the body still exists, the person no longer does. Alternatively, consider a person who, waking from a coma, has lost all memories, beliefs and desires from the earlier life. Again, many find it to be intuitively true about such a scenario that the former person no longer exists, even though that same body does. Venturing into more distant possible worlds, consider a person who steps into a tele transporter which records in perfect exactitude the physical state of the current body, destroys that body, and then creates an exact replica somewhere else. Again, many, like Derek Parfit, believe that this is good enough for personal survival even though it fails to meet the bodily criterion of identity. John Locke seemed to believe a person could go to sleep a prince and awake a pauper.

This is all familiar territory for anyone who has reviewed the literature on personal identity from the last forty years or so. What I would like to focus on is the specific and unique challenges that the resurrectionist faces in light of the debate over the bodily criterion. If my foray into the historical material is correct, then the doctrine of resurrection in Judaism, early Christianity, and Reform Christianity is explicitly understood in a manner consistent with the bodily criterion of identity. I want to claim that the resurrectionist faces especial problems when it comes to maintain this criterion consistently, but also has an especially powerful conceptual tool to cope with those problems—namely, God. So in what remains I want to discuss those problems and then examine whether this tool is powerful enough to overcome those objections.

It has to be said that most defenders of the bodily criterion of identity do not believe that there is any such thing as life after death.

This is for the obvious reason that, when the body dies, so does the person. The especial problem that resurrectionism poses for the defender of the bodily criterion of identity is explaining how the person can survive the death of the body, or at least survive an intermittent period of death, given that the person *is the body*. When the body dies, it starts to decay. Given time enough, the body decays completely, and its parts become the parts of other things—rocks, soil, trees, hedgehogs, even other persons. It's important to note though that the death of the body, unlike perhaps the death of a person, does not mean that the body ceases *to exist*. The body proper does not cease to exist until it has sufficiently decayed. What constitutes 'sufficiently' is probably a vague boundary. At the extreme, we can certainly agree that decomposition down to the atomic level and re-absorption of those atoms into other things constitutes the *destruction* of the body.

Let's deal with each of these problems in turn. First, there has to be strict or numerical identity between the resurrected and the current me. A person exactly like me will not be me. The bodily criterion can handle this insofar as it stipulates that the resurrected person will be me just in case the same body has been resurrected. Two objections might be raised here, one scriptural and the other philosophical.

Paul says that through resurrection we will be raised in a new, glorified body—in fact, in an incorruptible body. Similarly, while it is clear that Jesus was resurrected in a body very similar to his corruptible body (there were, after all, the stigmata and spear wounds shown to Thomas), his resurrected body still does things we cannot imagine a corruptible body to do. I see no reason why we cannot believe that the corruptible and incorruptible bodies cannot be comprised of the same stuff. Of course there would have to be some

miraculous re-ordering of things such that carbon-based life-forms like ourselves do not suffer the types of injuries or corruptions that we do today, but I see no reason why God, in his infinite power, could not make the suitable arrangements.

The philosophical answer, coming off the scriptural one, has to be that, in order to satisfy the bodily criterion, it is the *same body*, and this means, a body made from the *same stuff*. Again, I am assuming—on the basis of intuition and expectation of agreement less than argument—that disassembly and reassembly are disassemblings and reassemblings of *the same thing*. So for the resurrection of my body to constitute *my* resurrection it has to be the *same body* and that means the re-collection, reassembly and reanimation of the same stuff that constitutes my body today.

I want to defend this idea against two important objections. The first objection denies that this criterion is even satisfied *in this life*, let alone in the world to come. Being metabolic, bodies are constantly shedding material and incorporating new material. I am the same person today—let's stipulate—that I was twenty years ago, but I am not the same body. Today I have gray whiskers but twenty years ago I had none at all. This seems to be a problem, but there is an easy, if unsatisfying, solution. We can say that Michael Today is the same person as Michael 1990 insofar as Michael Today had no whiskers in 1990 and that Michael 1990 has gray whiskers in 2010. To make this solution satisfying we need to adopt some criterion that allows for there to be the same body at times as dispersed as 2010 and 1990 I recommend the following, taken from Quinn 1978:

- (2) For any x and y , some body of person x is spatiotemporally continuous with some body of person y only if there are spatiotemporal loci l_1 and l_2 such that some body of x is at l_1 and some body of y is at l_2 and there is a continuously ordered set of

spatiotemporal loci such that l_1 and l_2 are members of that set and there is some physical object at every locus in that set.

Observe that this criterion is satisfied even if my bones turn to dust between l_1 and l_2 , or if I am burned and my ashes scattered to the winds. It could be the case, as Quinn claims, that my body today is spatiotemporally continuous by this standard with my body in 1990 even though these bodies do not share a single proper part (Quinn, 1978, p. 112)!

(2) as an interpretation of (1) implies that resurrection is consistent with the bodily criterion of identity just in case the parts that make me in the world to come are spatiotemporally continuous in the way outlined by (2) with my body now. There is one strong objection to this view: what is to stop elements of the same set from comprising proper parts—at different times, admittedly—of different persons? For example, the atoms that were part of Michael 1990 might also be part of Thomas 2010. Who then *is* this set of atoms?

This of course is just an iteration of the problem that Aquinas confronted, and I am going to argue that Aquinas' solution to this issue is passable and consistent with (1) and (2). Mark Johnson has argued that this problem, the problem of perimortem duplicates, effectively refutes bodily accounts of resurrection based upon principles like (2).

Recall that the problem posed by duplicates is that multiple persons could be constituted from the same matter. Aquinas considers this in the case of cannibals: the matter that constitutes the persons of generation X is the same that constitutes the persons of generation Y and Z. Thus, when at the Resurrection everyone is raised at once, there will not be enough matter to go around to reconstitute each person, and creating new matter won't solve the problem because that would violate (2). Aquinas' solution, you will recall, relies on a *deus*

ex machina; God vigilantly monitors our earthly going-ons to ensure that such potential outcomes are never realized. The *deus ex machina* appeal can then be given some credibility when supplemented with an argument from justice (it would be unjust for God not to forestall such possibilities).

Johnston's argument against this is somewhat complicated, but I believe it can be summarized briefly as follows:

Assume that perimortem duplicates are possible—that some elements of the set of stuff that constitute Michael also constitute James, although never at the same time. It's important for Johnston's argument that this *could* happen—however unlikely, through the normal workings of the laws of nature; it is a highly *improbable* outcome, but not a *miraculous* one. Assume also a principle like (2). At the Resurrection, a body is reproduced out of elements that constituted at one point both Michael and James. If so, Johnston reasons, “the one body that then results would be the body of *each* of the perimortem duplicates” (Johnston, 2010, p. 33). In this case two distinct people have become one and the same person, an absurd result. “Bodies are stuck in this life,” he concludes (Johnston, 2010, p. 36).

My response to this, like Aquinas, is to accept that God would never allow this potential outcome to take place. Johnston argues that this will not do. This solution brings God in ‘too late,’ he says. If it is true that,

- (a) necessarily, if a body y at t_2 is spatiotemporally continuous with a body x at t_1 , then y is the very same body as x ,
- (b) perimortem duplicates are possible, and that
- (c) necessarily, if a body z reproduces exactly bodies x and bodies y at some later t_3 , then z is the very same body x

come back into existence and the very same body y come back into existence

So,

(d) necessarily, there are no distinct bodies x and y with the same perimortem state such that z reproduces both x's perimortem state and y's perimortem state.

Now, what if someone argues, as I have suggested before, that (d) in fact is true because God's justice is inconsistent with the problem of perimortem duplicates insofar as if they were allowed than one, another, or neither would face their just desserts? If so, then (d)'s truth does not follow from (a), (b) or (c), but is rather added after the fact. This is the sort of move that Johnston argues is 'too late,' for (d) is a logical consequence of (a), (b), and (c). (d), Johnston argues, does not follow from divine, but from merely *mundane* necessity. As he puts it, "[i]t is not thanks to God's just will that if $x = y$ and $y = z$ then $x = z$. A will has no room to insert itself *here*." (Johnston. 2010, p. 37).

I agree, not as a matter of divine but of mundane necessity (d) follows from (a), but the problem, I submit, with its following from (a), (b) and (c) is not a problem for the bodily criterion of identity but for the idea that we need to be *essentialists* about identity.

Johnston is offering a familiar sort of argument: from the fact that some unlikely counterfactual *could obtain* we conclude that some actual state of affairs logically implied by the principle is affected. For example, we might be tempted to conclude that because some other being *could* have all of my memories, perceptions and experiences and yet not be me that I now am not *essentially* this collection of memories, perceptions and beliefs. I don't deny that this is true, but this does not show that I am not *in fact* these things; it shows only that I am not *essentially* these things. The same applies to Johnston's

arguments: If Johnston is right, then (2) does not reveal anything true about what a person is *essentially*, but to this one may reply, why worry about essences? Consider, as Johnston does, the Ship of Theseus: it leaves port from Athens on a circuitous journey to Delos. Along the way, it *could be* the case that every board of timber is replaced as it weathers with new boards found as driftwood. It could also be the case that some enterprising sailor picked up the discarded boards and reconstructed them in the exact model of the ship that left the port from Athens. Let us say that these two ships arrive in Delos simultaneously. Which is the ship of Theseus? This scenario would precisely present the absurd result that Johnston worries about it. We should not know what to say, not because the facts are not all available, but because the facts cannot settle the matter. Of course, Johnston is correct: because this is possible, it shows that the ship of Theseus is not *essentially* the form and material of the ship that left Athens. All the same, we think it is equally absurd to claim that, *because this could happen*, on normal journeys, when there is no duplication or other such shenanigans, that we are unsure what to say about whether the ship is reaching port in Delos *is* the ship of Theseus. Just so, we conclude that (d) *is* a logical consequence of (a), but only if we qualify (a) with *necessary*. However, we see no reason why we need to do that. (2) is just fine, and (2) is not modally qualified. So long as we give up on a commitment to essentialism, then we are free to assert (a), (b), and (c) along with an auxiliary premise stating God's ultimate justice such that (d*) follows:

(d*) there are no distinct bodies x and y with the same perimortem state such that z reproduces both x's perimortem state and y's perimortem state.

This paper claim that we can accept (2) as a statement of the bodily criterion of identity without getting caught in the sort of

absurdities staked out by Johnston only if we can accept that a person is his or her body, but not *essentially* so. Room in the literature already exists for this sort of theory in the work of Parfit and Nozick.

Returning in summary to the question of resurrectionism and the bodily criterion of identity: resurrectionism maintains that each person will die but will also, on the last day, be resurrected in the world to come. Reform Christian thinkers thought that this should be interpreted to mean that the same body, dead at one point, is resurrected by God and the person resurrected insofar. So long as we can accept that this is so by God's fiat rather than essential, the Reform Christian commits no inconsistency in holding to the doctrine.



References

* Gospel of Luke

1. Althaus, P. (1966). *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Robert Schultz, Trans.). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
2. Aquinas, Th. (1989). *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Charles O'Neill Trans.). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
3. Ferguson, E. (2003). *Background of Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company
4. Hobbes, Th. (2002). *Leviathan* (A. P. Martinich, Ed.). Ontario: Broadview Press, Ltd.
5. Johnston, M. (2010). *Surviving Death*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
6. Luther, M. (1857). *The Table Talk of Martin Luther* (William Hazlitt, Trans.). London: H. G. Bohn.
7. Milton, J. (1825). *Treatise on Christian Doctrine* (Charles Sumner, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
8. Quinn, Ph. (1978). Personal Identity, Bodily Continuity and Resurrection. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 9(2), pp. 101–113.
9. Stendhal, K. (1965). *Immortality and Resurrection: Death in the Western World*. Mass Market Paperback, The Macmillan Company.
10. Swain, L. (1986). *The People of the Resurrection*. Wilmington: Liturgical Press.