

## Philosophical Contributions to the Dialogue between Science and Religion

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### 1. Opening Remarks

In its best moments, the dialogue between science and religion has become less a battle over who may claim supreme authority to pronounce on the fundamental nature of the world or on our proper place within it and more a cooperative investigation in which these dual sources of understanding complement each other and jointly paint an informative and awe-inspiring portrait of our universe – its origins, its inhabitants, its laws, and its purposes.

Great pools of ink have been spilt on recommendations concerning the proper relation between science and religion, a good share of it by people in this volume. When presented with the opportunity to address this topic, I at first thought I would undertake yet another general characterization – a quick sketch of science (with the obligatory ‘of-course-this-is-all-too-rough’ caveat), a brief overview of religion (similarly qualified) and then a bit of advice-dispensing on why each benefits from its sincere and engaged relation to the other. I found, however, that I didn’t have much to contribute to that theme that hasn’t already been done (and done better) by others.

It turns out, however, that there is another participant in this dialogue, one with whom I am more familiar and one who contributes a great deal to our successes and discoveries in both science and religion. Unfortunately (and despite a long-standing and impressive tradition in which it received a tremendous amount of well-deserved attention) the presence of this third partner in the dialogue is frequently no longer adequately acknowledged. Indeed, the reward for its contributions is, on occasion, even worse than ingratitude or neglect, instead taking the form of a suspicious and explicit denial that there is any substantive role for it to play at all.

Philosophy (especially contemporary analytic philosophy) deserves a clearly-marked place at this conversational table. Metaphysical and epistemological tools and insights are often at the core of our abilities to make scientific progress, to interpret religious texts and traditions, and to combine these unique perspectives on the world into a unified and intelligible



whole. Moreover, we may also look to philosophy to help us reveal the boundaries of our representational and cognitive capacities and to recommend an intellectual modesty where it exposes limitations on our powers of understanding.

In this essay, I will introduce and critically discuss representative examples of the role of contemporary analytic philosophy in both scientific discovery and religious discovery.

A Preview: In section 2, I set the stage with some brief remarks on what I take to be the somewhat strained relation between analytic philosophy and theology, after first drawing attention to a particular style of argument (allegedly rooted in science and clearly hostile to religion) that is best confronted by tending to and nurturing this troubled partnership. In subsequent sections, I investigate an intriguing pair of instances of this argument. Word-limits constrain the level of detail that can appear here, but footnotes will direct the interested reader to sustained treatments of each theme. Consequently, in each case I aim not at comprehensiveness, but at an overview both broad enough to forcefully illustrate the role of analytic philosophy in furthering the dialogue between science and religion and narrow enough to permit at least some in-depth discussion of our two examples. I will also concentrate on somewhat lesser-known problems in the hopes that the obstructions attending our customary prejudices will be less formidable in the context of relatively unfamiliar debates. Accordingly, in section 3, I present and critically evaluate a challenging scientific objection against the existence of God. In section 4, I inquire into the possibility of the general resurrection of the body, given the prevailing scientific worldview concerning the vexed topic of what we are – i.e., given the received scientific view of the ontological status of human persons as material objects. Finally, in section 5, I offer some concluding remarks on what I take to be the threats to the health and success of the dialogue between science and religion that come from not attending properly to the philosophical presuppositions and philosophical restrictions that are operative in the relevant debates. In so doing, I hope to support the case for the benefits of a many-sided conversation in achieving the goals of both science and religion.

## 2. Analytic Theology

Some fifteen years ago, Thomas V. Morris edited a volume of essays, *God and the Philosophers*, which featured thoughtful reflections by prominent religious philosophers on all manner of issues regarding the integration of their work and faith. Two years ago, Louise M. Antony edited the inevitable counterpart volume, *Philosophers without Gods*, which featured another series of thoughtful and well-crafted narratives by prominent atheistic philosophers on the range of topics facing the modern secular academic.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Morris, Thomas V., ed. *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Antony, Louise M., ed., *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).



Each group tends to paint itself as an underdog – the theists bemoaning their minority status in unsympathetic academic environments, the atheists their history of being misunderstood in a society that tends to think that once God goes absent so too do morality, meaning, and value. Still, one very refreshing aspect of these essays is that they offer a dramatic departure from “the distortions of the undergraduate atheists” whose books regularly blemish the best-seller lists and put forth instead sophisticated and intellectually challenging reasons to reassess our commitments to religious beliefs, practices, and institutions.<sup>2</sup>

A recurring and prominent theme in this latter work is the alleged fundamental and irreparable opposition of religion and science, sometimes described cautiously (even regretfully) and other times advanced aggressively (even contemptuously) as in this passage from the essay by Georges Rey in which he presents his thesis of meta-atheism:

Despite appearances, many Western adults who’ve been exposed to standard science and sincerely claim to believe in God are self-deceived; at some level they believe the claim is false.<sup>3</sup>

Rey’s thesis and tone are admittedly representative of a considerable segment of our contemporaries. But what, exactly, is the lesson to be drawn from exposure to standard science that renders religious belief so mad and psychotic (as Rey repeatedly puts it) that a pandemic of self-deception and contradictory belief is the best diagnosis? I’ll venture a guess: It’s because Rey and many, many others find belief in – to take one example – a literal Fall of humanity and original sin to be nothing short of bizarre, given the purported scientific evidence against it. Hear, for instance, Ian McFarland as he explains the trend in modern theology to dehistoricize the Fall:

An obvious objection to the idea of original sin is that it depends on a fallacious account of human history. In both its eastern and western forms, original sin refers to a historical act committed by the first human pair, the effects of which are passed on to all subsequent generations. The plausibility of this claim is undermined by contemporary scientific accounts of human origins, which deviate from that recorded in Genesis. It is now beyond dispute that there was no point when human existence was characterized by immunity from death, absence of labour pains, or an ability to acquire food without toil. Nor are the facts of evolutionary biology consistent with the descent of all human beings from a single ancestral pair (monogenesis). Instead the best available evidence suggests that modern humans emerged as a splinter population from pre-existing hominid groups within the last

2 The quoted phrase comes from Mark Johnston’s *Saving God: Religion after Idolatry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), and its targets include Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris.

3 Rey, Georges “Meta-atheism: Religious Avowal as Self-Deception” *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, 243-265.



quarter of a million years . . . [T]he geological record makes it clear that natural disasters, disease, suffering, and death long antedate the emergence of the human species. It follows that such phenomena cannot be interpreted as the consequence of human sin. Although the timescale of human evolution vastly exceeds that described in Genesis, the emergence of *Homo sapiens* remains a very recent development in the several-billion-year history of life on earth, and nothing suggests that humanity's advent occasioned any change in the basic conditions of biological existence.<sup>4</sup>

Such a summary of the deliverances of empirical science – of physics, astronomy, chemistry, geology, and evolutionary biology – is (for Rey and an increasing majority of his audience) obviously and non-negotiably decisive. To continue to believe against this cloud of scientific witnesses is simply to be grossly self-deceived.

Examples can be quickly multiplied and it quite naturally begins to appear to the spectators that traditional religious doctrines and themes suffer a sound thrashing, solidifying the sense that religion has nothing of value left to offer our modern age and increasing the likelihood that more and more people will take to heart the advice that concludes the essay by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong in this same volume:

We should not let religion distort academic and popular discussions. When such occasions arise, atheists need to speak out. This is the only way to overcome Christianity in society and to pave the way for real progress.<sup>5</sup>

I, for one, think this advice is over-hasty and both sadly and significantly mistaken, but what strategy for response should be employed by the serious proponents of these endangered views, given just how heavily the scientific deck appears to be stacked against them and given just how articulate and reasonable are Rey and Sinnott-Armstrong and numerous other champions for the cause?

Prospects look dim. Facing such an apparent Goliath of an opponent and such a widespread and publicly-endorsed sentiment that (when thus opposed by science) religion should simply pack up its things, hang its head, and slink away – it would seem that religion stands in need of some courageous and true friends. Fortunately, there are some excellent candidates at hand; unfortunately, once these potential friends self-identify as analytic philosophers, theologians tend to fear that they are wearing the opposition's colors and are reluctant to call upon them for aid.

Mistake though it is, the error is understandable, for the last time many theologians turned

4 McFarland, Ian "The Fall and Sin" *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* John Webster, Kathryn Tanner and Iain Torrance, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 140-159.

5 Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter "Overcoming Christianity" *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, 69-79.



to so-called analytic philosophers for insight, dialogue, or fellowship, they were viciously ridiculed and rebuffed – and this in the least flattering of ways.<sup>6</sup> Informed that questions about the existence, nature, and significance of the deity were hereafter to be engaged exclusively under the guidance of linguistic analyses of religious language, and menaced with (inexplicably popular) verificationist theories of meaning, theologians were told by the analytic philosophers that they hadn't even achieved the minimal distinction of saying anything false, for they hadn't managed to say anything at all. Or, if the charge of meaninglessness proved too strong to sustain, they were made to understand that their strings of grunts and wheezes and hallelujahs amounted to mere expressions of approval and disapproval or perhaps signaled the adoption of certain policies regarding future behavior – but that's it. Unsurprisingly, religion decided to look for some new friends.

Happily, the age of treating all philosophical problems as linguistic problems has long passed, and not just because continental or post-modern or some such analytic-alternative now holds court as the preferred philosophical methodology. Indeed, analytic philosophy is still overwhelmingly the dominant approach in philosophy, especially in those universities where the language of instruction is English. Rather it's that this most unfortunate moment in the history of analytic philosophy was mercifully temporary, as was its slavish devotion to linguistic analyses, verificationism, and all the unfounded suspicion of metaphysics, ethics, and religion that trailed in its wake. The features that defined that sorry period were not significantly present at the inception of analytic philosophy when it emerged in the early 20th Century as one more or less unified response to the figures, themes, problems, and challenges that marked the philosophical landscape of the 1800s. More to our purpose, though, these objectionable features would hardly characterize the work of the main figures in the analytic tradition over (roughly) the last forty years, many of whom would have been tarred with the same brush as their theological predecessors for their explicit and unabashed commitment to all manner of entities and theories as robust and anti-reductionistic as you please.

As noted above, however, the damage had already been done, and theology and analytic philosophy are still tentatively mending fences and cautiously breaching their long-standing silence, a reconciliation hindered by the fact that, having thus kept their own counsels for so long, there are relatively few cross-over figures equally at home in both philosophy and theology.

Change is on the horizon.<sup>7</sup> But it will be slow, for when theology parted ways with

6 For an excellent and more detailed discussion of this history see Dean Zimmerman's "Three Introductory Questions" Persons: *Human and Divine* Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman, eds., (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2007): 1-32 – to which I am indebted for some of the material in this section.

7 I have had the pleasure of seeing some of this change first-hand and of participating in two excellent interdisciplinary conferences in the last two years where such guarded-but-genuine-good-will was very much on display between representatives of the two camps: "Logos" – a workshop on philosophical theology held at the University of Notre Dame (May 2009) and "How do we survive our death? The quest for personal identity and resurrection" – a conference held at the University of Innsbruck (August 2008). Both experiences filled me with optimism about the prospects for a flourishing partnership in the years ahead.



analytic philosophy it also largely joined forces with continental philosophy, and consequently, many modern theologians have internalized continental criticisms of analytic aspirations, techniques, and pretensions to such an extent that it has left them without much interest in renewing the conversation – even if old wounds can be healed.<sup>8</sup> Although I am among those targeted by such criticisms, I admit they have force and that we analytic philosophers should welcome and listen carefully to them. For what it's worth, here's one such criticism that I think goes pretty deep: “whether or not analytic philosophers are occasionally clever and talented at what they do – they seem on the whole to be oblivious to the fact that what they do is just a smallish slice of what there is to be done. As a result, they tend to overrate the importance of their own achievements and altogether fail to appreciate the value of alternative modes of inquiry.” Maybe so, but my interest is not so much in defending the claim that analytic philosophy is the cure for all of the ills of modern theology or in disrupting fruitful relationships between theology and our continental cousins . . . rather I hope only to advance the more modest goal of persuading the modern theologian that analytic philosophy is nevertheless a rich source of resources worth tapping into and that the two disciplines really do have something to learn from one another, after all.

So, just how might the contemporary analytic philosopher make an overture of friendship? Well, if I see my neighbor struggling with a task to which I am especially well-positioned to contribute and I want to befriend him, I should offer my services – “help him raise his barn.” And if we analytic philosophers note our religious neighbors struggling with an objection (and a widespread, public reaction to that objection which threatens harms to things they hold dear) on which analytic philosophy is especially well-positioned to weigh in – then we should weigh in!

Recall that at the outset of this section, I identified just such a pattern of struggle – one in which a variety of religious doctrines are on both display and trial, science is cast in the role of prosecutor, and the word on the street is that religion is faring rather badly. Moreover, since much of the investigation is being conducted in a language that analytic philosophy speaks very well, such philosophical voices are indeed well-positioned to contribute to the exchange on religion's behalf. In the remainder of this essay, I will turn to some examples of the kind of assistance they can offer, assistance that should not only repair some of the damage to the relation between analytic philosophy and theology but also improve the dialogue between science and religion by undercutting reasons to think that they really do conflict as much as the common reports would have us believe.

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8 For an excellent and more detailed discussion of continental-inspired, theological critiques of analytic philosophy see Michael Rea's “Introduction” *Analytic Theology* Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, eds., (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009): 1-30. Several of the essays in this handsome collection are directly relevant to the main themes of section 2 of this paper, especially those by William Abraham, Oliver Crisp, Michael Murray, Eleonore Stump, and Nicholas Wolterstorff.



### 3. Scientific Atheism

Scientific atheism is on the rise. Frequently this takes the unpromising form of providing scientific explanations for some observation whose only previously-adequate explanations all involved the participation of a divine being: for example, evolutionary biology offering a God-free account of human origins or physics describing one or another version of a multiverse to render unmysterious the life-permitting cosmic conditions enjoyed by our universe and to alleviate the necessity of positing a fine-tuner. Whereas such advancements in science can undercut one kind of pro-religious argument, it is (of course) simply gratuitous to infer atheism from a failed argument for theism; yet curiously, there seems to be a small industry devoted to blurring exactly this distinction.

More worrisome and challenging are those scientific arguments that claim to have discovered something genuinely incompatible with theism (as opposed to merely reducing the need for all the supernatural meddling with which God is credited by the religious.) Here's an example:

- 1) If God exists, God is omnipresent.
- 1) Nothing is omnipresent.
- 2) So, God does not exist.

This deceptively-simple argument has the formal virtue of validity, and its conclusion is transparently atheistic; the action, then, is centered on the truth-value of its premises. Insofar as the first is justified by appeal to religion and the second by appeal to science, we have our advertised conflict. Naturally, the theist can avoid the conflict by relinquishing (1) and maintaining either that this classical, divine attribute is not required for divinity after all or that it need not be taken to imply literal location properties or relations.<sup>9</sup> The present point, however, is to put all such religious concessions on hold and to ask after the credentials of premise (2), especially with a view to determining whether they are underwritten by science alone. What, then, is the support for (2)?

Something like the following: Modern science tends toward substantivalism in its theory of spacetime. Whatever its proper geometry, topology, and dimensionality, spacetime is an entity (presumably a plurality or fusion of a plurality of spacetime points) that has the function of hosting other entities such as substances and events.<sup>10</sup> This hosting is secured by way of a fundamental and perfectly natural relation of occupation or location that holds

<sup>9</sup> Some modern theists seem to be happy with the former (but such an out has its costs since it also threatens literal temporal predications for God). Anselm and Aquinas were happy with the latter, with Anselm reading omnipresence as a kind of knowledge, Aquinas interpreting it as a kind of power: Anselm, *Monologium* chapters 20-22 and *Proslogium* chapter 13; Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, 68 and *Summa Theologiae* I, 8.

<sup>10</sup> For more on substantivalism (and its main competitor, relationalism) see Earman, John *World Enough and Spacetime* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989) and Nerlich, Graham *What Spacetime Explains* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).



between objects and regions, a relation that seems thus posited and endorsed by our best science. (Of course it is not as if all scientists speak with one voice, and the relationalists will disagree with this claim as will the substantialist-monists who are reductionistic about objects, identifying them with regions of spacetime. But lack of general consensus won't be thought to save religion from attack on this front any more than similar in-house scientific disputes are thought to weaken the attack from evolutionary biology.) The line of reasoning behind (2) then adopts the plausible thesis that this fundamental notion of occupation is a one-one relation together with the claim that omnipresence would require a one-many relation (from a single divine object to a plurality of regions). It follows that nothing stands in that relation, and (2) is pronounced true.

Moreover, should the theist attempt retreat and take omnipresence to imply location only at the most inclusive region, God would then sport the objectionable property of being only partly-here and partly-there, a view that sins both against the notion that God can and must be wholly present in a plurality of particular regions and the thesis that God is mereologically simple and thus lacking in proper parts altogether. Even worse, to the extent that God is acknowledged to manifest temporal properties and stand in temporal relations, it would seem that God would need to bear some occupation relation to times, but insofar as contemporary science identifies times with certain hyperplanes of simultaneity in a four-dimensionalist manifold, this is just another way of admitting that God bears some occupation relations to spacetime, and we are left once again with the puzzles that threaten either divine simplicity or the apparent absurdity of being wholly-present at two or three or uncountably-many distinct regions.<sup>11</sup>

The informal gloss on the problem is just this: science has taught us enough about spacetime and its inhabitants to know that you can't be in two places (unless it is only a part of you present in each) and omnipresence is the most extreme violation of that principle one might imagine. If religion says God is omnipresent, so much the worse for it.

Consider, now, a reply: Science has, indeed, taught us a great many things about spacetime, its nature, and the characteristics of its inhabitants. But if we have also learned that the fundamental occupation relation that binds objects to its subregions is a one-one relation, then philosophy made a contribution as well, for that verdict goes well beyond the results of modern science and makes a metaphysical pronouncement about whether an object that fills some region,  $R$ , is numerically identical to or distinct from an object that fills some nonoverlapping region,  $R^*$ .

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11 For a comprehensive discussion of the medieval and recent history of omnipresence, the knowledge and power readings of Anselm, Aquinas, and their 20th-century descendents, the special problems that the attribute poses for the Christian theist, and the role of the contemporary metaphysics of location in resolving these problems – see my “Omnipresence” *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 199-216.



Whereas denying the possibility of multi-location (i.e., a single object in distinct regions) and co-location (i.e., distinct objects in a single region) appears to be a bit of well-grounded common sense, common sense is forever falling into contradiction with itself, and analytic metaphysics is in the business of exposing these inconsistencies and regaining a kind of reflective equilibrium by rooting out and abandoning something that initially appeared to be obviously true. Of course this need not result in a blow to science, for science never backed the thesis in the first place – or if it does cost anything, it comes in the relatively painless reminder that science need not think itself the ground for every hypothesis that seems reasonable at first blush.

Significantly, however, the opposition to multi-location and co-location has recently come under heavy philosophical fire. Some of this criticism has been inspired by the desire to make metaphysical room for extended mereological simples (i.e., for objects that have no proper parts and yet occupy extended regions). And some of it has been inspired by arguments designed to show that if ‘located at’ is a perfectly natural and fundamental relation, and if familiar, popular, and plausible recombination principles regarding modality are true, then it will follow that objects, regions, and the location relation can manifest absolutely any pattern you like.<sup>12</sup> To get a sense of the debate in question it will help to have some machinery before us. What follows is certainly not exhaustive but is nevertheless representative of some of the ways relations between objects and regions have been recently conceived. Consider the following five definitions deriving from work by Josh Parsons.<sup>13</sup>

- (D1) ‘x is entirely located at r’ =<sub>df</sub> x is located at r and there is no region of spacetime disjoint from r at which x is located.
- (D2) ‘x is wholly located at r’ =<sub>df</sub> x is located at r and there is no proper part of x not located at r.
- (D3) ‘x is partly located at r’ =<sub>df</sub> x has a proper part entirely located at r.
- (D4) ‘x pertends’ =<sub>df</sub> x is an object that is entirely located at a non-point-sized region, r, and for each proper subregion of r, r\*, x has a proper part entirely located at r\*.
- (D5) ‘x extends’ =<sub>df</sub> x is an object that is wholly and entirely located at a non-point-sized region, r, and for each proper subregion of r, r\*, x is wholly located at r\*.

The argument against omnipresence discussed above presupposes that objects pertend in accordance with (D4) – i.e., that occupation is a one-one relation, and that the only sense to be given to ‘occupying more than one place’ is ‘having proper parts that occupy different places’. But as we can see from (D3), being thus partly located at a region does not entail

12 Many are the friends of extended simples. For representative defenses see Markosian, Ned “Simples” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 76 (1998): 213-226 and McDaniel, Kris “Extended Simples” *Philosophical Studies* Vol. 133 (2007): 131-141. For the argument from recombination principles see Sider, Theodore “Parthood” *Philosophical Review* Vol. 116 (2007): 51-91 and Saucedo, Raul “Parthood and Location” *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* (forthcoming).

13 Parsons, Josh “Entension, or How it Could Happen that an Object is Wholly Located in Each of Many Places” (Unpublished).



being located there simpliciter. Accordingly, when we adopt pertension as our model, the dilemma threatening either to reject divine simplicity or to expose the absurdity of being somehow multi-located is secured.

Parsons is to be commended, however, for noting and correctly emphasizing the importance of a crucial philosophical distinction here captured in his definitions. Note that the definition of 'entirely located' involves a claim about the non-existence of a certain kind of region, while that of 'wholly located' involves a claim about the non-existence of a certain kind of object. As is confirmed by the literature on the topic, it is an easy matter to run these two conceptions together, but by carefully distinguishing between them, a rather different theory about how the location relation behaves is made intelligible and our troublesome dilemma can be dissolved.

Accordingly, suppose we understand omnipresence as ubiquitous extension. According to (D5), to extend is to be wholly and entirely located at some non-point-sized region (in the case of omnipresence, at the maximally inclusive region) and to be wholly located at each of that region's proper subregions (in the case of omnipresence, at every other region there is). Whereas (D1) would then require that there be no region disjoint from the maximally inclusive region at which God is also located, it should be obvious that this condition is automatically satisfied. Moreover, (D2) would then require that for every region, an omnipresent God does not have any part that fails to be at that region, but again assuming the mereological simplicity of God it should be obvious that this condition is automatically satisfied as well. Consequently, God could be wholly present at two or more numerically distinct regions without forfeiting mereological simplicity simply by extending.

A confession: There certainly are philosophically sophisticated and challenging defenses of extension. Moreover, what one may have thought was exclusively an a priori battlefield has recently been an arena in which a posteriori arguments from contemporary physics have provided unexpected support favoring recognition of some extending objects, as well.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding these varied sources of support, I am not a fan of extension and tend to prefer instead the pertension view (with small technical qualifications). Elsewhere I have argued at length against extension (and a variety of other multi-location views),<sup>15</sup> but the point of this section was not to endorse a philosophical position on extended mereological simples or the location relation. On the contrary, it was to show that the alleged conflict of religion and science with which we began this section arises only after one commits to a philosophical position on these matters and that consequently, the conflict has been

14 See the discussion of non-locality and quantum mechanics in Parsons (Unpublished). See also the moderate support for extension contributed by the null individual in my "Confining Composition" *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 103 (2006): 631-651.

15 In chapter 4 of my *The Metaphysics of Hyperspace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), and in my "Précis of *The Metaphysics of Hyperspace*" and "Reply to Parsons, Reply to Heller, and Reply to Rea" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 76 (2008): 422-426, 452-470.



misidentified. It will prove instructive to survey another example of this same phenomenon in the following section.

#### 4. Human Persons and Resurrection

Despite the fact that their Jewish predecessors were committed to a kind of materialism in which death marked not the separation of the body from the soul, but rather a bodily descent into She'ol (the earthly grave in which one may find shadowy yet material remnants of human persons), Christians have tended toward dualism for much of their history.<sup>16</sup> Among the central reasons for this commitment were the heavy influence of Greek philosophy and the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, a doctrine which was beginning to take shape in the second century before Christ and which was to become a prominent point of opposition between the Sadducees and Pharisees in the first century after Christ. Although relatively safe from sophisticated attack in its infancy, the stage was thus set for another scientific challenge against the Church.

Nowadays, we are informed that there is a great flood of scientific evidence for materialism and that dualism has been finally exposed as useless at best or incoherent at worst. (For the record, I endorse this thesis of materialism for human persons – I don't think that I have any immaterial parts, but I'm skeptical about laying the credit for justification in this belief at the feet of science alone.<sup>17</sup>) Still, to the extent that modern science can establish the thesis that we human persons are material things through and through and to the extent that the doctrine of the general resurrection requires dualism for human persons, it would appear that science opposes that doctrine. Should modern Christianity continue to insist upon that doctrine, we have located yet another conflict between (a specific) religion and science. As before, let us make the argument explicit:

- 1) Christianity is committed to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.
- 1) The doctrine of the resurrection of the body requires dualism for human persons.
- 2) Scientific discovery has shown dualism to be false (or at least very improbable).
- 3) So, science has shown a religious doctrine to be false (or at least very improbable).

On the obvious assumption that Christianity is a religion, the argument is valid, and its conclusion asserts the sought-after conflict; the action, then, is centered on the truth-value of its premises. Naturally, the Christian theist can avoid the conflict by relinquishing (1)

16 For a sustained discussion of the prospects of combining Christianity with a materialism for human persons (with special attention to the Scriptures, Creeds, and early Church Fathers) and for eight different ways of reconciling the general doctrine of the resurrection with materialism, see chapter 7 of my *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person*, "Nothing but Dust and Ashes" (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) and my "Multiple Location and Single Location Resurrection" (forthcoming).

17 Significantly, this pairing of Christianity and materialism is very much on the rise and has received the heavy endorsement and support of some of the best figures working in both metaphysics and philosophy of religion. For representative and accessible defenses, see Merricks, Trenton "The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting" *Reason for the Hope Within* Michael J. Murray, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999): 281-286 and van Inwagen, Peter "Dualism and Materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?" *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 12 (1995): 475-488.



– although that would be a hard sell – or by contesting (3), and accusing the scientists of speaking not from their area of expertise but as naïve metaphysicians when they draw anti-dualistic conclusions from their work in biology, chemistry, and physics. But this particular battle need not be waged.

In the discussion of omnipresence above, apparent conflict was rendered merely apparent by showing how the scientific side of the dispute had adopted a (negotiable) philosophical thesis that was generating the real difficulty. Let us now show the reverse can be true – how in the case of the general resurrection, apparent conflict can be rendered merely apparent by showing how the religious side of the dispute has invoked a (negotiable) philosophical thesis that is responsible for the trouble.

So, why might the Christian theist think materialism is at odds with the doctrine of the resurrection? Hear the speech of the committed Christian dualist:

Materialism obviously cannot be squared with the details of the resurrection. The argument is really quite simple. If materialism is true, then I am identical to a living human organism, a human animal. But, then, I perish when that animal perishes (after all, I am it). And oh, how it can perish! It can decay, its rotting into nothingness interrupted only by worms that feed on the putrid and decomposing flesh. Or it can burn to a cinder, its ashes being carried on the winds to places unknown. Or it can be torn limb from limb, the lifeless muscle and tissue finding its way into the belly of a cannibal where (subject to an undignified decomposition) it comes to partially compose the body of the man who has consumed it. How, then, shall this body be raised? The cannibal case is a clincher. There is no reason to think it impossible that a man (at his death) be composed of smallish parts each of which has the historical property of being among the smallish parts that composed another man at his death. But then if their bodies are restored by way of reassembly, his cannot be. Such danger – the wage of cannibalism is eternal death! Of course, cannibalism isn't required. Our man could come to have his feature quite innocently, should unknown and long-dead corpses furnish nutrients to the soil in which he cultivates his crops. In short, the bodies of many of our ancestors have ceased to be present altogether and (unless the resurrection is very near at hand) a similar fate awaits our own bodies. God could, of course, take the particles that composed Abraham at his death (if they are still present on Resurrection Day) and reconfigure them in precisely the same pattern in which they were arranged shortly before Abraham's demise, endowing them with the same causal properties and intrinsic states they possessed on that day. But then an omnipotent



God could do the same for the particles that composed Abraham at some moment when he was a child of ten. Each of the resulting arrangements would have equal claim to be Abraham's body – equally bad claims; not even omnipotence can bring back the dead by reassembly. Don't get me wrong; I don't mean to impugn God's omnipotence, but God can perform only miracles not impossibilities. God can generate a particle-for-particle duplicate if He wishes, and (as just noted) God can even reconfigure some set of particles that once composed Abraham; but this is not to bring back Abraham. If Abraham was really identical to a living human organism, a mere human animal, nothing but dust and ashes – then he is forever gone. To be sure, we might hope that there will be someone, a replica perhaps, who someday will be composed of Abraham's former parts, and who will carry on in Abraham's stead with similar memories, desires, intentions, and character – Abraham's representative in the world to come. But this hope is not what Scripture teaches. Abraham will be raised – not his replica. As I see it, Abraham will be raised only if Abraham is not identical to a human animal, and if Abraham is not identical to a human animal, then Abraham is not merely a material object. Hence, materialism fails to conform to the teachings of Scripture. So much the worse for it.<sup>18</sup>

This is a powerful speech, but it has been opposed by a number of theorists committed to reconciling Christian doctrines and themes with a robust materialism for human persons. Unsurprisingly, the reconciliations turn on bits of philosophy which, as these theorists are concerned to argue, are perfectly consistent with Christianity and effectively obviate the need to turn dualist. To illustrate this point, permit me to sketch in broad strokes a few of these attempts.

*Baker and Corcoran's Constitutionalist View:*<sup>19</sup> Abraham – that is, the same person but not the same body – will rise again on the appointed day. But how can Abraham arise, if Abraham is a material object and thus identical to a certain human body whose parts have long been subject to decay and dispersal? The mistake lies in the Animalist move from “is a material object” to “is identical to a certain human body.” Abraham was a human person, but the relation between that human person and the human body that was buried in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre was constitution not identity. Abraham is credited with being a material object in virtue of being constituted by the material animal. So let the corpse of Abraham decay; he has need of it no more, for when he is resurrected he will be constituted by a new and imperishable body. That is, one and the same person will be constituted by two

18 I borrow this speech of the Christian dualist as well as phrasing for the following five paragraphs of text detailing the Christian materialists' replies from my *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person*.

19 Baker, Lynne Rudder “Persons and the Metaphysics of Resurrection” *Religious Studies* Vol. 43 (2007): 333-348 and “Material Persons and the Doctrine of Resurrection” *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 18 (2001): 151-167. Corcoran, Kevin “Persons and Bodies” *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 15: 324-340.



very different bodies at two very different times, and there is no threat from the transitivity of identity, for constitution is not identity.<sup>20</sup>

*Merricks's Anti-Criterialist View:*<sup>21</sup> Abraham – the same man and the same body – will rise again on the appointed day, and as a result he will be among the fortunate, the temporally gappy. Contra the constitutionalists, Abraham is identical to a human animal. But despite this fact, we need not fear that some biological criterion of personal identity may be brought in to show that temporal gaps are impossible (they surely are not), or that this very person and this very body might not be found on either side of that temporal gap for the surprising reason that there are no criteria of personal identity, biological or otherwise. Abraham will be raised, and there need be no explanation of that.<sup>22</sup>

*Van Inwagen's Simulacra View:*<sup>23</sup> Abraham will rise again on the appointed day. But there will be no need to track down and call together all those parts that have gone their separate ways throughout the biosphere after the body that was buried in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre decayed and was partially reabsorbed into the environment, for despite the casual language of Genesis 25:9, Abraham's body was not in fact buried there. Instead, in a divine circumlocution of the pitfalls of resurrection-by-reassembly, God saw to it that a simulacrum was smuggled in to be buried and to decompose in place of Abraham's corpse. Abraham's genuine body was spirited away for safekeeping, to sleep – parts intact – until it shall be reawakened and reanimated (but not reassembled) on the resurrection day.<sup>24</sup>

*Zimmerman's Jumping-Animals View:*<sup>25</sup> Abraham will rise again on the appointed day embarking on his new life with a body-stage that bears immanent-causal relations to his body-stages at some moments immediately prior to his death. Moreover, those very pre-resurrection body-stages were likewise immanent-causally related to a corpse that suffered decay and decomposition in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre. That is, Abraham underwent a kind of fission, made possible by God's endowing a particular animal body with certain causal powers. Admittedly, Abraham will have suffered a sizeable temporal gap. Fortunately, however, the immanent-causal relations between the relevant stages of the body found on either side of the gap were sufficient to preserve Abraham's identity. Nor need we worry that the corpse which also followed – and followed immediately – upon the fission competes with or is in any way an impediment to Abraham's jump to heaven, for a corpse isn't a thing at all; despite appearances, 'corpse' is a plural referring expression which picks out suitably

20 For critique of the constitutionalist view see Sider, Theodore *Four-Dimensionalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). Criticisms of this view include its controversial commitment to co-location and the charge that its constitution relation is an unanalyzable mystery.

21 Merricks, Trenton "There Are No Criteria of Identity Over Time" *Noûs* Vol. 32 (1998): 106-124.

22 For a general critique of the anti-criterialist view, see Zimmerman, Dean "Criteria of Identity and the 'Identity Mystics'" *Erkenntnis* Vol. 48 (1998): 281-301. For a defense of a biological criterion against Merricks's proposal, see Olson, Eric *The Human Animal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and for a defense of a psychological criterion against Merricks's proposal, see chapter 4 of my *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person*.

23 van Inwagen, Peter "The Possibility of Resurrection" *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 9 (1978): 114-121.

24 For a further critique of both Merricks's and van Inwagen's thesis of Animalism (i.e., that a human person is identical to a human organism) see my "I am not an Animal!" *Persons: Human and Divine*, 216-234.

25 Zimmerman, Dean "The Compatibility of Materialism and Survival: The 'Falling Elevator' Model" *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 16 (1999): 194-212.



arranged particles at a time at which they do not compose anything at all, but which are nevertheless immanent-causally connected to a collection of particles which do compose (at an earlier time) an organism at its death. So, everything is as it should be: Abraham's so-called corpse was buried and reassimilated into the environment (in the same way anyone's remains remain, whether the individual whose remains they are is resurrected or not); Abraham survives across a temporal gap on account of the fission which guarantees him a body in the world to come immanent-causally related to the body in the world left behind; and Abraham's post-resurrection body is numerically identical to his pre-resurrection body – its stages related causally just as were the stages immediately before and immediately after the moment he turned ten years old. Accordingly, these divinely-grounded fissions by which human persons can jump with the numerically same animal-bodies across temporal gaps into Paradise (while leaving their remains behind!) seem to provide a better story for the materialist to tell than any story which is marred by replicas at the end, or simulacra at the beginning, or co-location throughout, or no criterion of identity at all.<sup>26</sup>

*Hudson's Perdurantist (or "Temporal Parts") View:*<sup>27</sup> Abraham and the human animal we associate with him are both material beings, but they are related by mereological overlap rather than by identity. On this proposal we may identify two temporally-extended material objects that together diachronically compose Abraham (the human person). The first such material object (i.e., Abraham's first salient temporal part) was present in our remote past and was a mere proper part of that human animal, for the human animal in question continued to exist for a brief while after its death, spending the last stages of its career as a corpse decomposing in the grave. The second such material object (i.e., Abraham's second salient temporal part) will come into existence on the last day and will continue everafter in the world to come. Neither of these objects is identical to Abraham any more than I am identical to my right or left half. Rather, they together compose Abraham, a temporally-gappy material being who overlaps a particular biological organism and thereby earns rights to the adjective in his description as a human person. With this proposal's recognition of temporally-extended composites, the relation of parthood is no longer temporally indexed, and the operative criterion of persistence becomes a psychological gen-identity relation uniting a collection of person-stages into our man Abraham. Happily, then, it is one and the same man and one and the same body that rises again – just not one and the same animal, for that long-dead creature does not rise again. Moreover, it is precisely this combination of diachronic fusions and psychological relations between person-stages that permits the view to enjoy the best feature of Zimmerman's metaphysics of jumping animals without being at all subject to its associated cost. That is, it can endorse a story of fissioning material objects

26 Yet this dazzling story is subject to its own share of grave defects, as well. In particular, Zimmerman acknowledges the most troublesome feature of his account is that the proposal requires a "closest continuer" theory of personal identity. Whether or not the man who appears in the world to come is Abraham depends on what happens in the other half of the fission. In other words, whether Abraham is indeed the man who rises on that last day depends entirely on the features manifested by individuals occupying regions where he is not to be found at all.

27 Perdurantism or temporal-parts theory has many able-defenders, most notably Theodore Sider in his superb book, *Four-Dimensionalism*. The application of perdurantism to the problem of Christian materialism and the resurrection was first presented and defended in my *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person*.



and human persons who jump temporal gaps while preserving appropriate immanent-causal relations between their temporal parts, without thereby inheriting a commitment to the closest-continuer theory of personal identity.<sup>28</sup>

Each of these positions is philosophically sophisticated and features a bit of metaphysics on which it is reasonable to assume contemporary science remains neutral. Both perdurantism and its three-dimensionalist rival, endurantism, for example, can claim consistency with the scientific orthodoxy on the nature of spacetime and differ instead on the nature of the parthood relation and on whether ordinary material objects occupy extended, four-dimensional regions; but as we've seen, these philosophical differences can have consequences elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, given the five alternatives just presented, I side with Hudson's resolution, and thus deny premise (2) in our reconstructed argument above. As before, however, the point of this section was not simply to endorse some philosophical verdict on the coherence of the constitution relation, or the right criterion of diachronic personal identity, or whether human persons are identical to human animals, or the possibility of fission cases, or the merits of four-dimensionalism and its invocation of temporal parts. Rather, it was to show that the alleged conflict of religion and science with which we began this section arises only after one commits to some philosophical position or other on these matters and that consequently, the conflict has been misidentified once again.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

I have argued that despite their checkered history of mutual mistrust, modern theologians have good reasons to listen to some of the voices in contemporary analytic philosophy (whose subjects, in turn, would have much to gain from an exchange of ideas as well).

Religion is routinely and roundly criticized for not being up to date and obediently in step with contemporary science and is widely ridiculed when it dares make any pronouncement that appears to contradict the currently received scientific wisdom. As we have seen, however, these unfortunate criticisms that so impair the conversation between religion and science are frequently misdirected.

Of course, it is one thing to show that science can be reconciled to a curious and not-much-discussed property like omnipresence by bringing out the metaphysical toolbox and looking for a way to make a repair, but perhaps the reader thinks that there are more central controversies that aren't so easily handled. Well, perhaps such a reader will prove to be right, and the present paper cannot be credited with much more than removing two such controversies from consideration. But then again, this essay was launched with only the modest goal of piquing interest in the resources of analytic philosophy to confront and

28 For influential critiques of this metaphysics of temporal parts, see van Inwagen, Peter "Four-Dimensional Objects" *Noûs* Vol. 24 (1990): 245-255 and Rea, Michael "Temporal Parts Unmotivated" *The Philosophical Review* Vol. 107 (1998): 225-260.



redirect such disputes. In closing, however, I would like to suggest that the kind of work which has been illustrated here and which is designed to remove the appearance of conflict is available and equally compelling in an astonishingly-wide range of cases of alleged tension between religion and science – cases which are much better known and whose conflicts are almost universally regarded as ineliminable. For instance, it is commonplace to be told that contemporary science is in a position to discredit the doctrine of the Fall, or to pronounce verdicts against such places as Heaven and Hell, or to oppose the existence of such creatures as angels and demons, or to decisively debunk reports of certain miracles described in the New Testament. In each of these cases, however, it is a straightforward matter to identify one or more philosophical theses upon which the supposed dispute turns – all too often, unnoticed theses whose background-presence and subtle-influence are driving the apparent disagreement.<sup>29</sup>

It is a happy fact that analytic philosophy and contemporary science speak such very similar languages and that as a result analytic philosophers are so well-positioned to expose much of this apparent incompatibility by demonstrating that the opposition (if opposition there be) is not accurately characterized as a contest between religion and science but instead arises from a considerable and negotiable philosophical backdrop. The health and success of the dialogue between science and religion is endangered by not attending properly to the philosophical presuppositions and philosophical restrictions that are operative in the relevant debates. Accordingly, recognizing and incorporating the contributions of analytic philosophy can go a long way toward furthering a fruitful and exciting and cooperative exchange of ideas arising from religious and scientific discoveries.<sup>30</sup>

29 For further examples of reconciling the alleged implications of our contemporary scientific worldview with a variety of topics of concern to the Christian theist (including versions of the four issues just mentioned in the text) see chapter 8 of my *The Metaphysics of Hyperspace*, "Hyperspace and Christianity." To be fair, though, metaphysical rescue-attempts are not always unbridled successes, but even the failures can teach us something. For an attempt to refute and expose such a failure and yet draw a valuable lesson from it all the same, see my "Fission, Freedom, and the Fall" *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* Jonathan Kvanvig, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 41-49.

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