

Let's Get Physical

Foundational Essay on the Resurrection Body

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I have noted that at the core of many Skeptical or other arguments on the resurrection of Jesus Christ lies a base assumption that the epistolary NT records could (or must) be interpreted as saying that the resurrected Jesus was not a being with a physical body (as the Gospels make clear), but rather was some sort of ghostly or spiritual being that was not tangible. From this Skeptics may run with another ball -- the visions of Jesus were mass hallucinations, or some such like that. The Secular Web's Mr. Friendly Ice-Cream Man, Robert Price, puts it this way in a response to William Lane Craig:

Many New Testament scholars have observed that the conception of the resurrection body implied in 1 Corinthians 15 clashes so violently with that presupposed in the gospels that the latter must be dismissed as secondary embellishments, especially as 1 Corinthians predates the gospels. Craig takes exception. The whole trend of his argument seems to me to belie the point he is ostensibly trying to make, namely that any differences between the two traditions do not imply that 1 Corinthians allows only sightings, subjective visions, while the gospels depict more fulsome encounters replete with dialogue, gestures, touching, and eating. Nothing in 1 Corinthians 15 rules out such scenes, he says. But surely the very urgency of the matter shows that Craig would feel himself at a great loss if he had to cut loose all those juicy gospel resurrection stories to be left with the skimpy list of terse notes in 1 Corinthians 15. By itself, 1 Corinthians 15 just wouldn't mean much. He wants the appearances of 1 Corinthians 15:3-11 to be read as if they had in parentheses after them "See Luke 24; Matthew 28; John 21."

Now even if indeed the rez body (as we shall say) was not physical, this does not automatically disqualify the authenticity and revelatory authority of the appearances; it merely gives some critics another level of excuses to appeal to. But we need not make that point. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that the rez body of Jesus clearly was physical, and that this is shown in two ways:

1. The Jewish contextual literature of the period that describes the nature of resurrection.
2. The NT epistles themselves, which many skeptical and other critics fail to understand properly.

In recent days, in *Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave (ETJBG)*, Richard Carrier has offered replies to some of the arguments we have here (though not from us personally); we reply to that which is directly relevant to this item, in this article; but other material we address here.

Our survey of background Jewish literature is taken from Pheme Perkins' work *Resurrection*. Although not all Jews held uniform ideas about resurrection, it will become clear from this survey that the concept always involved a physical reconstitution of the deceased body. There is no room or place for the idea of a "spiritual resurrection", which is an unknown concept in this context, an oxymoron like "square circle" or "concrete rubber".

We may begin our survey with relevant material from the OT:

Daniel 12:2–3 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Ezekiel 37:1–12 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon

them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophecy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.

Is. 26:19 Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise.

These three passages, especially Ezekiel, are programmatic for the concept of resurrection. Now here are cites from Judaism at the time of Jesus:

4 Ezra 7:32 The earth shall restore those who sleep in her, and the dust those who rest in it, and the chambers those entrusted to them.

1 Enoch 51:1 In those days, the earth will also give back what has been entrusted to it, and Sheol will give back what it has received, and hell will give back what it owes.

Sib. Or. IV ...God Himself will refashion the bones and ashes of humans and raise up mortals as they were before.

2 Baruch 50:2ff For certainly the earth will then restore the dead. It will not change their form, but just as it received them, so it will restore them.

Pseudo-Phocylides 103-4 ...we hope that the remains of the departed will soon come to light again out of the earth. And afterward, they will become gods.

Response: Could there have been a "two-body" version of resurrection?

In ETJBG [107ff], Carrier wishes to specifically demonstrate that the idea of a "two-body doctrine" of resurrection could have plausibly existed in Judaism. Briefly, this "doctrine" is supposed to be that a dead body of a person stayed and rotted in the grave and they were given a completely new body in heaven. In short, there is full replacement as opposed to transformation.

One aspect of his case is to appeal to "diversity" in Judaism. Carrier charges those who maintain a relatively uniform view of resurrection in Judaism with "inherently racist" thinking, which is a bit odd in a volume where J. Duncan M. Derrett appealed to a racist stereotype of Jews as financiers. In fact, this is not "racist" in any sense but in accord with the conservative realities of ancient suspicion about anything new; and it is also in line with the point that any faith or belief will have an "acceptable pool of diversity". Thus we would hardly expect Carrier to admit that a person was an "atheist" if they believed in God. So likewise the idea is that Judaism held at its core a certain idea of "resurrection".

Carrier first errs by reading into comments by Robinson, et al that Jewish faith could not conceive of survival in a disembodied soul some idea that Jews could not conceive of ANY conscious life apart from a body. That is not what is being argued. Carrier also hauls up the irrelevancy he did in our discussion of variable timings in the final resurrection, and is no more forthcoming in terms of the scale of difference than he was in reply to us. He then goes on to claim that first century Judaism boasted "a colorful continuum of ideologies" but rather significantly missing from this continuum is any worthwhile evidence of a two-body doctrine (we will make what we will of what he does find, shortly). He names some thirty sects, but admits that "we know almost nothing about" some of them! Carrier's mere listing of sect names does not tell us just how closely these groups were aligned -- whether it was a matter of "Presbyterians and Lutherans" or "Baptists and Mormons"! He even admits that the number of sects could be most conservatively given at ten [109]. In light of how little data he truly does have, it is evidence of his despair that he resorts to the contrivance of arguing that "it is absurd to say they would not accept a two-body doctrine of resurrection" merely on the basis of their variety! Carrier has failed to prove that such a belief would fall within an "acceptable pool of diversity" for Judaism, and cannot show that it would; thus his appeal to "diversity" is in vain, a mere case of showboating.

In terms of proving that there WAS such a doctrine elsewhere in Judaism, his evidence is meagre and contrived:

- * He appeals to those who believed in a conscious soul before the general resurrection; but this has little to do with belief concerning resurrection itself, much less does it prove a "two body" thesis.

- * He notes "Jubilees 23–25 and a redaction in 1 Enoch (92–105) as well as other Jewish apocrypha," the latter of which are not specified, only offered with reference to Nickelsburg. But neither of these says that the non-bodied soul "lives forever...without a body" as claimed. (One wonders whether Carrier has fallen in some cases for the error of equating "soul" with "spirit" in these texts.)

- * He appeals to Philo, who (in line with his Hellenism) called the present body a prison to be escaped, and believed in an ethereal afterlife. As one who has been seriously Hellenized, the relevance of Philo to this issue is highly questionable. Indeed, Wright [145] points to Philo as an example of the sort of thinking that "did not come to dominate the horizon," of one who syncretized his beliefs with Platonism. To use him as Carrier does, as evidence in favor of a broader possible existence of a "two body" doctrine, is absurd (especially since it is not in the least "very close" to such an idea, Carrier's strained attempts to make it sound close notwithstanding: There is no "new" body here, but rather, components of the "old" person released; so likewise with Essenes who held a view similar to Philo's, though the latter are not said by Josephus to reject a later resurrection.)

- * Carrier claims that an "explicit" report of a two-body belief from Josephus, in which those raised "cross over" into "a different body". Carrier errs, however, in trying to force the language of Josephus to say more than it does. We will say more of this in the other item, where he similarly tries to force more meaning that is apparent out of Biblical language; suffice for now to say that a transformed body IS a "different body" and would also, by virtue of exposure to the cleansing power of YHWH, be called "undefiled" -- and thus Josephus does not at all clearly teach a "two body" doctrine (indeed, his verbiage is so vague that some take him to be teaching reincarnation!).

- * Last, Carrier points to a "Rabbi Mari" who merely says that "the righteous are fated to dust," from which Carrier strains the conclusion that he "believed in a different type of resurrection"! [113] Mari's words are not in the least incompatible with a

transformatory view, and moreover, are just as well understood not as a teaching of doctrine, but as a riddle in which a subject is tested and challenged to defend his view against a seemingly contradictory passage.

Let's now work with the NT evidence, starting with the positive arguments for a physical resurrection body:

1. Paul's word for "body" can have no other meaning than a physical body. In this regard, Gundry's landmark study of the word used for "body" (soma) makes it quite clear that something physical is intended. In *Soma in Biblical Theology*, Gundry examines the use of soma in other literature of the period and shows that it refers to the physical "thingness" of a body. It is often used in a sense that we would say, "We need a body over here" with reference to slaves who are used as tools; to soldiers who are on the verge of death, to passengers on a boat, and to people in a census. In other places it is used to refer to a corpse (and so cannot refer by itself to the "whole person" as some influenced by Bultmann have suggested). Xenophon (*Anabasis* 1.9.12) refers to the people entrusting Cyrus with their possessions, their cities, and their "bodies" (somata). Plato refers to the act of habeus corpus in terms of producing a soma. Aristophanes refers to the throwing of a soma to dogs. It is used by Euripides and Demosthenes to refer to corpses.

2. Paul's 1 Cor. 15 examples are analogous to a physical body. Paul is answering the question posed by the Corinthians, "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" His answers refer to appropriate physical bodies, suitable for various types of existence -- "somatic variety with the universe" [Harr. RI, 119]. This is not appropriate if Paul has in mind a spiritual, disembodied "resurrection". And of course, he refers back to Christ's own body (1 Cor. 15:3ff) as an example of this principle in action, a "positive and emphatic correlation" between the resurrection of Christ and that of the believer. [Gundry, 172]

3. The word anastasis can only mean bodily resurrection. This word is used 44 times in the NT. In the Synoptics we have this episode: "The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection..." In John we have: "And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation," a clear allusion to Daniel 12; also "Martha saith unto him, I know that he

shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Acts uses this word to explain what happened to Jesus. "But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question."; "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." Paul uses anastasis as well to refer to what happened to Jesus (Rom. 1:4, 6:5; 1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:10). It is used to describe a physical, bodily resurrection in Heb. 11:35, and is found as well in 1 Peter.

Skeptics may wish to argue, "Well, the Gospels and Hebrews meant one thing, and Paul meant another." But anastasis is not so easily disposed of. It is clearly a technical term for bodily resurrection, and it is the burden of critics to prove otherwise.

4. 2 Cor. 5 shows that a physical body is in view. "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." Here, Paul describes the earthly body as a "tent" (i.e., temporary living structure) and the new body as something that is a "building" built by God, something that one is "clothed" with (the verb in question has the connotation of "pulling one garment on over another one" – Craig.ANTE, 151), something that the Spirit is a "deposit" for! How much more of a suggestion of being tangible and material do we need?

5. Phil. 3:21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. It is clear from this little verse that Paul regards Christ as now having a "glorious" body (soma). This is clear testimony to a physical resurrection.

6. A transfer to an idea of a physical rez from a spiritual one makes no sense in the social context. In view of the expanding Gentile mission, it is hard to see how an embellishment from

"disembodied" to "embodied" could take place. The Greeks perceived such events as a resurrection, initially, as a "resuscitated corpse" – rather like our Creature Feature zombies! Paul would have had no problem preaching a disembodied spirit to the Gentiles; but doing that, then switching it to "physical" as in the Gospels, would have been highly counterproductive to missions. As Perkins [Perk.Rz, 61] observes:

Christianity's pagan critics generally viewed resurrection as misunderstood metempsychosis at best. At worst, it seemed ridiculous.

This view is reflected for example by Celsus, who responded thusly to the idea of resurrection: "The soul may have everlasting life, but corpses, as Heraclitus said, 'ought to be thrown away as worse than dung'". Plutarch similarly said it was "against nature" to "send bodies to heaven" and that only pure souls "cast no shadows" (i.e., had no bodies) and he even rejected accounts of bodily translations on this basis. "The funeral pyre was said to burn away the body so that the immortal part could ascend to the gods." [73] There were cases of temporary resuscitation, but these occurred before the person was buried and in almost all cases before they entered the realm of the dead. In such cases the person died again eventually -- which does not conflict with hostility to, or rejection of, resurrection. (See Peter Bolt, "Life, Death and the Afterlife in the Greco-Roman World", in *Life in the Face of Death*, Eerdmans, 1998.)

Note as well that in 1 Cor., Paul is addressing advocates of asceticism and libertinism -- points of view associated with those who thought matter was evil and at the root of all of man's problems. Platonic thought supposed that "man's highest good consisted of emancipation from corporeal defilement. The nakedness of disembodiment was the ideal state." [Harr.RI, 116] If the critics are right, Christianity took a big and significant step backwards that should have killed it in the cradle, or at least caused historical repercussions and divisions that would still be in evidence.

Thus is our "pro" case for a physical rez body; what about the counter-arguments? Robert Price claims above that the Gospel pictures of the rez Jesus clash "violently" with those in the epistles –

– mainly, Paul's material in 1 Cor. 15. Is this truly the case? Let's start with the biggest "con job" in the whole lot:

1. "Paul can't possibly be referring to a physically resurrected body, because he clearly says that 'flesh and blood' cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 15:50)

This cite is usually contrasted with Luke 24:39: Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. It's clear enough that the phrases compared are different in a key way: "flesh and blood" versus "flesh and bones." A difference that is no difference, the skeptic may say. Really? Not at all. The phrase "flesh and blood" is "a typical Semitic expression denoting the frail human nature." It is a phrase that reflects a conceptual unity, rather than a physical aspect of the body; and this is supported by the use of the singular "is" rather than the plural "are." [Craig.ANTE, 141] Thus, as Craig also points out, the second half of the parallel in 1 Cor. 15:50 (corruptible/incorruptible) is "Paul's elaboration in other words of exactly the same thought" [Craig.BR, 60] – perhaps making it more clear to the Greeks in his audience who would not "get" the Semitic turn of speech. (This relates to the Semitic Totality concept, which we explore here.)

Similar use of the phrase "flesh and blood" is found in Sir. 14:18 and 17:31, Wisdom 12:5, and in the works of Philo, as well as elsewhere in the NT, and in rabbinical literature. Craig also points out that Paul uses the phrase "flesh and blood" in the sense of "people" or "mortal creatures" elsewhere: Eph. 6:12 "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." – It is also used this way in Gal. 1:16. Dahl [Dahl.RoB, 121], reflecting both on this phrase and the word "flesh" as used in v. 39, comments:

The connotation of the word is not merely, if primarily, physical, but describes the whole totality and would therefore comprehend the mental or psychological as well. It is used in biblical literature to emphasize frailty, creatureliness, weakness, etc., and is, for that reason, the opposite of 'spirit,' which is always connected with the idea of strength.

This fits in with what Craig is saying: "flesh" = weakness; spiritual body = strength. And Orr and Walther [Orr.1COR, 349–50] state:

Paul may mean the material substance of bodies, composed of flesh and blood; or the phrase may have a quasi-technical significance, referring to humanity. If he means the former, then certainly God's kingdom is in the future. If he means the latter, then he seems to be referring to the natural human being in other terms. The other two uses of this phrase in the Pauline literature, Gal. 1:16 and Eph. 6:12, suggest the second option (cf. also Matt. 16:17 and Heb. 2:14). (emphasis added)

Let us also add the opinion of Perkins [Perk.Rz, 306]. For her, "flesh and blood" is:

...a Semitic expression for human being (as in Gal. 1:16). It often appears in contexts that stress creatureliness and mortality. (emphasis added)

We have thus seen what "flesh and blood" means; what about "flesh and bones"? This is not an anatomical description, but a reflection of the Jewish concept of resurrection, an emphasis on physicality. In the OT, it is the bones that are raised and preserved for the resurrection; hence, the phrase "connotes the physical reality of Jesus' resurrection." [ibid., 69] This was why Jewish belief held great concern for the preservation of the bones – hence, the use of ossuaries to keep them in one handy container. [Craig.ANTE, 144] Jesus is thus assuring the disciples that they are not merely seeing a ghost, but a resurrected body – the stress is on corporeality, not constituency. As Harris notes, "flesh and blood" would not be used for this sort of emphasis, not only because of the connotation of that phrase in association with weakness and corruptible life, but also because blood wasn't something that could be touched [Harr.RI, 54].

Carrier [ETJBG, 134–5] tries to soften this point by ignoring the clear distinction made here between what is meant by "flesh and blood" versus "flesh and bone." He also makes the standard error of assuming that Jesus showed his hands and feet to show his wounds; this is false, for as we noted elsewhere, while Jesus does

show off his hands and feet (in Luke), and while Thomas says he wants to see the wounds, and Jesus tells him to check out the locations, there is no actual indication that there were indeed wounds there. The "hands and feet" bit has to do with one of three "zones of interaction" recognized by anthropologists. Malina and Rohrbaugh in their social science commentary on the Synoptics [356] note that the hands and feet were a "zone of purposeful action" and "of external behavior or interaction with the environment." It includes the hands, feet, fingers, and legs. Thus the hands and feet are not presented as evidence of crucifixion but as evidence of physical ability to interact.

Carrier's further argument that Paul could not have believed that Jesus would eat fish is based on a poor reading of 1 Cor. 6:13, "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them." This verse says nothing about the resurrection body and at least the first part and very likely the second is in fact a Corinthian slogan Paul is answering (Witherington, Corinthians commentary, 168); but it is about the judgment God will place on sins, not to the transformation that accompanies resurrection.

2. "Paul can't be referring to a physical body, because in 1 Cor. 15:45 he says that Jesus became 'a life-giving spirit.'"

This does not follow from the text at all in terms of disproving a physical rez body. Paul says that Adam became a "living soul" -- he is not saying that Adam became a disembodied soul; nor is he, then, saying that Christ became a disembodied spirit. [Craig.ANTE, 137] In light of the explanation by Paul previous to this verse, it correlates to the natural body made at Adam's creation versus the "spiritual body" created at the Resurrection, or what Craig believes is better referred to as the "supernatural body." As Dahl [Dahl.RoB, 81-2] puts it:

God's eschatological plan demands that if a man is a body-animate, he can and will be a body-spiritual...That is to say, his ultimate destiny is to be a totality not simply animated by the spirit (which might be said of other kinds of 'flesh'), but a totality taken up into the life of the Spirit himself, so that the whole totality is so controlled and possessed by the Spirit that it shares his life-giving powers....the second man derives his glory and power direct from heaven.

And Jansen [Jans.RJC, 106–7] adds:

The stress is not on the relationship of Lord and Spirit but on the contrast between the physical body and the spiritual body. The exalted Christ not only has a spiritual body but is himself the life-giver, in contrast to the first man who became a living being...Paul views the first and the last Adam as inclusive figures (as in Romans 5) in whom we see the whole of human history.

Thus, this verse "contrasts the two heads of two different families" [Ladd.IBRz, 117] by way of their orientation. More practically, the parallelism Paul is attempting to Genesis 2:7 would have been lost had he referred to Jesus' body. [Craig.ANTE, 138] Wright (Resurrection of the Son of God, 340f) notes that verses 20–28 and 35–49 are "built on the foundation of Genesis 1 and 2" as part of Paul's theology of a new creation. (Note that Paul refers to the heavenly bodies, animals, the seeds of plants -- all elements of the Genesis creation.) Paul is "setting up categories from the created order to provide a template of understanding for the new creation...." [341] This verse then speaks of Christ as the new "spirit" means whereby life will be given, just as the "spirit" in Gen. 1 was the creative tool of the previous creative act.

3. "Paul could not mean a physical body -- he refers to a 'spiritual body'." Price suggests that this refers to a body that is immaterial, or some sort of angelic substance, spiritual in nature. Mormons may find this useful for their own doctrine of spirit as a sort of substance. The phrase actually means not a disembodied spirit, but a tangible body dominated and directed by the Holy Spirit – thus Craig prefers the term, "supernatural" body, in accordance with the Greek terminology:

152. pneumatikos, pnyoo-mat-ik-os'; from G4151; non-carnal, i.e. (humanly) ethereal (as opposed to gross), or (daemoniacally) a spirit (concr.), or (divinely) supernatural, regenerate, religious:--spiritual.

Harris points out that Greek adjectives ending in -ikos "carry a functional or ethical meaning" [Harr.RI, 120]. (Wright [351n] adds that adjectives of material end in -inos.) Consider these sample verses where, obviously, pneumatikos could by no means be referring to something immaterial:

Rom. 1:11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong...(Does this refer to a gift that is made of some "luminous angelic substance" or is simply immaterial?)

Gal. 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Is Paul talking to people who are CURRENTLY made of an "angelic substance" or are immaterial?)

And Wright adds these classical uses, showing that the word is used not for what something is made of, but what it is "animated by": Aristotle speaks of wombs "swollen with air" (hysterai pneumatikai) and Vitruvius refers to a machine "moved by wind" (pneumatikon organon). The point, then, being made by Craig is that Jesus' resurrection body was dominated and directed by the Holy Spirit – not "made of" spirit. "Spiritual" here is an adjective describing an orientation, not a status of existence.

Carrier [129] attempts to get around this difficulty by claiming that the distinction between –inos and –ikos is "not so clear-cut" as, he says, "Wright admits" (though in fact, Wright is not so firm as that; he does say it is "dangerous to generalize in so widespread and pluriform a language as Koine Greek" yet the distinction remains "generally true"; Carrier also ignores Wright's point that Paul was perfectly capable of coining a word like psychinos if needed) and while he gives us an alleged set of examples of words with dual meanings, he does not offer specific citations as to where they appear. He would further need to show that these examples were not potential cases of scribal error or poor spelling/usage, or occurred often enough to make this suggestion unlikely.

Pushback: But can Paul have imagined that Jesus's body during his earthly life was not already dominated and directed by the Holy Spirit? Ours, maybe, but his? One cannot ignore the parallel being drawn between Jesus and the resurrected believer throughout the chapter. And to say that "it is raised a spiritual body" means only "it is raised" is a piece of harmonizing sleight-of-hand...

Here our critic, Robert Price, has missed the point. Of COURSE Paul "imagined" that Jesus had an earthly body that was not "dominated and directed" by the Holy Spirit, as indeed the Gospels,

and even Paul, teach: It was a body that got hungry, got thirsty, wept, was born of a woman, was descended from David, and was crucified and killed. The post-resurrection body, on the other hand, was/is NOT subject to weaknesses, according to Paul. This is the whole thrust of the parallel between Jesus' RESURRECTED body – NOT His earthly one – and the believer's resurrected body! Paul said of Jesus in His earthly body: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." – Phil. 2:5–7. And: "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." – Rom. 8:3. The earthly body of Jesus was just as frail as ours; but it is the RESURRECTED body of Jesus that is under the domination of the Spirit – or as Craig puts it, is Spirit-oriented – not the earthly one, in either case. What Price has apparently done here is confused the idea that Jesus received COUNSEL and DIRECTION from the Holy Spirit with the idea that His bodily material was itself dominated by the Holy Spirit on the material, earthly level. The two concepts are in no way the same!

Wright (Resurrection of the Son of God, 315) adds the pertinent point that as it happens, the pagan philosophers of the day DID hold a "Mormon" view of spirit as "composed of material, albeit in finer particles." Thus indeed if Paul was teaching the sort of "spirit body" resurrection supposed, "his argument would be unnecessary, since many people in Corinth believed in that anyway." A "spiritual rez" thesis makes 1 Cor. 15 an argument for something that the Corinthians would have already believed in!

4. "Peter doesn't believe in a physical resurrection. He says that Jesus was 'put to death in flesh but made alive in spirit' (1 Peter 3:18). He also doesn't mention the empty tomb where he should (5:1)." We have dealt with the first cite with reference to the Mormons: the phrase here is by the Spirit, meaning the mode whereby Jesus was raised. The verb "quicken" is used elsewhere to describe physical resurrection (John 5:21, 1 Cor. 15). As for 5:1, I challenge critics to make a case that this was a place where anything like the empty tomb should be mentioned: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed..."

5. "Why not preach a bodily resurrection? It is a more concrete and wonderful proof of victory over death." How so? The body is not present, so "concreteness" is out the window. The empty tomb is explained no more easily. It is not "wonderful" unless you agree that the body is worth saving, which the pagans did not believe. It only makes the job harder to do.

6. "There were other instances of the doctrine being messed with; what about 1 Corinthians? Maybe the switch was one of these mess-ups." Such an objection merely begs the question, and arguing for "guilt by association" because of other mess-ups is not valid. Moreover, as noted, the Corinthian controversy was one that denied a physical resurrection! The only other mess-up supposed that the resurrection of believers had already taken place -- an issue of timing, not nature. Further speculation that the "spiritual rez" idea was lost or suppressed are no more than begged questions as well.

7. "Other Jewish sects did not believe in a physical resurrection. Why not Christianity also?" Be careful when this is offered; it is a trick question! Saying "physical resurrection" is like saying "round circle." Many writers (including some scholars, but mostly uninformed skeptics) speak of "spiritual" resurrection but they use the term improperly. To use a prime example, according to Josephus, the Essenes had a doctrine that "righteous souls go to a place of blessedness." It should be first noted (as by N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 326f) that it is possible that Josephus' description here is somewhat affected by his attempt to depict the various divisions of Judaism as Hellenistic philosophical schools. Read improperly, his description of the Pharisee belief suggests that they believed in reincarnation or metempsychosis! The best authority for Essene belief is Essene documents, and on the matter of resurrection, they are silent, though Wright, following Vermes, believes that at least some Essenes embraced physical resurrection.

That said, what if Josephus is indeed accurate? Then we do not have, by definition, "resurrection" -- we have apotheosis. Or actually, maybe we only have pre-resurrection stirrings. There are other passages like these which some speak of as counter to resurrection, but in these cases what we likely have (as in *Wisdom of Solomon* 3:1, 5:16, 6:17-20, and *Josephus on the Essenes*) is a description of life for those between death and resurrection, with no actually negative indications against resurrection. In any event it is unwise to proceed without caution and assert that we have

evidence that Christianity could have preached a "spiritual resurrection." It is especially dangerous to use cites uncritically, for as Wright also notes, in describing the intermediate state, Jewish writers sometimes borrowed Hellenistic language "which in its own context denotes a permanent disembodied state; but they still make it clear that bodily resurrection is the end they have in sight." (Such a mistake is indeed made by Porter -- see below -- when claiming that Pharasaic belief recorded by Josephus may not be resurrection -- it should be noted that even Porter shows that when Josephus found an idea among the Sadducees that was like one from the Greeks, or originated from the Greeks, he clearly said so.)

Finally, it is illicit to use Eccl. 12:7 as a point against physical resurrection in light of that book's genre (see also here).

Conclusion -- There is no way to escape the fact that the contextual background of the NT, and the NT itself, clearly teaches a Jesus whose body was physically resurrected into tangible form. Proponents of a "spiritual" resurrection are either misinformed or else are trying to "escape from the scandal of a physical resurrection." [Gundry, 163]

Addendum: "Firstfruits" of the Resurrection: In light of the above it has been shown tha certain skeptical contentions about Christ's order as the first resurrected are also wrong. The raising of Jairus' daughter, and of Samuel as a ghost, do not fit in this paradigm.

The one set of people who do fit in the paradigm are Matthew's resurrected saints. At this point some skeptics may bring in two verses:

Acts 26:23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

Wouldn't Matt's saints be "first"? In chronology, yes, but that is not the sense here. In Acts the word used for "first" is *protos*, and it can mean first in order, but it also can mean first in importance. For example, Matthew 10:2 reads, "Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother...." This is clearly a ranking of importance recognizing Peter as the "chief" of

the apostles in rank. If it were a numerical listing, we would read, "...second, Andrew..."

1 Cor. 15:20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

This verse is not relevant to chronology, either. The word "firstfruits" is *aparche*, which alludes to the Jewish firstfruits sacrifice. Matthew's saints were not sacrifices at all as Jesus was.

Addendum: Some New Criticisms A reader in New Zealand recently alerted me to a couple of essays that seek to dispute the core premise that resurrection in Judaism could only be conceived of as physical. Surprisingly neither essay deals with the essential background doctrine of the Semitic Totality Concept -- under which physical resurrection would be necessary for any sort of real life or afterlife -- or Perkins' thorough study, or Gundry's landmark soma study, though as it happens neither essay disputes that Paul and the NT teach a physical resurrection.

The first essay appears in a book titled Resurrection and is written by Stanley Porter, whose work we have appreciated often on the subject of rhetoric in the NT. Porter steps into a new realm here and posits that the Jewish concept of resurrection may have had origins in the Greco-Roman world (and here, his lack of notice of Semitic Totality is rather poignant). It is his contention however that -- despite the Greek disdain for the material -- the Greeks "did have a significant tradition of bodily resurrection" while there was also a "fairly large stream of Jewish tradition that did not entertain a bodily resurrection." [53]

Porter does interact with some of the cites from later Jewish literature above, but is compelled to devalue them by rather questionable means. 4 Ezra is dismissed because allegedly, bodily resurrection is "strongly implied" but "not explicitly outlined, especially as there appears to be a dichotomous view that separates bodies and souls." [64] Why the latter is of any relevance is difficult to see. Semitic Totality would see the body and spirit (not soul) as properly belonging together, not necessarily inseparable. Beyond that it is hard to see how much more explicit Porter wants things to be. 2 Baruch 50:2 is noted, but Bauckham is quoted as saying that it appeals not to resurrection in terms of resuscitation of the corpse,

but "asserts a raising in the exact form, not necessarily to be read as 'concerned with the material identity of the body.'" [65] To this we say, what of it? It remains physical resurrection. Jews of later periods, and we today with a cremation debate ongoing, may discuss whether the body raised need be materially identical to the original. As it stands our bodies shed cells constantly, and the ancients could see that their bodies changed and surely asked questions about how one with a missing leg would be resurrected. As a close Porter waves off this data as later than 70 AD, but it is hard to see how Jewish beliefs in the afterlife could undergo any radical change in just a few and from much earlier concepts. (Porter excuses away Daniel 12:2 for example by dating Daniel to the Hellenistic period!)

Porter then attempts to dig resurrection out of Greco-Roman sources, but after giving several examples of beliefs concerning merely the afterlife (rewards and punishment, or survival of the spirit) and reincarnation, Porter ends up with no actual example of resurrection from the classical Greek writers and thinkers, and from the mystery religions pulls out the story of Dionysus being torn up by the Titans (note what our classical scholar said there about this story being unlikely to be known by Palestinian Jews), a story of Isis which credits her with the power to raise others from the dead (using indeed the word anastasis), and the example of Mithraism (!) which by his own description does not even teach bodily restoration! (As an aside, Porter bewilderingly uses a grossly outdated source from 1925 for his data on Mithraism!) Other than this Porter offers an example from Euripides of a character in a play who dies, and whose husband goes through hell and high water so to speak to get her back -- which he does, physically indeed, though by completely unspecified means. Porter admits that this is no clear resurrection (as he supposes the woman died again later), but rather a revivification. And this we are to take as a "significant tradition"! It is rather better to say that Porter has overstated his case, and has done so without consideration of a very significant part of the paradigm -- Semitic Totality.

I am pleased now to note (7/22/03) that some of these very criticisms have been laid against Porter's essay by none other than N. T. Wright in his latest mega-volume, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. As I noted when I read Porter's essay, most of what he offers is not even relevant to resurrection, only proving that there

was a Greco-Roman concept of afterlife with variable ideas attached to it. The story of the returned woman (whose name is Alcestis) Wright also agrees seems to be a revivification, but also adds, having provided several examples, that "intelligent pagans contemporary with early Christianity knew about such stories, and dismissed them as mythic fictions." [67] Readers of this story "would not have thought of the story as in any way realistic." The example is, after all, from a play, and as Wright puts it, "One might as well invoke the Ring cycle as evidence of marital and family customs among the nineteenth-century German bourgeoisie."

A shorter but just as overstated case may be found in O'Collins' *The Easter Jesus* [102ff]. O'Collins suggests that resurrection "may possibly have come from Persian religious thought into Judaism", though scholars of this field are divided on the subject and a common philosophical view of Totality is the more likely reason for the resemblance (see here, especially Zaehner's note). O'Collins notes Baruch 50:2, but somehow considers contradictory points in Baruch 51 which speak of the just as "transformed into the splendour of angels" or the "splendour of glory". He also jumps in the same sentence to an arbitrary conclusion about the writer of *Wisdom of Solomon*: "He stresses the spiritual elements of the after-life and -- to say the least -- leaves unclear the fate of the body. Here we seem to meet belief in life after death involving no body at all." (Emphasis added.) How does one jump from "unclear" to "no" so easily? In the end O'Collins provides no substantial evidence for his closing claim that there was no unique Jewish view of resurrection.

Discuss this article here.

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