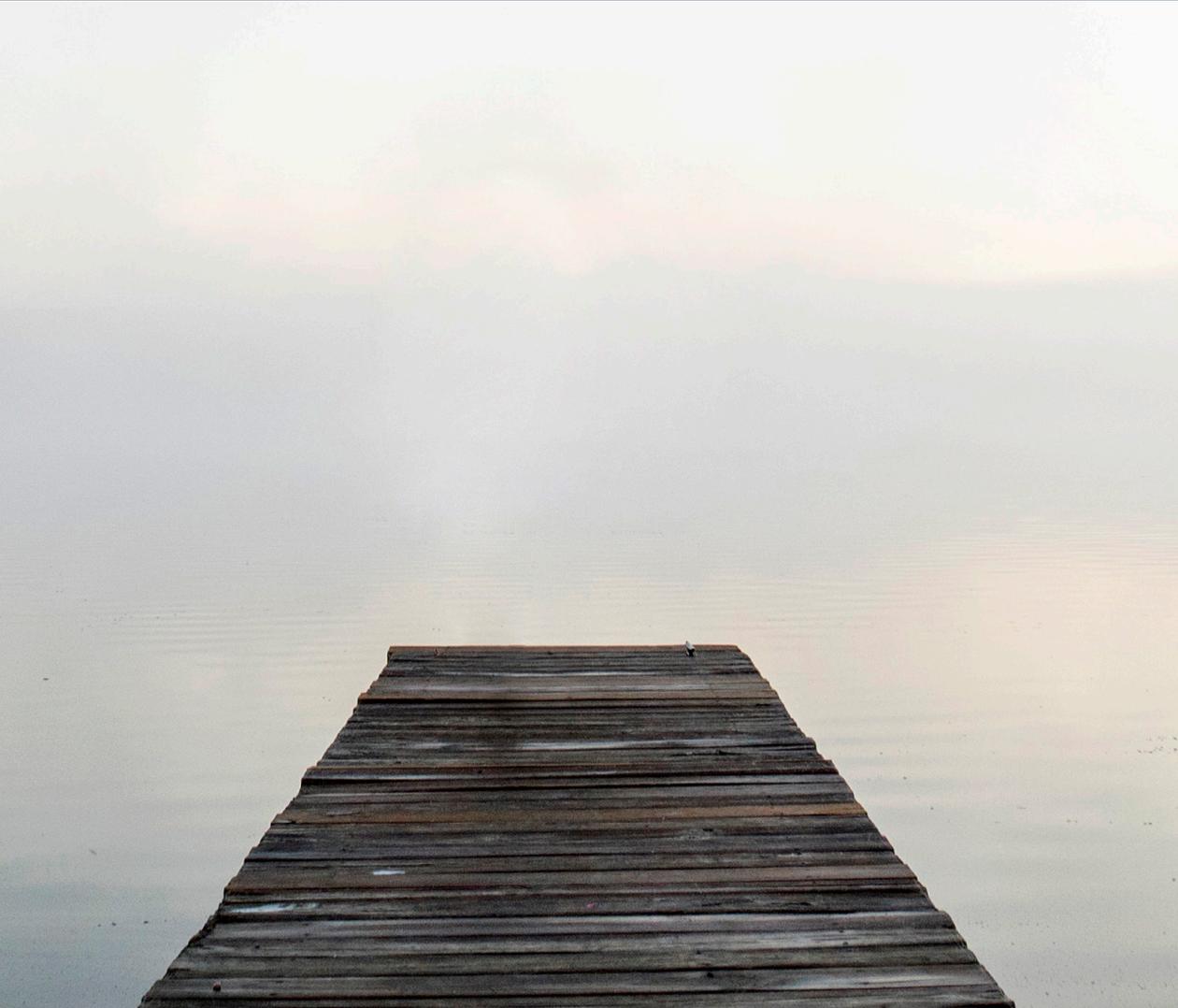


APOLOGETICS



SOUTHWESTERN
JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Souls and Christian Eschatology: A Critique of Christian Physicalism

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The Definition of Chalcedon enjoins us to confess that Jesus Christ is “perfect” both in deity and human-ness, and that he is “actually God and actually man, with a rational soul and a body. He is of the same reality ... as we ourselves as far as his human-ness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted.”¹ Such a confession intertwines subtle but important Christological and anthropological questions. We are prompted to consider, for example, the nature of the Incarnation, as well as the death and Resurrection of Christ.² But these considerations cannot be isolated from such anthropological questions as, What does it mean to be human? What *is* a human: a soul, a soul and body, or simply a body with a brain?

Regarding the composition of human beings, most thinkers—Christian and non-Christian alike—traditionally have held that a human person is a unity of two distinct entities: one physical (the body) and one immaterial (the soul). It is generally acknowledged that the historic position of Christendom is (some sort of) “dualism,” that is, the view that human persons are composites of body and soul such that it is possible for them to survive the separation of the soul from the body. So Augustine: “the soul is united to the body in the unity of the person. . . . For, if the soul is not mistaken about its nature, it grasps that it is incorporeal.”³ “It must necessarily be allowed that the principle of intellectual operation,” agrees Aquinas, “which we call the soul of a man, is a principle both incorporeal and subsistent.”⁴ The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) distinguishes sharply between body and soul:

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption;
but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immor-

¹ “The Definition of Chalcedon,” in *Creeeds of the Churches*, 3rd ed., ed. John H. Leith (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 35–36.

² Oliver Crisp offers a lucid discussion of these questions in a Christological context in his *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 137–54.

³ Augustine, *Letters 100–155*, trans. Roland Teske, S.J. (New York: New City Press, 2003), 137.11. See also Bruno Niederbacher, “The Human Soul: Augustine’s Case for Soul-Body Dualism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 2nd ed., ed. David Vincent Meconi and Eleonore Stump (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 125–41.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, in *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1948), q. 75, a. 2.

tal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous . . . are received in the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies: and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain . . . reserved to the judgment of the great day. Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.⁵

For his part, Calvin likewise affirms “that man consists of a soul and a body,” where “soul” refers to “an immortal yet created essence, which is [man’s] nobler part.”⁶ Whether because it is taken as the straightforward teaching of Scripture, as being entailed by doctrinal commitments, or simply as the common-sense account of one’s irreducible first-person point of view, soul-body dualism remains the prevailing view in the Christian tradition.⁷ And yet dualism increasingly is being rejected by the unlikeliest of scholars: *Christian* scholars.

A growing number of Christian scholars, including theologians, philosophers, and exegetes, a group collectively referred to as “Christian physicalists,” are adopting the claim that humans are wholly physical beings. Although they preserve the belief that God is non-physical, Christian physicalists argue that human beings neither possess nor are identical to non-physical souls. But is such a position viable as a distinctly *Christian* anthropology? After expanding our understanding of the notion of “physicalism,” I shall focus our attention on its dominant expressions amongst Christian physicalists, before ultimately arguing that each expression fails to account for certain fundamental Christian doctrines. For this reason, I argue, Christian physicalism ought to be rejected as an unsuitable anthropology for Christians.

Physicalism

The term “physicalism” can be a slippery one. In some usages it refers to the thesis that there is no entity in existence that is not a purely physical entity, a gloss perhaps more suitably labeled “global physicalism.” We are not presently interested in global physicalism. Our interest, rather, is “physicalism” intended as a certain ontology of human persons, including

⁵“The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646),” in *Creeds of the Churches*, 228.

⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1.15.2 (cf. 1.15.6).

⁷Further examples abound. Paul L. Gavrilyuk demonstrates the dominance of anthropological dualism amongst the Patristics in his “The Incorporability of the Soul in Patristic Thought,” in *Christian Physicalism? Philosophical Theological Criticisms*, ed. R. Keith Loftin and Joshua R. Farris (New York: Lexington Books, 2017), 1–26. See also John W. Cooper, “Scripture and Philosophy on the Unity of Body and Soul: An Integrative Method for Theological Anthropology,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (New York: Routledge, 2015), 27–42.

their consciousness. Against the backdrop of naturalism's strengthening influence, the twentieth century saw dualism widely replaced by views of human persons as wholly physical beings. This trend has found its stride in the present century, as physical science increasingly is regarded as trumping other disciplines in the search for knowledge.⁸ This is particularly evident in the influence exerted by neuroscientific claims that functions and features of human persons traditionally attributed to immaterial souls are explainable entirely in terms of the physical brain/body. As Nancey Murphy, a Christian theologian at Fuller Theological Seminary, writes: "Science has provided a massive amount of evidence suggesting that we need not postulate the existence of an entity such as a soul or mind in order to explain life and consciousness."⁹ Thus, in Murphy's estimation, "all of the functions once attributed to the soul (perception, reason, emotion, moral awareness, even religious experience) are yielding to brain studies."¹⁰ Daniel Dennett, himself having no interest in theology, is customarily forthright on this score:

This fundamentally antiscientific stance of dualism is, to my mind, its most disqualifying feature, and is the reason why . . . I adopt the apparently dogmatic rule that dualism is to be avoided *at all costs*. It is not that I think I can give a knock-down proof that dualism, in all its forms, is false or incoherent, but that, given the way dualism wallows in mystery, *accepting dualism is giving up*.¹¹

While the truth of these claims may be dubious, they do reveal the perception that neuroscience has displaced belief in the soul in favor of physicalism.

Surveying the Physicalist Landscape

While all physicalists agree in denying that human persons are (or have) substantial, immaterial souls, it is far trickier to find a widely-satisfactory articulation of just what *is* physicalism. This is largely the focus of Daniel Stoljar's influential book *Physicalism*.¹² Although sympathetic to the view, Stoljar is convinced "that there is no thesis of physicalism that is both

⁸ David Papineau presents a helpful explanation of this phenomenon in "The Rise of Physicalism," in *Physicalism and Its Discontents*, ed. Carl Gillett and Barry Loewer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3–36.

⁹ Nancey Murphy, "Human Nature: Historical, Scientific and Religious Issues," in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 18.

¹⁰ Nancey Murphy, "Natural Science," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 556.

¹¹ Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York: Back Bay, 1991), 37.

¹² Daniel Stoljar, *Physicalism* (New York: Routledge, 2010). Marc Cortez summarizes some of these same difficulties in his *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies: An Exercise in*

true and deserving of the name,” a circumstance due in no small part to the difficulty of specifying just what it is to be *physical*.¹³ For present purposes, it will be adequate to point to paradigm cases of physical objects—rocks or atoms, for example—and say that *being physical* is *being like one of these*. Happily, there is sufficient agreement amongst physicalists about human persons to adopt the following as a working definition: physicalism is the thesis that all features (e.g., bicuspid, biceps, and brains) and functions (whether mental, physical, or spiritual) of human beings can be fully accounted for in terms of the physical (or microphysical).¹⁴ And this, of course, spells the wholesale rejection of dualism.

Reductive Physicalism

Broadly speaking, physicalist views divide into two categories: reductive and non-reductive versions. The former, sometimes also referred to as the “identity theory,” is best understood as claiming that mental states (that is, states such as *being in pain* or *intending to read Aristotle* or *believing that Samwise was the real hero*) are *identical to* or *reduce to* brain states/processes.¹⁵ In other words, reductionists tend to hold that talk of mental or psychological states will (eventually) reduce to talk of physics. As Paul Churchland puts it:

The red surface of an apple does not *look* like a matrix of molecules reflecting photons at certain critical wave-lengths, but that is what it is. The sound of a flute does not *sound* like a sinusoidal compression wave train in the atmosphere, but that is what it is. The warmth of the summer air does not *feel* like the mean kinetic energy of millions of tiny molecules, but that is what it is. If one’s pains and hopes and beliefs do not introspectively seem like electrochemical states in a neural network, that may be only because our faculty of introspection, like our other senses, is not sufficiently penetrating to reveal such hidden details.¹⁶

Christological Anthropology and Its Significance for the Mind/Body Debate (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 116ff.

¹³ Stoljar, *Physicalism*, 90. See also his “Two Conceptions of the Physical,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62/2 (March 2001): 253–81. Cf. Jaegwon Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 33.

¹⁴ We might follow Geoffrey Maddell in his understanding of the word “physical.” He writes: “there is a notion of the physical which seems reasonably clear: what is physical is that which the physical sciences recognise to be such, and that in turn suggests a view of the universe as consisting of assemblies of elementary particles, a view which the great majority of those who call themselves materialists operate with.” Geoffrey Maddell, *Mind & Materialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 5.

¹⁵ Or, as Jaegwon Kim puts it, “reductive physicalism defends the position that mental properties are reducible to, and therefore can be identified with, physical properties.” Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2011), 57.

¹⁶ Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 15.

This is so, it is held, despite the *appearance* that some mental states transcend or “break free” of the physical; if we can gain exhaustive knowledge of Paul’s physical properties, then we shall have everything we need in order to have exhaustive knowledge of Paul’s mental properties. Thus, as D.M. Armstrong summarizes,

What does modern science have to say about the nature of man? . . . I think it is true to say that one view is steadily gaining ground, so that it bids fair to become established scientific doctrine. This is the view that we can give a complete account of man *in purely physico-chemical terms* . . . I think it is fair to say that those scientists who still reject the physico-chemical account of man do so primarily for philosophical, or moral, or religious reasons, and only secondarily, and half-heartedly, for reasons of scientific detail. . . .

For me, then, and for many philosophers who think like me, the moral is clear. We must try to work out an account of the nature of mind which is compatible with the view that man is nothing but a physico-chemical mechanism.¹⁷

To be clear, there are disagreements amongst reductive physicalists—including, for example, whether or not mental states should (or even can) be reduced to behaviors, and whether every *type* of mental state can be identified with some *type* of brain state.¹⁸

Christian physicalists overwhelmingly have rejected the reductive version(s) of physicalism, and this for various reasons. Nancey Murphy writes that she rejects the “contemporary philosophical views that say that the person is ‘nothing but’ a body,” desiring instead to “explain how we can claim that we *are* our bodies, yet without denying the ‘higher’ capacities that we think of as being essential for our humanness: rationality, emotion, morality, free will, and, most important, the capacity to be in relationship with God.”¹⁹ Murphy’s desire to preserve these essential capacities is well-placed, it seems to me, since they are needed for even a minimalist Christianity to be true. One must *freely trust Christ* and *believe Jesus is truly God*, after all. Moreover, Christian physicalists are doubtlessly keen to avoid the hard problem of accounting for the *qualia* (that is, the “what it is like” texture or quality) of our conscious experiences. The idea is that when I have a certain experi-

¹⁷ D.M. Armstrong, “The Nature of Mind,” in *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 1, ed. Ned Block (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 191.

¹⁸ Some of these are explored in E.J. Lowe, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapter three. Philosophers customarily distinguish between general sorts of things (types) and particular/concrete instances thereof (tokens), such as baseball games and game seven of the 2016 World Series.

¹⁹ Nancey Murphy, “Human Nature: Historical, Scientific, and Religious Issues,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, 2.

ence—watching my son take his first steps, say—there is a subjective quality to my experience for which no amount of third-person (*viz.*, physical) data can account.²⁰ Any third-person observer will note the expression on my face and adjudge correctly that I am a happy and proud daddy, but I and I alone have unique access to knowing *what it is like* for me to watch my son take his first steps. The concern to preserve a meaningful distinction between non-physical mental properties and physical properties (of the brain) is widely shared amongst Christian physicalists, and indeed it is largely the attempt to address this concern that motivates their rejection of reductive physicalism in favor of non-reductive physicalism.

Non-Reductive Physicalism

Whereas reductive physicalists insist that all mental states are identical to or reduce to brain states/processes, non-reductive physicalists seek to preserve mental states as features (*viz.*, properties or functions) of human persons that do not reduce ontologically to anything physical (such as brain states/processes). As one proponent of this view, Kevin Corcoran, puts it: “if something does not so much as have a capacity for intentional states, it seems equally obvious that that thing is not a candidate for personhood. So if a being lacks a capacity for intentional states, then that being, whatever it is, is not a person.”²¹ It therefore is not the case, on this view, that Paul’s being in love is ontologically identical to or reducible to any electro-chemical brain property, although it *is* the case that Paul’s mental state of *being in love* reduces to some token physical state (perhaps some arrangement or relations between Paul’s various physical properties). In short, most non-reductive physicalists hold that specific *types* of mental states do not generally reduce to specific *types* of physical states, although every *token* mental state reduces to some *token* physical state. A significant motivation for this position is the desire to deny that all experiences of pain, for example, are reducible to some specific physico-chemical brain state. It seems that both Paul and Paul’s dog Rover can both experience the same type of pain experience, but they are plainly not experiencing the same type of physico-chemical brain states! There is considerable variety among non-reductive physicalists when it comes to specifying just what is the relationship between Paul’s “mental” state and Paul’s “physical” state(s).²²

²⁰This sort of problem is developed in Howard Robinson, “Qualia, Qualities, and Our Conception of the Physical World,” in *After Physicalism*, ed. Benedikt Paul Göcke (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 231–63. See also Frank Jackson’s “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1982): 127–36.

²¹Kevin Corcoran, “The Constitution View of Persons,” in *In Search of the Soul*, ed. Joel B. Green and Stuart L. Palmer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 160.

²²The two most dominant conceptions of this relationship are that one’s mental states either *supervene* on one’s physical properties or that one’s mental states are such in virtue of their *function* in human life. These views are helpfully introduced in William Jaworski, *Philosophy of Mind: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), chapter six;

Christian Physicalism

With a working knowledge of the difference between reductive and non-reductive physicalism in hand, let us turn our attention to “Christian physicalism” (CP). Now, CP is not to be understood as a third variety of physicalism beyond the reductive and non-reductive versions. It is perhaps best to think of CP as a family of views, all of which both claim Christian doctrine and deny that human persons are (or have) substantial, immaterial souls. Although he does not employ the “CP” label, New Testament scholar Joel Green, himself a Christian physicalist, expresses the latter shared commitment clearly:

Various forms of *monism* defended among Christians require no second, metaphysical entity, such as a soul or spirit, to account for human capacities and distinctives, while insisting that human behavior cannot be explained exhaustively with recourse to genetics or neuroscience. Using various models, the monists with whom I am concerned argue that the phenomenological experiences that we label “soul” [*sic*] are neither reducible to brain activity nor evidence of a substantial, ontological entity such as a “soul,” but rather represent essential aspects or capacities of the self.²³

Thus, CP may be understood as the conjunction of Christian theological commitment and non-reductive physicalism regarding human persons. To my knowledge, all Christian physicalists opt for a non-reductive version of physicalism.

Constitutionalism

Amidst the numerous ontologies of human persons championed within the CP camp, two views (currently) stand out as dominant: the constitution view and animalism. It is important to note that neither view attempts to be a distinctly Christian anthropology *per se*; plenty of constitutionalists and animalists have no interest in Christian theological commitment.

Amongst adherents of the constitution view (also called simply “constitutionalism”), the contributions of Lynne Rudder Baker have outstripped those of her fellow Christian physicalists. Beginning with her 1995 article “Need A Christian be a Mind/Body Dualist?” Baker has argued “that what we now know about nature renders untenable the idea of a human person as

and James D. Madden, *Mind, Matter & Nature: A Thomist Proposal for the Philosophy of Mind* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), chapter four.

²³Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 31. Green elaborates his stance in “Why the *Imago Dei* Should Not Be Identified with the Soul,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, 179–90.

consisting, even in part, of an immaterial soul.”²⁴ Baker argues in *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* that one is a “human” in virtue of being constituted by a human body, and one is a “person” in virtue (essentially) of having the capacity for the first-person perspective.²⁵ In short, human persons are constituted by their physical bodies but nevertheless are not *identical* to them. Kevin Corcoran likewise advocates the constitution view in his *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul*,²⁶ and his edited 2001 volume *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons* is among the most frequently cited works in the literature.²⁷

What, according to constitutionalists, is meant by the “first-person perspective”? As Baker explains it, “the first-person perspective is a very peculiar ability that all and only persons have. It is the ability to think of oneself without the use of any name, description or demonstrative; it is the ability to conceive of oneself as oneself, from the inside, as it were.”²⁸ So, the first-person perspective is neither a mental state nor a mere point-of-view (which non-personal things, such as Fido the dog, have) but rather a certain capacity, namely the capacity to conceive of oneself *as oneself*. On the constitution view, this capacity is sufficient for being a person; being a person is not a matter of being made of certain “stuff” or of having or being any type of body. As Corcoran explains:

In the case of persons and bodies, if every property had by the one is had by the other, then the English words *person* and *body* are two terms that refer to a single thing, like Superman and Clark Kent refer to the same guy. But if one has a property lacked by the other, or vice versa, then persons and bodies are *not* identical. Are persons and bodies identical? Are there properties had by persons that are lacked by bodies or had by bodies that are lacked by persons? I believe there are.²⁹

Thus, on the constitution view, there is at least one property had by the human person Paul that is not had by Paul’s physical body. Moreover, as

²⁴ Lynne Rudder Baker, “Need A Christian be a Mind/Body Dualist?” *Faith and Philosophy* 12/4 (1995): 502.

²⁵ Lynne Rudder Baker, *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Baker summarizes her view and addresses some objections in “Materialism with a Human Face,” in *Soul, Body, and Survival*, ed. Kevin Corcoran (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001) as well as in “Christian Materialism in a Scientific Age,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 70/1 (2011): 47–59.

²⁶ Kevin Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006).

²⁷ Kevin Corcoran, ed., *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

²⁸ Lynne Rudder Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life: An Essay in Practical Realism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 69. Cf. Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature*, 50f.

²⁹ Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature*, 49.

Baker correctly observes, “a molecule-for-molecule qualitative duplicate of you would not be you, and would not have your first-person perspective. She would start out with a first-person perspective that was qualitatively just like yours; but the qualitative indistinguishability would be short-lived, as you and your duplicate looked out on the room from different perspectives.”³⁰ So far as it is described here, the dualist may find aspects to admire about the constitutionalist’s view of persons, but what makes the constitution view a *physicalist* view is its claim that one is a “human” because of being constituted by a human body.

“Constitution” is a relational term. What does it mean to be “constituted by” something? Consider the common example of a plaster statuette—say, the plaster statuette of Shakespeare before me in my office. Baker and Corcoran will want to distinguish between the *statuette* and the *plaster* on the grounds that, although they are co-spatial, the two are not identical: if we place my Shakespeare statuette into a sealed container and crush it into a thousand pieces, then, although the statuette of Shakespeare is destroyed, the plaster itself remains. The idea is that just because the plaster constitutes the Shakespeare statuette, the plaster is nevertheless neither a part of nor identical to the Shakespeare statuette.³¹

Christian physicalists who are constitutionalists understand the relation between the physical body (or physical organism or living animal) that constitutes me and the human person that *is* me in a way similar to how the plaster relates to the statuette of Shakespeare—although the statuette of Shakespeare is not, of course, a human person. The statuette of Shakespeare weighs three pounds precisely because it stands in the *constituted by* relation to a three-pound lump of plaster, and the statuette of Shakespeare will continue to have that property until it ceases to be related constitutionally to the lump of plaster. Once again: the physical body that constitutes me and the human person that *is* me are not to be thought identical, not least because the body that constitutes me does not have my first-person perspective.

Animalism

Amongst proponents of animalism, Peter van Inwagen and Trenton Merricks have made notable contributions to the Christian physicalist literature. For their part, animalists reject the constitution view’s underlying account of material constitution, holding instead that a person *just is* a human organism: “animalism says that each of us is numerically identical with an animal: there is a certain organism, and you and it are one and the

³⁰ Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life*, 69–70.

³¹ Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life*, 32ff and Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature*, 66.

same.”³² The idea is that a human person is one and the same thing as an animal of the *human* kind.

In differentiating animalism and constitutionalism, it will be helpful to think about the different “persistence conditions” for personal identity operative within each. This highlights an important point of departure between the two. When contemplating the notion of personal identity, consider the question “In virtue of what may we assert that the Keith who’s typing this article (on 26 January 2018) is identical to the Keith who was married thirteen years ago (on 11 December 2004)?” What are the conditions, in other words, that must be met in order to explain the persistence of Keith’s identity over the years? To be clear, we’re interested in knowing how *Keith on 11 December 2004* is numerically one and the same as (and not simply *qualitatively* indistinguishable from) *Keith on 26 January 2018*. In a word, we’re interested in token-identity. The answer(s) to this question are called “persistence conditions.”³³

Whereas the constitution view understands the physical body (or physical organism or living animal) that constitutes me and the human person that *is* me in a way similar to how the plaster relates to the statuette of Shakespeare, animalists demur. On the constitution view, “I” shall continue in existence just so long as *my* first-person perspective is exemplified. Animalists, on the other hand, will insist that “my” persistence conditions are entirely a biological matter: whatever else the view entails, it is not possible for a human person to exist without his or her physical body.³⁴

Focusing on its claim of biological continuity will allow us to pinpoint an important feature of animalism. In the animalist’s estimation, what is it that makes one human organism the same organism at a later time? It cannot be (on pain of raising the specter of mereological essentialism) the physical stuff comprising the organism, since a human organism is constantly losing and gaining parts over time through mitosis and other such events. By way of response, animalists typically point to an underlying biological process called “Life.” It is the persistence of this process, it is claimed, that does the trick. Life is the “self-organizing biological event that maintains the organism’s complex internal structure” amidst the perpetual need to “take in new particles, reconfigure and assimilate them into its living fabric, and expel those that are no longer useful to it.”³⁵ In other words, what makes an organism at one time identical to an organism at a later time is the fact that each is “caught up in” the same Life: so long as the same biological event of Life

³² Eric T. Olson, *What Are We? A Study in Personal Ontology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24. The edited collection *Animalism: New Essays on Persons, Animals, and Identity*, ed. Stephan Blatti and Paul F. Snowdon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) develops and critiques the animalist view.

³³ Michael Rea, *Metaphysics: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 103.

³⁴ This “biological approach” is considered in Andrew M. Bailey’s “Animalism,” *Philosophy Compass* 10 (2015): 867–83.

³⁵ Olsen, *What Are We?* 28.

continues, the organism “Keith” persists.³⁶ If Keith at December of 2004 is caught up in one Life but Keith at January of 2018 is caught up in a different Life, then we are not talking about numerically identical Keiths. The big question for animalism, then, is whether the various activities comprising the “Life” process can, in fact, continue over time. However, as Brandon Rickabaugh has pointed out,

A life is an event composed of a collection of separate relation instances and atomic parts, and as parts are replaced, so are the relation instances. Because of this inherent process, a life at $t1$ is not numerically identical to a life at $t2$. Although the relation types and part types may remain, the specific relation tokens and part tokens are expelled and replaced. That is, the life at $t2$ might have the same type of structure and same type of parts as the life at $t1$, although the life at $t2$ does not have the numerically identical structure or the numerically identical parts as the life at $t1$. The life just is this storm of parts and relation instances. It isn't as if there is some fundamental thing that has various separable parts and relation instances. A life just is the storm, the collection of parts and relations. The result is that a life does not endure.³⁷

What this means is that, on animalism, the Life of Keith at December of 2004 involves biological relations of the same *type* as the Life of Keith at January of 2018 along with biological materials (the “stuff”) of the same *type*. The particular *tokens* of biological material and the particular *tokens* of biological relations comprising the Life of Keith at December of 2004 are not the same as those comprising the Life of Keith at January of 2018, with the consequence that the “Life” of the former Keith simply cannot furnish any persistence conditions involving the latter Keith.

Christian Physicalism, the Intermediate State, and Resurrection

Christians traditionally are committed to belief both in a post-mortem intermediate state and the bodily resurrection of the dead. Although these are theologically rich doctrines, involving far more than the mere continuation of existence, it will be sufficient for our purposes to take these as jointly affirming that numerically one and the same person:

³⁶ Olsen, *What Are We?* 29. R.T. Mullins and I discuss this in our “Physicalism, Divine Eternality, and Life Everlasting,” in *Christian Physicalism?* 108–12.

³⁷ Brandon Rickabaugh, 9ff, of “An Enduring Problem for Animalism,” presented at the Perspectives on the First-Person Pronoun “I”: Looking at Metaphysics, Linguistics and Neuroscience, at Durham University (Durham, England) May 16 to May 18, 2014. Available online at www.brandonrickabaugh.com.

1. Exists as physically embodied at time t_1
2. Following physical death, exists as disembodied from $t_2 \dots t_\phi$
3. Following t_ϕ and bodily resurrection, exists (thereafter) as embodied, where one's resurrection body is numerically identical to one's pre-mortem body

To be clear, 3 should not be taken as asserting that the continuation of one's personal identity depends upon one's resurrection body being numerically identical to one's pre-mortem body. (Whether that is the case or not simply is not in view here.) It is traditionally the case, though, that it has been held that one's resurrection body is numerically identical to one's pre-mortem body (not least because this is the pattern set by Christ's experience in the Resurrection, as the apostle Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 15:20–49). This does not mean that one's resurrection body has the exact same physical or micro-physical parts as one's pre-mortem body. One's pre-mortem body is numerically identical with itself over time, but obviously does not share the same physical or micro-physical parts over time, after all. At any rate, biblical and theological explications of the above doctrines are plentiful, and we will proceed on the assumption that each is well-established.³⁸ Given their deep roots in the Christian tradition, we should be reluctant to abandon belief in these doctrines. Thus, I suggest that if one's anthropology cannot account for belief both in a post-mortem intermediate state and the bodily resurrection of the dead, then, to that extent, one's anthropology cannot be countenanced an acceptably *Christian* anthropology.³⁹

Christian physicalists, of course, cannot affirm 2 in any literal sense. Acknowledging this, Nancey Murphy writes:

All that physicalist anthropology strictly *requires* . . . are one or two adjustments: one needs to give up or finesse the doctrine of the intermediate state if that has been an important part of one's tradition. It can be finessed by calling into question the meaningfulness of putting the experiences of those who are with God on an earthly timeline. One needs also to understand resurrection differently: not re-clothing of a "naked" soul with a (new) body, but rather restoring the whole person to life—a new transformed kind of life.⁴⁰

³⁸ See, for example, N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 82–84, 130ff, 190–206; John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), *passim*; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1077–1100.

³⁹ To be clear, I am not arguing that CP is false by way of *assuming* there is an intermediate state of disembodied experience. The claim, rather, is that given the deeply rooted status of these doctrines within Christian theological tradition, the incompatibility of CP with these doctrines is sufficient grounds for rejecting CP.

⁴⁰ Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23.

Setting aside the red herrings that are Murphy's mention of "putting" believers who are in the intermediate state "on an earthly timeline" and her seeming implication that the traditional view of resurrection denies restoration of "the whole person" to a truly "transformed kind of life," one is keenly interested in what "adjustments" to these doctrines are on offer from Christian physicalists. Whatever adjustments are offered, it is important to notice that they are offered as revisions of the traditional Christian commitment to a literal state of disembodied existence, throughout which a person's numerical identity is preserved, following their physical death until the point of bodily resurrection. John Cooper is surely correct in concluding that "if it is false that the soul—the essential person or self—can survive separation from the body, if human beings are monistic or ontologically holistic beings, then this eschatological scenario [viz., 2 above] is a flat impossibility."⁴¹

On the other hand—and to their credit—Christian physicalists do tend to view the Christian doctrine of resurrection as a test case for their views. Baker has addressed the doctrine of resurrection in conjunction with the constitution view in several places.⁴² Kevin Corcoran has, as well.⁴³ On the constitution view, in order to exist as a human person, one must be constituted by a body—but it is not necessary that any particular person be constituted by any particular body; constitution does not, recall, equate to identity. Now, it is integral to the Christian understanding that it must be one and the same person who lives on earth (first as a sinner, then as one redeemed by Christ) who then persists through the intermediate state and who later experiences bodily resurrection. If numerical identity is not so preserved, after all, then none of those who populate the eschatological "final state" (that is, all those who experience bodily resurrection) will be redeemed sinners. Indeed, such a denial would seem to controvert the Christian hope of salvation, in that the *Keith who accepts Christ as his Savior in 1988* would cease existing at physical death and be replaced by the qualitatively similar but not numerically identical *Keith who has a resurrection body and enjoys the final state with God*.⁴⁴ If such a conclusion is to be avoided, the constitutionalist must explain how *Keith who accepts Christ as his Savior in 1988's* first-person perspective continues to be exemplified between his ceasing to be constituted by his earthly/physical body (at physical death) and "his" coming to be constituted by his resurrection body. In reply, Baker suggests that "there is no intermediate state, but that [Keith] (temporarily) *does not exist in the interim*."⁴⁵ The idea, she explains, is that at resurrection "God reassembles the atoms that constituted

⁴¹ Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, 105.

⁴² See Lynne Rudder Baker, "Material Persons and the Doctrine of Resurrection," *Faith and Philosophy* 18/2 (2001): 151–67; and Lynne Rudder Baker, "Persons and the Metaphysics of Resurrection," *Religious Studies* 43/3 (2007): 333–48, and her "Christian Materialism in a Scientific Age."

⁴³ "Constitution, Resurrection, and Relationality," in *Personal Identity and Resurrection: How Do We Survive Our Death?* ed. Georg Gasser (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 191–206.

⁴⁴ Here, Baker would agree. Cf. "Persons and the Metaphysics of Resurrection," 339.

⁴⁵ Baker, "Need A Christian be a Mind/Body Dualist?," 499 (emphasis added).

[Keith] and restores the relationships that they bore to one another during [Keith's] natural life, and thereby 're-creates' [Keith] . . . During the time that [Keith] does not exist, some of [Keith's] atoms still do, and they provide the basis for [Keith's] resurrection body to be a continuant of [Keith's] biological body."⁴⁶ Such a re-interpretation of the Christian understanding invites more than a few questions, and we may well ask how it is that this view avoids the above concern and guarantees Keith's numerical identity. In addressing this, Baker avers that "there is no informative non-circular answer to the question: 'In virtue of what do person P1 at t_1 and person P2 at t_2 have the same first-person perspective over time?' It is just a primitive, un-analysable fact that some future person is I; but there is a fact of the matter nonetheless."⁴⁷ One may well regard this claim as somewhat unsatisfying, however, especially in light of Baker's further appeal that God may simply "decree" that a given resurrection (that is, a *new*) body have earthly-Keith's first-person perspective, there being little explanatory recourse other than asserting that God miraculously makes it so.⁴⁸

In claiming that a human person *just is* a biological animal, and that it is not possible for one to exist without one's body, animalists face the same difficult questions regarding these doctrinal considerations. In considering the implications of animalism for the resurrection, Peter van Inwagen long has argued that, upon death, God may well replace one's corpse (or at least the "core person") with a simulacrum in order to preserve one's existence—that is, the animal and its particular Life and biological parts with their particular structure—for future resurrection.⁴⁹ The idea is that, at one's physical death, God literally replaces one's corpse so that what is buried is a simulacrum, allowing God to whisk one away for preservation till one is re-started or re-constituted or restored to life. This move is essential for van Inwagen, since if a person's body ceases to exist (dead bodies deteriorate, after all) then that person ceases to exist.⁵⁰ But as is frequently observed, it is difficult to see how one's earthly/biological body could be identical to a resurrection body. This is because, given that one's earthly/biological body is corruptible and that resurrection bodies are not corruptible, the fact that whatever is corruptible is *essentially* corruptible implies that one's earthly/biological body

⁴⁶ Baker, "Need A Christian be a Mind/Body Dualist?," 499.

⁴⁷ Baker, "Persons and the Metaphysics of Resurrection," 345. She says much the same thing in "Need A Christian be a Mind/Body Dualist?" 499.

⁴⁸ Beyond its incompatibility with Christian doctrine, the constitution view is subject to formidable philosophical objections. See especially Ross D. Inman's "Against Constitutionalism," in *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, ed. Jonathan J. Loose, Angus J.L. Menage, and J.P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018).

⁴⁹ Peter van Inwagen, "The Possibility of Resurrection," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9/2 (1978): 114–21. Van Inwagen further develops this in "Dualism and Materialism: Jerusalem and Athens?" *Faith and Philosophy* 12/4 (1995): 474–88.

⁵⁰ It is significant that van Inwagen objects even to property dualism. See his "A Materialist Ontology of the Human Person," in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), 213–15.

cannot be(come) identical to a resurrection body.⁵¹ Beyond this, van Inwagen's account faces insuperable theological difficulties surrounding Holy Saturday, as Jason McMartin has shown.⁵² For his part, Trenton Merricks is well-known for denying there are any criteria for identity over time,⁵³ yet he insists on the resurrection of one's numerically identical body: "if you are not numerically identical with a person who exists in Heaven in the distant future, then you do not have immortality—so bodily identity is crucial to resurrection."⁵⁴ According to Merricks, physicalism can make the best sense of this, for "life after death and resurrection are, for physical organisms like us, one and the same thing."⁵⁵ However, as was argued above, the "Life" of a given person at t_1 simply cannot furnish any persistence conditions involving the same person at a later time, and thus animalism is no more successful than the constitution view in sustaining the traditional Christian commitment to the intermediate state and bodily resurrection.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Baker, "Persons and the Metaphysics of Resurrection," 342.

⁵² Jason McMartin, "Holy Saturday and Christian Theological Anthropology," in *Christian Physicalism?*, 124–25. Similar Christological difficulties for animalists are raised in Luke Van Horn, "Merricks's Soulless Savior," *Faith and Philosophy* 27/3 (July 2010): 330–41.

⁵³ Trenton Merricks, "There Are No Criteria of Identity Over Time," *Noûs* 32 (1998): 106–4.

⁵⁴ Trenton Merricks, "The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting," in *Reason for the Hope Within*, ed. Michael J. Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 268.

⁵⁵ Merricks, "The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting," 283. Merricks further considers these matters in his "How To Live Forever without Saving Your Soul: Physicalism and Immortality," in *Soul, Body, and Survival*.

⁵⁶ I should like to acknowledge my thanks to John M. DePoe for his valuable feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

