I believe in... the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. (The Apostles’ Creed)

The ancient Christian affirmation of a bodily resurrection still echoes today, and admittedly makes this paper’s title sound odd. Resurrected persons are supposedly people with bodies, at least within Christian eschatology. How then can they be disembodied?

The counter-question is whether the notion of bodily-resurrected persons can satisfy certain problems raised by that same Christian eschatology, and this paper is an exploration of these issues. The first part draws attention to the importance of resurrection in contemporary philosophical discussion, in particular for John Hick’s notion of eschatological verification. Part II examines critically the adequacy of this view of resurrection. In Part III we turn to a thesis about St Paul’s concept of the resurrection body which avoids some of the problems raised in Part II. But the thesis raises its own difficulties, and the paper concludes with a sketch of further complexities in the logic of Christian eschatology.
much the same view, believing that without the possibility of the resurrection of the body any hope for life after death is groundless.¹ In contrast to these views is the interest John Hick has shown in the central concepts of Christian eschatology; in particular the doctrine of resurrection has been important in his approach to problems of verification.

Hick has become famous, of course, for his notion of eschatological verification. Originally he developed this within the context of the positivist attack on the meaningfulness of religious language, but his discussion has survived the death of that particular debate, probably because it provides a way of looking at more than that particular problem. I shall summarize the matter very briefly in order to focus more specifically on the place of resurrection in Hick's thought. Basic to eschatological verification is the contention that, within the Christian tradition, theological statements are factual because we can specify conditions under which they would be seen to be true. Verification cannot take place in this life simply because the evidence is now too ambiguous. Events of religious significance to some are explicable for others in different ways, and no conclusive evidence one way or the other has yet been presented. Nevertheless, the Christian believes that the evidence will be available in the eschaton, the life to come, and this evidence will conclusively remove all rational doubt about the truth of Christian theism. Hence such claims as 'God loves us' do more than express wishes or signal intentions to live in a certain way; they are cognitive claims, either true or false.

What would have to be the case in order for eschatological verification to take place? Hick's answer involves three conditions:²

(i) We survive death as identifiable persons in a resurrection world.
(ii) We there experience unambiguously the fulfilment of God's purpose for us.
(iii) We also experience unambiguously communion with God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Although Hick attempts to show that it is logically possible to meet each of these conditions, I shall not discuss the philosophical adequacy of his position as an answer to the verificationist challenge.³ Rather, I want to make clear the essentially empirical nature of the answer by asking what characteristics Hick assigns to his resurrection bodies.

³ There have been many discussions of the philosophical issues involved in eschatological verification, and Hick has been careful to reply to his critics. See in addition to the second edition of Faith and Knowledge his recent essay, 'Eschatological Verification Reconsidered', in Religious Studies xiii (1977), 189–202.
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Hick clearly belongs with those who think that survival can be discussed intelligibly without a belief in dualism. The Judaeo-Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh or body is consonant with ‘the conception of man as an indissoluble psychophysical unity’, and this is the view with which he operates. The form of the doctrine he finds in St Paul – that God ‘resurrects or (better) reconstitutes or recreates’ a person not as an ante-mortem body but as a *sōma pneumatikon* or what Hick prefers to call a resurrection body. The characteristics ascribed to the resurrection body are these:

(a) it has the dispositional characteristics of the ante-mortem body; there is a ‘sufficient correspondence of characteristics’ between the two;

(b) it has the memory traces of the ante-mortem body; again, there is a ‘sufficient continuity’ of memory;

(c) it is in an environment with which it is continuous; that is, it is in some form of space not related to our space;

(d) it is composed of material other than physical matter;

(e) it is in the same shape as the ante-mortem body.

Points (a) and (e) may be related; they are both certainly present by implication in Hick’s three pictures whereby he illustrates the logical possibility of survival as a resurrected body. For in his third picture, the only difference between the ante-mortem body and the resurrection body is that the latter is in a different space, resurrection space, where it might well exist co-temporaneously (if that is an intelligible claim) with the decaying ante-mortem body. In every other relevant respect the two bodies are qualitatively identical.

Now Hick needs all of this to meet his first condition, that we survive death as identifiable persons. In the resurrection world there will be no great problems of identity, for we will meet and identify others ‘in the same kinds of ways, and with a like degree of assurance, as we do now’. Problems in the account apart, the important conclusion is that for Hick a resurrection body is *just the same as* an ante-mortem body, except that it is not physical matter nor is it in our present space (characteristics (d) and (c) above).

This condition of eschatological verification met, Hick passes to the second and third conditions, for they are central to his view. Here again it is important that the resurrection world be much like our present world in its ontology and epistemology. This is, I suggest, because of Hick’s specifically Christological solution to the problem of man’s knowledge of God. In the resurrection world we will have to enjoy a certain kind of life together in order for Christian theism to be verified. There may be some problems in describing

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1 Both quotations are from *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 180.
2 This is drawn from *Faith and Knowledge*, pp. 183–5. In a more recent discussion (‘Resurrection Worlds and Bodies’, *Mind* LXXXII (1973), 409–12), Hick has reiterated some of these characteristics in such phrases as ‘physically alike in every particular, psychologically alike in every particular’, and ‘a psycho-physical being exactly like the being that I was before death’ (p. 411).
just what is that life in which the fulfillment of God’s purpose for men is experienced, but Hick thinks that it is exemplified in the character of Christ. And in case anyone might think that such a life experienced in the resurrection world were just a surprising natural fact, he stresses that we can know that life as God’s purpose for us if we can experience communion with God in that life. (Thus the third condition turns out to be itself the condition of the second.) But the only way for this to happen is for us to meet and experience Jesus as God made knowable to us. We cannot ever experience the Infinite; we can only know empirically the Incarnate. Thus, for eschatological verification to work, we must meet Jesus as Christ and God in the resurrection world and enjoy the kind of life together that is glimpsed in the New Testament. Hick could not maintain his eschatological solution unless the empirical knowledge which we now have of Jesus can be confirmed in what is an essentially empirical experience in the life to come.

II

We next need to ask about the adequacy of Hick’s resurrection world for the purpose of eschatological verification. First, a preliminary observation.

I want to suggest that Hick’s philosophical purpose is served equally well by a future verification as by an eschatological verification. There is nothing in the logic of his solution which demands that the confirmation of Christian theism take place in the life to come, in a resurrection world or even in a body that has survived death. So I should think that, strictly speaking, Hick’s first condition is unnecessary. As long as Jesus were to be physically present again in this world, and life were to have a certain quality, Hick’s Christianity would be confirmed beyond rational doubt. Of course, that ‘as long as’ may not be trivial, for such a world would certainly be a better one than this present world. Nevertheless, the confirmation could logically come in the historical process of this world, in this time and space without the complication of survival and resurrection.

But within the context of Christian eschatology, that mere possibility is unsatisfactory. For one thing, there seems to be no reason to expect such events in the future history of this world, and Christians expect no final ‘sight’ for their faith until the eschaton. Since Hick is trying to elucidate the status of the claims of Christian theism, it is important that his solution be both theologically and philosophically satisfying. Hick attempts to satisfy the theologian by incorporating eschatological characteristics into his description of the resurrection body—it is made of non-physical matter and exists in a resurrection space; and the philosopher is to be satisfied by the stress on the

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1 It was after this paragraph was first written that Hick’s ‘Eschatological Verification Reconsidered’ appeared. He now acknowledges that in principle such verification could occur in this world, though he maintains that this would not satisfy traditional theism (Religious Studies XIII, 201).
empirical nature of this body. In fact, however, there is cause for both theological and philosophical uneasiness.

We may note in passing some perplexity with a material body which is not physical (characteristic \((d)\) above). Hick's resurrection matter may behave differently from 'physical' matter, but its ontological status is obscure. Indeed, it is difficult to know just how it is that resurrection matter can be different: resurrection bodies and ante-mortem bodies have 'sufficient correspondence of characteristics' (condition \((a)\)) to make identification as easy there as it is here. And since that is true, what is to be done with traditional puzzles over the behaviour of resurrection bodies? One might feel a little like a Platonist who is asked about the Forms of hair, dirt and mud and other 'trivial and undignified objects' (Parmenides 180c); there is an uncomfortableness about questions concerning haircuts in heaven or artificial limbs in the life to come. While a detailed characterization of resurrection bodies has always been problematic in the Christian tradition, Hick passes over such issues in silence. They nevertheless persist as possibilities as long as he stresses 'sufficient continuity'.

One might be content to leave such matters in God's hands; for some questions trust is the best solution for the present. Underneath, however, there lurks a more fundamental philosophical problem about resurrected empirical bodies. In what kind of epistemological relation does a resurrected body stand to God? Note that this question is (if I can put it this way) philosophical and not simply christological. Hick answers the question by a kind of christological reductionism; he does not see the problem of knowing that we are meeting God as anything more than the problem of knowing that some particular person is Jesus of Nazareth. The only way to meet God in Hick's resurrection world is to decide (or, better, to have already decided in this life) that Jesus is God, and all that one will ever, or can ever, know of God. But unfortunately, this decision is not straightforward. In the Christian tradition God is Spirit who transcends the material and is indeed its creator. He is not in himself reducible to Jesus, but is revealed in the life and passion of Jesus. Hick himself says that 'only God himself knows his own infinite nature; and our human belief about that nature is based on his self-revelation in Christ to men'. Accordingly, whenever we decide that in knowing Jesus we are knowing God, we must do so because (as Hick puts it) we have no 'rational doubt concerning the authority of Christ'. However, the crucial question must surely be about that authority. How does Jesus

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1 Aquinas was interested in questions about hair and nails for the resurrection body: *Summa Theologica* suppl. q. 80.

2 Something like this trust seems to be Geach's solution: 'The traditional faith of Christianity, inherited from Judaism, is that at the end of this age Messiah will come and men rise from their graves to die no more. That faith is not going to be shaken by inquiries about bodies burned to ashes or eaten by beasts; those who might well suffer just such death in martyrdom were those who were most confident of a glorious reward in the resurrection' (God and the Soul, p. 29).

3 This and the previous quotation are from *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 190.
know God, if empirical beings do not have direct access? There remains an
epistemological gap between embodied beings and God who is spirit which
Hick has not bridged merely by locating Christ on the empirical side of that
gap in the resurrection world.

Further, I submit that it is the religious expectation of most Christian
believers not that Jesus will cross the epistemological gap in the life to come,
but that God will bring us over that gap to himself. The believer hopes to
have faith replaced by sight, to have the epistemological barriers removed.
The veil which makes revelation necessary for this life will be torn away, and
we shall know God as completely as he now knows us (I Cor. 13. 12). In
a word, we shall see him face to face — and (here is why that word is
metaphorical) not because he will be like us but because we shall be like him
(I John 3. 2). That we should have to stand in line to see God, wait our turn,
have only half an hour with him, or indeed any length of time which ends — all
this is foreign to the believer’s expectation of being in the presence of God
and knowing him intimately. And yet that is what Hick’s resurrection world
would necessarily involve, unless it could somehow support the absurd
possibility that an identifiable Jesus located in one resurrection space could
be in all resurrection spaces at the same time.

So an empirical resurrection world leaves us with philosophical perplexities
and theological dissatisfaction. We leave this now to turn in Part III to St
Paul’s concept of resurrection. Hick deliberately left ‘out of consideration St
Paul’s hint that the resurrection body may be as unlike the physical body
as is a full grain of wheat from the wheat seed’.1 If we try to improve Hick’s
theology, will we be able to make better sense of the logic of Christian
eschatology?

III

In this section I want to argue for the thesis that a Pauline resurrection body
may well be ontologically the same as a disembodied person. By a
‘disembodied’ person I mean one with all those characteristics we take to
be central to being a person apart from extension in space: consciousness and
memory, including thought, feelings and perception; and agency, the ability
to do things. Although some philosophers have argued that we could never
know or identify such bodiless beings, my thesis requires for the present only
that such a concept is not unintelligible.2 But the immediate objection is that
St Paul’s resurrected person is a body, which is precisely why contemporary
philosophers have been interested in the verification possibilities of a doctrine
of resurrection. There will be other kinds of objections: that Paul was not

1 Faith and Knowledge, p. 184. Geach, on the other hand, tries to capitalize on this point as teaching
material continuity, although not material identity, between this body and the resurrection body (God
and the Soul, p. 28). I comment on problems in material continuity near the end of Part III below.
2 See Penelhum’s chs. 2 and 3 for the possibility of perception and agency in disembodied beings
(Survival and Disembodied Existence).
interested in ontological questions, that he did not have the conceptual tools to make philosophical distinctions. To these I shall say simply that my intention is not to attribute my thesis to St Paul himself; I want rather to argue that, since there are metaphysical implications in any doctrine of resurrection, my thesis is a supportable interpretation of the Pauline concept of a resurrection body. If my argument is successful the thesis will not be as outrageous as it seems.

To begin, I propose to set out what might be called some logical and ontological possibilities for a resurrected person. These are obviously generated by our conceptual framework rather than Paul's, but they will make explicit the metaphysical options which are open to contemporary interpreters of Paul.

(i) A resurrected person might be just the same as in this life: a psychophysical organism with all the properties as he had here. A more technical way of putting this is to say that the ante-mortem and resurrection bodies will be qualitatively identical. And let us suppose that they are numerically identical as well; that is, it is one and the same body which has continued into the resurrection from this world. However, it is logically possible to have two bodies which are qualitatively identical but in different spaces (the 'two peas in a pod' possibility). We can take then as (ia) the possibility that the resurrected body is an exact replica of the ante-mortem body.

(ii) The resurrection body may be the same ante-mortem body which has changed to some extent, but not radically enough to affect our identification of it. That is, it may have some new properties such as constant health or standardized size and shape, but these would not alter its ante-mortem distinctive appearance beyond recognition. A (iia) possibility would be a second body which is very like the ante-mortem body.

(iii) It is also possible to claim that some particular resurrection body corresponds to an ante-mortem body when the resurrection body is dissimilar. It might be so unlike the ante-mortem body that unless we had independent reasons we could never guess the relationship. This is a kind of metamorphosis of the old body. Alternately, (iii a) might be the destruction of the old body and the creation of a second very different body. Here questions of personal identity become difficult. We know that the butterfly was the caterpillar because there has been a persistence of the same 'stuff' undergoing transformation. If an 'old' body is destroyed and it is claimed that it 'is' this radically different body, we want to know what it is that has changed. Those who attempt to answer such a question often invoke some form of dualism: the 'real' thing is not the body.

(iv) Finally, there is a different sort of ontological possibility. The above possibilities work on the assumption that a resurrection body is a material thing, but it may be that a 'body' in the resurrection is simply a person who does not take up space, a 'disembodied' person as I have defined it above.
In this case there is no point to talking about similar or dissimilar appearance, or about the persistence of matter through change. Naturally questions of identity arise, and one might develop subcategories of disembodied persons without memories, with memories, without perception and with it, and so on. However, my list of resurrection possibilities will end here, since I am interested in seeing how the Pauline material fits into this particular range.

How shall we begin through the morass of critical and exegetical issues involved in Paul’s concept of resurrection? The weight of material may appear burdensome, but since I cannot contribute much to the special concerns of the New Testament scholar, I shall ask questions of the material which are basically philosophical. At least in the case of the first two resurrection possibilities the Pauline view is not difficult to discover.

New Testament scholars agree that, whatever Paul might have meant, he did not mean that resurrection bodies were just like earthly bodies. It seems that some Jewish apocalyptic writers thought this way, but within Pharisaism there was a range of opinion on the nature of resurrection, from (as C. F. D. Moule puts it) ‘the crassest materialism and literalism to an almost gnostic spiritualization’. Although some commentators think Paul was working within a Jewish eschatology in I Thessalonians 5 (his earliest writing on resurrection), by the time of I Corinthians 15 we have the evidence that he sees a change in the resurrection: ‘we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed’ (15. 51). So we cannot be far wrong to rule out possibility (i) above. In fact, in view of the analogy Paul develops between seed and full grown wheat, we can suggest that possibility (ii) should also be considered inappropriate, though this will receive its full support only when that analogy is considered below. Notice that Paul would almost certainly reject (ia) and (iia) as well, since none of the bodies in the resurrection will be just the same as an ante-mortem body or changed a little but still recognizable.

Now this means that we are left with possibilities (iii) and (iv), a material body radically transformed or else a disembodied person. Which alternative does the text support? Is not the textual evidence overwhelmingly in favour of a material resurrection body? To answer, we need to look at (a) Paul’s use of sōma and (b) his description of the sōma pneumatikon, the ‘spiritual body’.

(a) We need not be in much doubt about scholarly opinion on what Paul means by sōma when he uses it of human beings. There seems to be universal agreement that it signifies the whole man, the person in his totality. J. A. T. Robinson spells out the usage in Paul: it can mean the external man, the bodily presence of a person (II Cor. 10. 1 C. F. D. Moule, ‘St. Paul and Dualism: The Pauline Conception of Resurrection’, New Test. Stud. xii (1965–66), 107. He goes on to describe some views, including notions of transfigured bodies and the resurrected as like angels.

(b) Jeremias sees in this the new thing that Paul has had revealed: at the Parousia, for both living and dead, the change will be immediate (J. Jeremias, ‘“Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God” (I Cor. xv. 50)’, New Test. Stud. xi (1955–56), 158–9.

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10); the sexual aspect of a person (1 Cor. 6. 19); the self or personality (Eph. 5. 28). He summarizes, ‘sôma stands for man, in the solidarity of creation, as made for God’. Since the sôma thus focuses on personality it makes sense to talk of its resurrection, whereas this would not be appropriate, Robinson suggests, for sarx (‘flesh’) which fades away in weakness because of its distance from God. The important conclusion for us is that sôma for Paul is not constituted by the physical. ‘It fulfills its essence by being utterly subject to Spirit, not by being either material or immaterial’. But if this is true, then it may well ‘fulfill its essence’ if the person is subject to Spirit although disembodied. A disembodied sôma will not be a contradiction in terms, and Paul’s use will allow for either possibility (iii) or for possibility (iv).

Paul of course does not use sôma exclusively of human beings. One of the most interesting passages in which it appears is I Corinthians 15. 35-41, and since this will lead us to the notion of spiritual body, we should look briefly at it. Here sôma occurs six times: first it is used of the dead (‘in what kind of body do they come?’ v. 35), then three times of that into which a kernel or seed grows (vv. 37, 38); and twice in v. 40, once for things ‘heavenly’ such as sun, moon and stars, and once for things ‘earthly’. I should think that this means the word has a very general function, that it means something almost as non-specific as our word ‘object’ or perhaps ‘individual’. In any case, Paul is concerned not so much with the metaphysical status of sôma as with the great range of things which have their own appropriate ‘bodies’ (cf. idion sôma, v. 38). We might suggest this range in English by referring to the categories: animal, vegetable and mineral – for Paul talks of seeds and flesh and celestial bodies. ‘Flesh’ (sarx) seems to function here as a synonym for ‘body’, or at least one general category of body; and if ‘glory’ (doxa) is read as the impact each particular body makes, then his point becomes something like this: every particular object or individual has its own unique being given it by God, even when (as in the case of the seed) it undergoes radical transformation.

(b) We come now to the nature of the resurrection sôma, or more accurately

2 The Body, p. 32, note.
3 There are many exegetical questions raised by the passage which I cannot consider here. My reading takes the phrase ho de theos didosin auto(i) sôma kathos ethelêsion (v. 38) to mean not merely that God gives to each kernel a body as he has wished, but also to each particular thing of whatever kind. Paul goes on to say this is true of each seed, but I see no reason why he would not extend it further. There is a linguistic difficulty here, of course: one doesn’t speak of animals, fish, stars and the like as changing into something, so to say that God gives ‘it’ a (new) body is inappropriate; ‘it’ already is a body. As for sarx: when Paul says that there is one kind of flesh for man, another for animals, another for... he need not be taken as making biological or taxonomic claims. M. E. Dahl (The Resurrection of the Body, London, SCM, 1962, p. 32) thinks differently, that Paul is somehow separating the ‘flesh’ of men from that of other species. But sarx as one general kind of sôma is separate only from seeds and stars and the like; within the category Paul is merely pointing to diversity, not making claims about ‘substantial’ or ‘qualitative’ differences (contra Sider, ‘The Pauline Concept of the Resurrection Body in 1 Corinthians xv. 35–54’, New Test. Stud. xxxi (1974–75), 430). He is saying, then, that men are not birds or cows or fish, that each sôma as sarx is different.
for Paul, the σῶμα pneumatikon. Here we should look at two questions, the analogy of the seed and the qualities Paul attributes to the resurrected σῶμα in 1 Corinthians 15. 42—9.

The beginning of v. 42 makes it clear that Paul applies what we have just considered to the human σῶμα: houtos kai, so it is with the resurrection of the dead. The σῶμα is sown as a seed is sown, and it is raised a different σῶμα. But the controversy among commentators centres on what this difference amounts to. M. E. Dahl sees the ‘accepted exegesis’ as stressing God’s creative power in the resurrection, creating a brand new body, perhaps not physical, not developed out of this present body. This he labels ‘hetero-somatism’. In contrast, he himself believes in ‘somatic identity’ between this body and the resurrection body.1 For, he says, seed and plant are ‘organically identical; they are not merely “related” or “continuous”’.2 By this he seems to mean that Paul’s analogy has plant develop out of the seed, without the destruction of that seed. It is the same matter (to use a philosophical term) which persists through the change. R. J. Sider apparently makes the same point, though he prefers to speak of ‘organic continuity’ between the two bodies, something which is compatible with discontinuity and transformation.3 Now presumably no one wishes to push an analogy beyond its limits; it would not be suggested that Paul believed corpses would sprout like seeds. What we have to ask of this analogy, then, is whether it can legitimately give us clues about the metaphysical status of the resurrected σῶμα. My answer is that it cannot. No one would want to claim that the very same body cells of the dead somehow come to life and biologically produce the resurrection body, but it is hard to see what other sense could be given to the notion of ‘material continuity’ here. It is much preferable to read the analogy as asserting continuity of the personality (which after all is what σῶμα is about). Whether the same human being will be material or non-material in the resurrection world is, I submit, a question for philosophical reflection rather than something to be decided by exegesis.

Our second task was to comment on the transformed character of the resurrected personality. Is it described in ways which will force on us a decision between our ontological possibilities (iii) and (iv), material and non-material existence?

The qualities attributed to the resurrected σῶμα are always in contrast to those belonging to the body in this life, and they form the second half of each of these antithetical pairs: corruptible/incorruptible (15. 42); dishonour/glory (v. 43); weakness/power (v. 43); psuchikon/pneumatikon (vv. 44–6); from earth, of dust/from heaven (vv. 47–9). We must cut through the exegetical

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1 Dahl, p. 8; p. 94. 2 Dahl, p. 27. See also p. 33 n. 1. 3 Sider, pp. 431, 432. Actually, I have trouble knowing what Dahl could mean by ‘organic identity’ other than some kind of spatio-temporal continuity. Presumably the ‘organic’ functions to warn us that the identity is not static, but on the other hand it is not qualitative. So it must be numerical identity, that there is one and only one thing which has undergone change. That, however, is what we mean by the ‘continuity’ of the same thing.
problems to ask about the ontological implications of these qualities. Those who favour a material resurrection body have to explain ‘spiritual body’; they generally do this by pointing out that Paul means by the expression a person totally controlled by the Spirit, freed from sin. The change Paul describes in these verses is moral and psychological, not metaphysical. So Sider: ‘a living Christian with a very material, very tangible physical body can become a soma pneumatikon’.\(^1\) To which the appropriate reply is, I submit, this: granted that the transformed character of the resurrection person is moral and relational, is there anything to preclude this character and these relationships in a disembodied being? Dahl thinks that we need not worry about the nourishment of a resurrected body composed of living cells since the essential thing Paul implies is our eternal dependence upon God’s love and grace.\(^2\) My question: can only living cells be dependent, and not what Dahl calls ‘pure spirits’? Is the immaterial somehow automatically independent of God? The answers again are philosophical, not exegetical; and once again we can conclude that everything the ‘materialists’ read in Paul’s characterization of the resurrection body might be possible in a disembodied resurrected state, except of course the materiality of the body. But materiality is not necessarily implied in anything Paul says, even on the materialists’ own reading.

We might continue with other problems in Paul’s discussion of resurrection. For example, it has been argued that 1 Corinthians 15. 50, ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God’, does not exclude material bodies from the resurrected state; Paul means by sarx kai haima those who are alive at the Parousia.\(^3\) But by the same token, the verse does not demand that material bodies will enter the resurrection; it all depends on what the ontological status of ‘person’ is. Further questions are raised by II Corinthians 4. 16–5. 10. Although a fully articulated defence of my thesis would have to give an account of this passage, we must rest content with the observation that even if these verses can be successfully interpreted in a non-dualistic fashion,\(^4\) there is no clearly defined ontological status for the eternal ‘house’ in heaven which clothes the naked at death. My thesis might be given textual support if sound exegesis would allow us to see such terms as ouranos and pneumatikos as pointers away from that which is extended in space.\(^5\) As it is, I want to close this section with those philosophical considerations which

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\(^1\) Sider, p. 434. Dahl would agree: ‘a body-spiritual, a personality completely controlled and informed by the creative spirit of God and therefore beyond corruption. Man is that kind of flesh, with that kind of destiny’ (p. 81).

\(^2\) Dahl, p. 90.

\(^3\) See J. Jeremias (p 206 n. 2 above).


\(^5\) Granted that this is not the primary function of these terms, they may still carry this implication. See for instance Dahl, p. 113, where he discusses ouranos as ‘the sphere of God himself’. And additional matters for exegetical attention might include such phrases as ta mé blepomena in II Cor. 4. 18. These belong to the eternal, the sphere of resurrection: but does the word mean ‘things incapable of being seen’, that is, non-extended realities, or simply ‘things not (yet) seen’?
provide positive support for my thesis about the nature of a Pauline resurrection body. Three matters need discussion: problems of identity, of continuity, and about the nature of God.

First, it seems that those who most strongly insist on the materiality of the resurrection body are motivated chiefly by a desire to preserve the identities of individual people in the resurrection. This commendable concern is expressed in Dahl’s notion of ‘somatic identity’, but we must ask whether the desire can be that easily fulfilled. Dahl, for instance, wants to say that meeting the same person as I met in London years ago requires not merely that person’s having the same thoughts and memories as the London man but also the same ‘body’. Dahl does not mean by this exactly the same cells, that is, material identity; but his notion of somatic identity will not help the process of recognition in the Resurrection. Surely one recognizes the London man partly because his body now is the sort of thing we would expect a body to be after the passage of some time. If someone with a very different body (say six inches taller, ten years young, of the opposite sex) claimed to be the London man, our regular tests for personal identity would be thrown into confusion. And if the body were the body of a strange animal never seen before, the criterion of somatic identity would disintegrate. Yet Paul’s analogy of seed and plant requires just this strangeness if it is taken materially. How will the criterion of bodily identity help us at all if the resurrection body is as different from this body as Paul claims it is?

The defence will presumably hark back to the notion of continuity, but this presents a second philosophical problem. Suppose we say that the resurrection body, though very different in appearance and behaviour from this body, is nevertheless ‘organically continuous’ with it. It is the very ‘stuff’ of this body which is transformed into the resurrection body. Such a view opts for possibility (iii) above rather than for (iii-a). This will not help in the least, however. For we could know that the resurrection ‘stuff’ was from this very same earthly ‘stuff’ only if (as in the case of the butterfly and caterpillar) we could observe their continuity through time and space. Logically that demands a resurrection body located somewhere in our space, and as well the ability to observe the transformation. The ‘materialist’ interpreters of Paul do not seem to have understood or acknowledged this: the notion of a spatially locatable Heaven somewhere in our universe would not be attractive to them, yet it is the inescapable result of their reasoning. Should they propose, on the other hand, a Hickian resurrection world in another space than physical space, they would lose the notion of continuity and end up with possibility (iii-a). The only tests for personal identity would then be those associated with memory and consciousness – the same as would be available for disembodied persons.

1 Dahl, p. 94. ‘It is vital to insist on the word identity as describing this relationship, because the whole idea has no meaning unless it is the same personality that is to be raised that exists now’ (p. 94).
That brings us to our third observation. There seems in those who press for materialism a blindness to the implications of their view for the nature of God. They speak sometimes disparagingly of 'non-material, ethereal substance', as though immateriality were to be unquestioningly linked with a vague dissipation of identity and reality; but for them God himself is spirit, supremely real without occupying any particular space. Or here is Dahl:

If the restoration of personality in an eschatological mode of existence is to take place, that personality must have an environment, and an environment is inconceivable without something analogous to space and time, that is to say, another kind of 'space' and 'time' to which these words do not literally apply, but can be applied parabolically. It sounds very much as though God is not a personality, or that if he is personal he must live in some kind of 'space', whatever 'parabolic space' might be. Surely such confusions and inconsistencies are best avoided by the realization that within the Judaeo-Christian tradition there is a commitment to a supreme reality which is non-material and which is personal as well. That very commitment should make it easier rather than more difficult to countenance the possibility of other persons, finite but persisting in their own identities, as real though disembodied.

St Paul may not have been interested in the ontological status of resurrected persons, except to be concerned to argue that (as we would put it) they are real persons. The evidence I have presented here nevertheless makes it legitimate to conclude that a Pauline resurrected body is ontologically the same as a disembodied but real person. Exegetically, nothing in the text forbids this interpretative move, while some things may encourage it; and philosophically the alternatives land us in muddles and confusions, at least in the context of Christian theism.

At this stage there develops a dilemma in the logic of Christian eschatology, for the arguments I have advanced in Parts II and III push in different directions. It was in order to escape from problems about immortal souls that

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1 Sider, p. 435. Sider quotes approvingly Hering's rejection of the "Cartesian prejudice" which would assume that the term "spiritual body" must connote something which lacks substance and extension (p. 435, n. 2) -- a sorry misreading of Descartes' most elementary point, that substance can be either spiritual or extended; in fact, that extended substance (body) is ultimately dependent upon spiritual substance (God).

2 Dahl, p. 91.

3 Some may object that this reading of St Paul ignores the parallel he draws between Jesus' resurrection and our resurrection. In case it should be thought necessary to my view that Jesus' resurrection be as a disembodied person (for the sake of this parallelism), let me say that I think this need not follow. This assertion requires argument for which there is no space here, but it might be noted that (i) the resurrection accounts are of a physical, empirical body raised from death; and (ii) Jesus' case may be unique in that a bodily resurrection is required as concession to our epistemological limitations, though this concession is of the same order as the incarnation itself.
some philosophers of religion have reverted to a doctrine of resurrection – but with the result that the resurrection world becomes very much like this world and the resurrection body unlike the Pauline transformed body. So they do some violence to basic notions in Christian eschatology. Yet those biblical theologians who insist on the materiality of the Pauline resurrection body have landed themselves in philosophical positions which ultimately undercut their own affirmations about identity and God. Is there then no coherent ‘logic’ of Christian eschatology, but only an uneasy alliance of either bad philosophy and good theology or good philosophy and bad theology?

To make this more explicit within the context of this paper: the thesis I have argued about the ontological status of a resurrected person is open to the charges alluded to in Part I. It has been vigorously contended that the very notion of a disembodied person is incoherent; or more mildly but still effectively, that such persons could never be known to persist as individuals in a resurrection world. So this attempt to provide a philosophically and biblically adequate analysis of a Pauline resurrection body has terminated in the difficulties that a doctrine of resurrection was supposed to circumvent. Are there any possible routes to get beyond the impasse?

One way would be a radical revision of Christian eschatology in order to remove the notion of the post-mortem existence of individuals in a resurrection world. In such a ‘realized’ eschatology there is no human existence beyond the existence we all know in this life, so the problems we have been concerned with here are avoided. Unfortunately, however, they are ‘settled’ by decision and not argument. This life is itself philosophically perplexing: we cannot merely assume that persons are bodies or souls with bodies or anything else. Nor can theists avoid questions about the nature of God. So even should this route be theologically defensible it still requires philosophical justification.

Another obvious route is the retreat back to a resurrection body which will make the problems of individuation and identity no more puzzling than they are now. Probably most philosophers will take this road; but while that is a philosophically interesting move, I hope this paper has demonstrated that it has little of importance to say to a Christian eschatology.

The remaining route is an investigation of the possibilities of disembodied existence, including the logical difficulties there may be in self-identity and in the existence of a plurality of such beings. Since Christians attribute this kind of existence to God, the issue belongs not so much to the logic of eschatology alone as to the logic of Christian theism in general. To examine a defence of these possibilities is a task for another occasion, but if the logic

1 'When this chapter (I Cor. 15) is set in its proper context of the whole Pauline theology, it becomes quite impossible to think of the resurrection hope in terms of the individual unit' (Robinson, p. 81).

2 See Penelhum, p. 108.
of disembodied survival and personal existence can be successfully defended,\(^1\) then the way is opened for a more satisfactory explication of some basic themes in Christian eschatology.\(^2\)


\(^2\) Versions of this paper were presented at a seminar at the American Academy of Religion 1976 meeting in St Louis, and the founding meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers in Cincinnati, April 1978.