

Physicalism, Dualism, and Resurrection  
James E. Taylor  
Westmont College

According to Aristotle and most subsequent philosophers, human selves are substances. What Aristotle meant by this is that selves are individual things that can have properties and can interact causally with other substances. For instance, you and I have the property of being able to think about ourselves and our search for meaning, and we can interact with each other in conversation about these topics.

If we think of ourselves as substances, we can ask ourselves, as Descartes did in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, what *kind* of substance we are. As far as Descartes was concerned, there were only two possible answers to this question. We are either material substances or immaterial substances. In the philosophical tradition Descartes inherited, Plato had held that human persons are immaterial substances and Aristotle had affirmed instead that human persons are material substances. Since we are embodied beings, Plato's view amounts to the *dualist* claim that human persons are immaterial selves that have living material bodies and Aristotle's position boils down to the *monist* stance that human persons are living material bodies with a certain kind of organizational structure. Descartes defended the substance dualist position against the substance monist theory. That is, he argued for dualism rather than materialism or physicalism.

Most Christians have been substance dualists. Descartes inherited his substance dualism from St. Augustine, who drew on Plato's philosophy in constructing his own Christian worldview. Even the great Aristotelian Christian thinker St. Thomas Aquinas formulated an alternative dualist position in spite of his sustained attempts to incorporate Aristotle's philosophical views whenever they were consistent with Christian doctrine. Why were Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, and other Christian philosophers substance dualists?

One reason is that Christians are committed to the reality of life after death. We believe in "the life everlasting." If human selves are merely material substances, that is, if we are just living bodies, then when these bodies of ours die and eventually decompose, decay, and disintegrate, and when the parts of our bodies are subsequently detached and dispersed, we cease to exist. In short, if I am my body and my body is destroyed, then so am I. But if we cease to exist when we die, then how can we enjoy everlasting life?

So, many Christians have believed that our commitment to the afterlife brings with it a commitment to substance dualism and a denial of monistic substance materialism. They have reasoned that if we will exist after our bodies die, then we must be something other than our bodies or a part of our bodies. If we survive the death of our bodies, then we must be immaterial substances: souls, minds, or spirits.

But some contemporary Christian philosophers, theologians, and scientists have endorsed some version of materialism or other. According to this view, though God is a purely spiritual or immaterial being or substance, God created a purely material world, and God crowned his purely material creation with purely material human beings created in his

image. Of course Christian materialists will need to explain how merely material organisms can be created in God's image and they will also need to provide an account of how the afterlife is possible for merely material selves. More generally, they will need to construct a theological anthropology that is consistent with a materialist metaphysical account of creation.

A fully satisfactory case for either Christian dualism or Christian materialism will need to be interdisciplinary in nature. To be acceptable, the true theory of human nature must satisfy at least three criteria: (1) a biblical and theological criterion; (2) a philosophical criterion; and (3) a scientific criterion. That is, the correct position on the essence of human selves must be adequate to revelation, reason, and experience.

### I. A Biblical Argument for Physicalism

Recently, some Christian materialists have argued that there are a number of important respects in which materialism satisfies the biblical and theological criterion more adequately than dualism does. In his essay "The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting," Christian physicalist Trenton Merricks argues, for instance, that the attitudes expressed by the writers of Scripture about both death and resurrection make more sense from a materialist perspective than from a dualist point of view.

Here's his argument. The Bible treats death as a great evil. For instance, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 that Christ "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" and that "the last enemy is death" (TNIV). At the same time, the Scriptures regard resurrection as a great good. Paul also told the Corinthians (in I Corinthians 15:16-19, TNIV) that,

if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, then we are to be pitied more than all men.

If we change these negatives to positives, we see that resurrection is required for freedom from sin and rescue from being eternally lost. That is, resurrection is required for our life with God after death.

Physicalism can certainly account for the evil of death and the good of resurrection. After all, if physicalism is true, then human selves are nothing but living bodies. And if human persons are merely functioning biological organisms, then when these organisms cease functioning at death, the persons with whom they are identical cease to exist. So if physicalism is true, the resurrection of one's body will be absolutely essential for one's life after death. If physicalism is true, then one's resurrection is one's re-creation. In sum, for the physicalist, death means annihilation and resurrection means re-creation; without the resurrection, one would remain non-existent. Given physicalism, death is an evil because it destroys a person and resurrection is a good because it brings that person back into existence.

How should we think about death and resurrection from the standpoint of dualism? If dualism is true, then selves are immaterial souls or spirits. If human persons are non-physical things that have physical bodies, then it is possible for human persons to continue existing even after their bodies die. If human persons can continue to exist in a disembodied state after their body dies and before their body is resurrected, then presumably they can enjoy eternal life without the resurrection. So, whereas the resurrection is *required* for eternal life if physicalism is true, resurrection is not essential for eternal life if dualism is true. Merricks concludes from these sorts of considerations that physicalism does a better job than dualism does accounting for the evil of death and the good of resurrection.

It is true that with dualism death is still bad and resurrection is still good. But the point of Merrick's claim is that dualism doesn't render death *as bad* as physicalism does and dualism doesn't make resurrection *as good* as physicalism does. For the dualist, one's death involves only a temporary separation of oneself from one's body. The Christian physicalist argues that, though temporary existence in a disembodied state would be *inconvenient* for various reasons, such inconvenience would not be as bad as the utter *tragedy* of personal non-existence. Moreover, for the dualist, resurrection would seem merely to alleviate what would be at worst a set of disabilities brought on by the absence of one's body. Before the resurrection of one's body, one would still exist and be able to do anything that doesn't require a body. In particular, one would presumably be conscious and would thus be able to experience the full range of valuable mental states, events, and processes for which consciousness by itself seems to suffice (such as loving, praying, hoping, dreaming, etc.). According to Merricks, though the restoration of one's body with its concomitant abilities would be a good thing, it would not be as good a thing as the bringing of oneself back into existence from absolute oblivion.

## II. Dualist Replies

In the remainder of this paper, I will argue that it is reasonable to doubt Merricks' claim that physicalism can account for the evil of death and the good of resurrection better than dualism can. I will argue first that it is not clear that the evil of death is more serious given Christian physicalism than it is given Christian dualism. Then I will make a case for the claim that it is doubtful that physicalism makes resurrection a greater good than dualism does. In general, my claims will be that, for all we know at present, (1) the dualist scenario of post-mortem disembodiment may be just as bad as the physicalist consequence of temporary annihilation and (2) resurrection may be at least as good a thing given dualism as it is relative to physicalism.

### A. Souls are not Naturally Immortal (in the Strong Sense)

In preparation for formulating these dualist replies, it will be important to clarify at least one respect in which any Christian version of substance dualism must diverge from the dualist theory that Plato originally constructed.

Plato argued that souls are *naturally* immortal. That is, he held that it is the nature of souls to be incapable of destruction. Bodies can be destroyed, of course, but according to Plato, souls cannot. So on Plato's view, souls will naturally and automatically survive the death of the bodies with which they are associated. Now if the thesis of the natural immortality of the soul means that *there is nothing in nature that can destroy a soul*, then this thesis is not necessarily inconsistent with Christian doctrine, because it may be the case that God created souls to be indestructible by any purely natural means. But if the thesis of the natural immortality of the soul means that it is the nature of souls themselves to be incapable of destruction by *any* means, natural or supernatural, then this thesis is obviously inconsistent with Christian doctrine, since God is clearly capable of destroying the souls that God created. Depending on how you interpret him, Jesus himself may have affirmed this fact when he told his disciples to "be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell" (Matthew 10:28b, TNIV). Since Plato argued that souls cannot be destroyed because (a) only what has parts can be taken apart, and (b) only things that can be taken apart (like bodies) can be destroyed, and (c) souls do not have parts, it seems clear that Plato adhered to the second, stronger version of the thesis of the natural immortality of the soul, which is inconsistent with Christian doctrine. So Christian dualism excludes Plato's thesis of the natural immortality of the soul. Souls can exist only if God creates them, and they can continue to exist only if God chooses to sustain them (or at least not to destroy them).<sup>1</sup>

The Christian dualist denial of Plato's natural immortality thesis means that Christian dualists and Christian physicalists agree on at least one important point relevant to the debate on which we are currently focusing: Human persons, whether they are merely material substances or instead purely immaterial substances, are completely dependent on God for their ongoing existence. Body or soul, we exist and we continue to exist only because God graciously sustains us in existence. Body or soul, we would be rendered non-existent if God were to will to destroy us.

One consequence of this denial of Plato's natural immortality thesis for the dispute we are discussing is that we can safely say that Christian dualism does not diminish the evil of death by ascribing to the immaterial soul a natural power not possessed by the material body. From a Christian dualist standpoint, there is no essential difference between soul and body with respect to their destructibility. So the Christian physicalist cannot argue that death is worse given physicalism than it is given dualism on the grounds that the body can be destroyed and the soul cannot be destroyed. The only difference on which the physicalist has the right to insist is that death involves the actual destruction of a destructible body but that it would not necessarily involve the actual destruction of a destructible soul. So if dualism treats death more lightly than physicalism does, it must be only because bodies differ from souls in being *actually destroyed* by death and not in virtue of being *destructible* in a way that souls are not. But this difference may suffice to secure the physicalist's argument. Does it?

---

<sup>1</sup> Plato also seemed to hold that souls are eternal (in the sense of being everlasting). If whatever is indestructible is also uncreated, then the eternity of souls follows from their being naturally immortal.

## B. Temporary Annihilation is not *Very* Bad

To answer this question, we can revisit the Christian physicalist's claim to provide a superior account of death and resurrection. Physicalists say death is very bad because it means personal annihilation and resurrection is very good because it means personal re-creation. But why would personal annihilation be a very bad thing? It seems implausible to think that annihilation would be very bad simply on the basis of the assumption that non-existence is very bad. After all, there are presumably an infinite number of possible but non-actual persons God could have created but did not. Though it may well have been a good thing for at least some of these persons to exist, it isn't clear that it is very bad that they do not. No, what makes annihilation a bad thing is instead that it involves the cessation of the conscious experiences of a person who had already enjoyed a period of actual existence. But notice that not just any cessation of the conscious experiences of a person is a bad thing. After all, each one of us regularly undergoes a loss of conscious experience whenever we are in a state of dreamless sleep. We don't tend to think of all merely temporary periods of unconsciousness as bad. It is true that we think it bad for a person to be in a coma, but it is reasonable to think that this is primarily due to our uncertainty about whether the comatose person is likely to recover. Arguably, personal annihilation would be a *very* bad thing only if it involved a *permanent* loss of the potential for ongoing conscious experience.

So then, is death a greater evil given physicalism than it is given dualism? It is not clear that it is. If we set annihilationism aside (the view that God punishes ultimately unrepentant sinners by utterly destroying them), then the Christian view is that all actual persons will ultimately continue to exist for eternity – some in heaven and some in hell. If Christian physicalism is true, then everyone has ceased or will cease to exist at their death, but everyone will be brought back into existence at the General Resurrection before the Last Judgment. If everyone will be re-created at the General Resurrection, then this period of personal non-existence will be temporary. And if we are only temporarily non-existent, then there is arguably nothing *seriously* bad about our consequent temporary loss of conscious awareness and experience. From our perspective after our resurrection, it will likely seem at worst to have been like a state of dreamless sleep and at best like a brief lapse of consciousness. From our perspective now as we imagine our future temporary non-existence, it need seem no worse than a very prolonged state of dreamless sleep, which need not be a bad thing at all.

Now the Christian physicalist may reply that, though a period of temporary non-existence may not seem so bad to a person after he or she has been re-created, it nonetheless should seem, to an honest person anticipating his or her non-existence, to be a horrible thing – even when this person takes into consideration that he or she will eventually come back into existence. The Christian physicalist may well insist that honest people will regard even their temporary possible annihilation with horror and that they would be substantially comforted to believe that the dualist is right to think that we will continue to exist without interruption after our deaths as disembodied souls.

But would it be rational for a *Christian* to shudder at the thought of her possible temporary non-existence between her death and her resurrection? Arguably not. After all, whether we are bodies that will cease to exist temporarily or souls that will not, our future is in God's hands. Whether physicalism or dualism is true, we are equally dependent on God for our future existence. If God chose to render us non-existent forever, he could do so, whether we are material substances or immaterial substances. But all those who trust in Christ can have a reasonable hope that God will not do this. The resurrection of Christ provides Christians with a solid ground for confidence that, come what may, we will ultimately enjoy sustained loving communion with God and the rest of the body of Christ forever. Just as Paul reminds the Corinthians of their resurrection hope, he also reminds the Roman church that absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God. From the standpoint of these assurances of God's ongoing gracious and loving faithfulness to us, any tendency we might have to contemplate our possible temporary non-existence between our death and resurrection with dismay ought to seem like an irrational lapse of faith. It makes sense for us to worry about being annihilated by death only if we don't really trust that God will re-create us at the resurrection. Again, our non-existence would be a very bad thing only if it were permanent. But God's demonstration of love for us in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ ought to assure us that, if we should ever be annihilated, our non-existence would *not* be permanent.

What these reflections reveal is that, what would be truly horrible for a follower of Christ is not one's temporary non-existence but instead one's being permanently destroyed or abandoned by God. But this is a possibility that both the Christian physicalist and the Christian dualist face to an equal degree. Whether we are bodies or souls, it is at least logically possible at any given time for God to annihilate us. Since God can destroy a soul as easily as he can destroy a body, dualism entails no special advantage over physicalism when it comes to our ultimate and eternal well-being. Thankfully, whether we are physicalists or dualists, we can have equally reasonable confidence in God's promise to be with us forever, no matter how many temporary lapses of consciousness we experience, whether due to sleep, concussion, senility, persistent vegetative state, or temporary non-existence between our death and resurrection.

### C. Resurrection May be at Least as Good Given Dualism as it is Given Physicalism

The Christian physicalist could reply at this point that so far I have not really argued that the Christian versions of physicalism and dualism agree on the degree of evil constituted by death *simpliciter*, but instead only that both views entail that, *if God eventually resurrects a person*, then his or her death is no more evil for the physicalist than for the dualist. This becomes clear when we reflect on the fact that, if God didn't bring about a given individual's resurrection, then if physicalism is true, that person would suffer permanent annihilation, and if dualism is true, then that person would presumably at least exist after his or her death in a disembodied state. Consequently, the physicalist can still claim that *resurrection* is more important relative to physicalism than it is given dualism even if death is no worse for the physicalist than for the dualist if the resurrection eventually occurs. The idea is that what makes resurrection crucial if we are just material

substances is that it is absolutely required for personal *survival*, whereas if we are immaterial souls, resurrection is not required for personal survival at all.

This seems like a strong argument. Does the dualist have an adequate reply? I think so. First of all, remember that, though a disembodied soul may well be capable of enjoying conscious experiences of various kinds and of initiating mental activities for which such conscious experiences suffice, a person without a body would be incapable of having the sorts of experiences and engaging in the sorts of activities for which a body is required. So a disembodied person, even if fully a *person* in the sense that the individual instantiates all the properties required for personhood, would nonetheless be a disabled and even *crippled* person. Such a person would not be able to exercise the full range of her God-given capacities. She would not, therefore, be a *normally functioning* person. Moreover, insofar as a disembodied person has desires to do things for which a body is needed, her desires will be frustrated. Since it is likely that persons who have been habituated to depend on their bodies for a relatively high proportion of their activities during their earthly life will be strongly inclined to want to engage in these activities, even when (perhaps especially when) they are disembodied, it is likely that disembodied persons would experience ongoing anxiety, frustration, and disappointment. The degree or extent of this frustration and discouragement will depend on the degree of their desire to engage in bodily activity. It seems plausible to think that the degree of this desire will be relatively high and that, consequently, the degree of their frustration will be as well. So though a disembodied person may *survive* between his death and his resurrection, it is highly unlikely that he will *thrive* during this period of time.

Perhaps it would be helpful to pause at this point to reflect on the plight of people suffering from various kinds of physical incapacitation in *this* life. There is, of course, a fairly wide range of degrees of physical disability involving the loss of motor control of various kinds. At one end of the spectrum are relatively minor, local, and temporary bodily dysfunctions such as mild and short-lived muscle cramps and instances in which a limb “falls asleep” for a brief time when one’s blood has been prevented from circulating fully through it. At the other end of the spectrum are cases of complete and permanent paralysis and quadriplegia. In the middle toward the minor inconvenience end are broken but set arms and legs which will eventually operate normally again, and in the middle toward the major disability pole are people with an amputated or paralyzed limb. If you have experienced any of these bodily impairments, you know what it is like to want to use a muscle or a limb to accomplish a desired goal and not to be able to do so. Even if you have not experienced a loss of motor control of a particular kind, you can probably imagine to some extent what it would be like to undergo such an unfortunate deficiency. Clearly, the degree of frustration you experience is a function of the seriousness of the incapacitation, the extent of bodily functions affected, the duration of time the disability lasts, and the prospects for finding some alternative means of fulfilling your desire or for compensating for not being able to satisfy it. With these examples in mind, it may be easier to imagine the degree of frustration one would feel if one were completely disembodied and consequently had no motor control at all – indeed no nervous system, muscles, skeletal structure, etc. to move or to enable oneself to move from one place to another.

Sensory impairments of various kinds and degrees provide another sort of illustration. In this case we can distinguish not only between temporary and permanent losses of sensory functioning, but also between different sensory modalities and different combinations of sensory modalities. As in the case of the loss of motor control, relatively brief losses of sensation are merely relatively inconvenient, whereas permanent losses of sensory functioning are permanently frustrating and disabling, at least with respect to those goals the attainment of which, and activities the enjoyment of which, require the absent means of sensation. And we should include here among the normal types of sensory experiences not only seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching, but also the experience of physical pleasures and pains of various kinds and one's awareness of the state of one's body at any given time as well as one's consciousness of one's orientation in space that is sometimes called the "kinesthetic" sense. Now imagine, if you can, what it would be like to be a disembodied soul, and thus to have no eyes, ears, tongue, nose, or nerve endings. Imagine, as well (if you can) what it would be like not to feel the press of a chair on your seat or the force of gravitation keeping you rooted to the surface of the earth.

Now think about all the typical sorts of experiences we have and activities we engage in throughout a normal day. Examples of *experiences* are hearing the alarm clock go off at 6:30 am, feeling the breeze coming in through the open window, smelling the coffee brewing in the next room, seeing a loved one struggling to wake up, tasting a bran muffin, and feeling the pleasure of a full stomach. Examples of *activities* (which, of course, will involve both sensations of various kinds and bodily movements of diverse sorts as well) are walking, eating, talking, sitting, reading, writing, running, singing, dancing, hugging, kissing, etc. etc. As we are normally constituted, all of these experiences require sense organs and all of these activities require a body (or at least enough of a body with the right sorts of parts). Therefore, a completely disembodied soul would not be capable of having any of these sort of experiences or engaging in any of these kinds of activities (unless this bodiless person were provided with means or instruments to enable the reception of sensory information and/or some degree of control of parts of a physical environment, should there be one – but in that case these added vehicles of perception or control would be functionally equivalent to bodies, and the soul would not be completely disembodied after all).

Finally, consider how many of these experiences and activities are typically involved in the ways in which we relate to other human beings. Actually, setting aside the highly unusual and probably non-existent abilities of extra-sensory perception (such as clairvoyance), extra-motor control of physical objects outside our bodies (such as telekinesis) and completely non-physical methods of communication with other human beings (such as mental telepathy), absolutely *all* of the interactions we engage in with other people require the use of our bodies in some way or other. All interpersonal human relationships are physical to some extent or other. Given this, a disembodied soul would be cut off from all normal means of relationship with other human persons.

In sum, as far as we know, disembodied souls would be incapable of external perception, non-mental action, and normal interpersonal human relations. Of course, such persons

would seem to be capable of conscious experiences and activities that do not require a body. Most generally, it seems true that, as Descartes affirmed, a soul without a body could *think* and therefore could engage in all the more specific kinds of this generic mental process. If dualism is true, then even without a brain, a central nervous system, a muscular system, a skeletal system, and sense organs, in short, even without a body, a person could presumably hope, dream, fear, wish, etc. And most importantly, a disembodied person could presumably *pray*. That is, such a person could practice the communicative mental activity that is at the heart of our relationship with God. So even if a disembodied soul could have no relations of any kind with other human beings, he or she could presumably continue to relate to God, at least in a purely mental way.

I say that a bodiless person would *presumably* be able to think and pray, etc. because in order to engage in thinking of any kind at all one has to have something to think *about*, and in the absence of new sensory information coming in through sense organs, the only material one could have available for thought would have to come from *memory*. The objects of thought and consciousness are either proposition or non-propositional. If they are propositional, they are composed of concepts. If they are non-propositional, they are composed of images. Without a way to acquire new concepts and images through the senses, one would have to draw on concepts and images that one has in one's mental *storage*. And one's mental storage is just one's memory. Would a disembodied person have access to his or her memories? As we will see shortly, it is not at all clear that he or she would.

I think we can conclude at this point that a disembodied person could at best have a limited kind of relationship with God (purely mental praying but no dancing, singing, leaping, kneeling, raising one's arms, prostrating oneself, genuflecting, or partaking in the elements of communion) but no normal ongoing relationship with fellow human beings (except in memory if memory is possible in this state). What would the quality of such an existence be? We should remember that, though God made us for relationship with the Godhead (so that, as St. Augustine said in his *Confessions*, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in (him)"), God also said, after creating Adam, that "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2: 18a, TNIV). God created human beings for both communion with him and for community with each other. In light of this, in the absence of human relationship and given the presence of the ongoing frustration of various desires to engage in sensation and bodily movement of different kinds, it seems likely that the overall conscious experience of a disembodied person would be relatively negative (in spite of being in the presence of God – as Adam was in the Garden of Eden as well before God created Eve). Again, for all we know at present, though a disembodied person could *survive* between his or her death and the resurrection of his or her body, such a person could not *thrive* – far from it.

With this conclusion in mind, let us return to the current main bone of contention between the Christian physicalist and the Christian dualist. The physicalist says that physicalism agrees with Scripture in the degree of importance it attaches to resurrection whereas dualism does not. But I think we are now in a good position to see that this is not necessarily the case. I have already argued that, if God resurrects a person, then, for all

we know at present, his or her antecedent death is evil to the same extent whether that person is merely a body or just a soul. But now suppose that God does not resurrect a dead person. If that were the case, a merely material person would remain non-existent forever. And that would be very bad. But now we can see that, for all we know at present, a purely immaterial person, as long as he or she continues to exist, would, in spite of presumably being able to think and pray, remain in a permanent state of relative frustration and unhappiness in virtue of being unable to sense, move, or relate to other human persons. Wouldn't such a sub-optimal experiential state be at least as bad as non-existence? Wouldn't it be worse? Wouldn't it be better simply not to survive than to survive in a constantly highly frustrated state forever?

Now before we consider this question more carefully, we should reflect on a possible suggestion of the physicalist that dualism does not require that disembodied souls in the intermediate stage between death and resurrection be miserable. God could graciously remove the causes of their unhappiness until the resurrection. Since what would make them miserable is the frustration of their desires, then God could simply eliminate the causes of these desires. But what could be producing these desires other than their memories of former sensations, bodily motions, and human relations? Without these memories these bodiless selves would not have the desires that are based on them. So God could eliminate their misery simply by preventing them from having access to their memories. But if God did that, then since (as I argued above) memories are required for thinking in the absence of a means of acquiring new information, these persons would not be able to think (there would be nothing for them to think *about*). In that case, their plight would be experientially equivalent to that of the person who ceased to exist at death. Though they would *exist*, they would not be *functioning* either physically or mentally. Consequently, if they are resurrected, their situation until that point is no better than that of the non-existent person, and if their body is never resurrected and they remain in a completely non-functional and so unconscious state forever, then their situation is effectively just as bad as that of the non-existent person who is not resurrected.

The dualist can formulate this as a dilemma for the physicalist. If a disembodied person continues to have full access to all their memories, then she can think but she will be miserable. If a disembodied soul loses all access to her memories, then she will not be miserable but she will also not be able to think. So a disembodied soul will either be miserable or unconscious. Either way her situation is at least as bad as being non-existent. So the physicalist's appeal to the resurrection to demonstrate the superiority of physicalism is undercut.

Physicalists have at least two replies to this dilemma. First, they could charge that it presupposes a false dichotomy; God could provide disembodied people with selective access to their memories rather than either allowing them full access or taking away all of their access altogether. And God could make sure that they had enough memories to enable them to think and pray without allowing them to be able to remember those things that lead to their frustrated desires and misery. Second, physicalists could insist that it is better for someone who has existed once to ultimately exist forever than for him to be

permanently annihilated, even if his ongoing existence is miserable. Both of these replies provide strong challenges to the dualist's dilemma. How can the dualist respond?

In response to the first claim, that God could provide disembodied persons with selective access to their memories, the dualist can insist, as Aquinas did, that bodiless souls do not have memories because they cannot have them. The reason Aquinas gave for this (following Aristotle) is that memory storage requires a physical basis. Aristotle called this the "passive intellect." Today we would think of it as part of the brain. In the same vein, Richard Swinburne has argued, in *The Evolution of the Soul*, that *all* the functions of the soul (and not just memory) are dependent on the functioning of a brain or other suitable physical mechanism. According to this variation of dualism, though the soul can *exist* in the absence of a brain, it cannot perform any of its functions. Consequently, there is an important dualist theory that rules out the possibility of a disembodied soul having selective access to his or her memories, and to the extent that there are good reasons for thinking that this dualist theory is true, there are good reasons to reject the physicalist's first claim.

In reply to the physicalist's second claim, that it would be better to exist in a state of misery than not to exist at all, the dualist could either simply deny this on intuitive grounds or agree that it is true. But if a Christian dualist were to agree that the non-existence of a person previously existing person would be worse than any kind of ongoing personal existence, wouldn't that be tantamount to conceding that the Christian physicalist has won the argument we have been examining? Not necessarily, since there is another version of substance dualism that we have not yet considered to which the dualist could resort for a defense against pure materialism. This is the dualist theory that human persons are a *combination* of material body and immaterial soul. On this hybrid view, a person cannot exist as only body or only soul. As we have been conceiving them, Christian physicalism entails that persons are just bodies and Christian dualism is the claim that persons are nothing but souls. The hybrid view is a *dualist* view because it makes both a material substance and an immaterial substance essential components of individual human persons. On this view, the soul is a thing that has the *potential* to think, will, and act, but only when it is conjoined with a requisite material substance such as a human body. In order to have a complete person, the soul's potential to think, will, and act, must be actualized in conjunction with a body that provides the materials that can serve as objects of the soul's thinking, willing, and acting. Though a lot more needs to be said about this view, what is important for present purposes is that there is a dualist view that has as one of its consequences that human persons are destroyed at death. So the Christian dualist who accepts this form of dualism can agree with the Christian physicalist that personal annihilation is worse than a miserable personal existence without having to concede that physicalism can account for the Bible's position on death and resurrection better than any version of dualism can. Of course this version of dualism may end up being untenable. But in that case, the dualist can simply deny the claim that non-existence is worse than miserable existence on intuitive grounds as suggested earlier.

### III. Conclusion

In conclusion, I suggest that the arguments I have offered provide adequate reasons at least to doubt and perhaps also to deny the Christian physicalist's claim that physicalism accounts for the biblical emphasis on the evil of death and the good of resurrection more adequately than any version of dualism does. I believe I have offered sufficiently plausible grounds for concluding that it is not at all clear that the Christian physicalist has made a strong enough case for this claim.