

Composition and the Will of God

Reconsidering Resurrection by Reassembly

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Christian eschatology traditionally posits the resurrection of the body. Throughout this tradition, it has been quite common to find theologians and philosophers who believe that the body in the paradisiacal world to come is numerically identical to the earthly body, and this is so even for those who would count as substance dualists.¹ So the aim to provide a coherent and plausible theory of sameness of body in the resurrection is not of interest only to materialists about human persons but also to dualists who stand in this tradition. Many bold attempts have been offered, such as Peter van Inwagen's (1978) "simulacrum" proposal, Dean Zimmerman's (1999, 2010) "falling elevator" account, and Trenton Merricks' (2001a) anti-criterialist theory.² What is common among many contemporary philosophers of religion is the outright dismissal of the possibility of resurrection by reassembly—a view that was held by many of the church fathers. According to this account, God resurrects the same body (or the same person for some materialists) by gathering the matter that formerly composed the earthly body and reassembling it into its previous shape and configuration (or at least organizing it in a sufficiently close enough way). Despite its early popularity, the resurrection by reassembly view has fallen almost completely out of favor due to various problems that appear intractable.³ Due to such concerns, much more attention has been given to developing and defending the simulacrum, falling elevator, or anti-criterialist accounts.

¹ This seems to be true with many of the church fathers. However, many substance dualists today hold that the resurrected body will be distinct from the pre-mortem, earthly body.

² For additional discussion of these and other accounts of the resurrection (some of which maintain the sameness of the body and others which do not), see Hud Hudson's chapter in this volume (Chapter 13).

³ For notable exceptions, see Davis (2001: 235–7) and Zimmerman (2013).

In this paper, we propose a modified version of resurrection by reassembly, one that is coherent and avoids many of the pitfalls that led to the original theory's widespread rejection.

After laying out several objections to resurrection by reassembly, we take a necessary digression into examining various theories of composition and offer our own novel account of restricted composition. After considering and responding to some objections to our view, we explain how our account can be incorporated into a modified version of resurrection by reassembly that avoids the standard problems associated with the original theory. It should be stated that we do not take this proposal to be the *actual* way in which God will resurrect bodies.⁴ Like the other accounts of resurrection, we are merely offering a “just-so” story—a way in which God *might* do it. But we do regard our proposal to be no less plausible than the extant theories that are considered as viable options for sameness of body in the resurrection.

11.1. OBJECTIONS TO RESURRECTION BY REASSEMBLY

Resurrection by reassembly was held by many early Christian thinkers, most notably by Augustine.⁵ This view might be supported by our intuitions involving the identity conditions of some material objects such as artifacts. For example, suppose someone takes a watch to a repair shop and the repairman takes the watch apart (with its parts scattered across the desk) and leaves it in that condition for a week. When the week goes by, the repairman reassembles the watch out of the parts on the desk. Now we might be inclined to believe that when the repairman returns the watch to its rightful owner, the watch that the owner now holds in her hands is the same watch that she dropped off a week ago. Had the repairman used completely different parts (i.e., parts distinct from the ones scattered on the desk) to assemble an indistinguishable watch, there is an inclination to believe that such a watch would not be numerically identical to the original watch. So there seems to be an intuition that the sameness of some macro-physical objects is accounted for by the reassembly (into its original form) of the exact same parts. Similarly, if God were to reassemble all the parts that once composed a pre-mortem body, we might believe that the reassembled body is identical to the pre-mortem body.

⁴ In fact, neither of us would go so far as to endorse the proposal; but we do want to offer it as an alternative option on bodily resurrection to the ones currently available.

⁵ See Augustine's *City of God* 22.20 and *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 12.35.68. For discussion of Augustine's view, see Niederbacher (2014: 128).

But things are much more complicated for human bodies. Our bodies are constantly undergoing changes in parts—through the acquisition and assimilation of new parts and the excretion of old ones—while maintaining structural stability. Hence, sameness of parts appropriately reassembled cannot be a necessary condition for the sameness of bodies across time (nor can it be a sufficient condition for reasons we will see below). Indeed, several well-known objections have been mounted against resurrection by reassembly that makes the account appear hopeless:⁶

Cannibal-Case: one of the earliest worries over resurrection by reassembly involved thought experiments in which a cannibal consumes and ingests a human victim and then immediately dies. Given that the atoms that composed the victim now partially compose the cannibal, how is God supposed to bring both individuals back from the dead? And which body gets which atoms? One possible response is to assert that the original possessor of those parts would get those parts back, whereas the missing parts of the cannibal would be supplied by God.⁷ Still, the problem can be posed in such a way that all and only the parts that composed the victim at his death later compose the cannibal at his death (such a scenario is, of course, very unlikely but logically possible). If so, then how can God resurrect the cannibal if (following the earlier policy of part distribution) the victim will be the recipient of all those atoms? Thus, if resurrection occurs by reassembly, then God cannot bring back both, which goes against the Christian belief that everyone will be resurrected (John 5:29).

Two-Bodies-Case: we know that human bodies undergo part fluctuation in such a way that it is possible (if not actual) that the parts that now compose Steve Davis do not overlap at all with the parts that composed him when he was ten-years-old. Now suppose that in the life to come, God reassembles the parts that now compose Steve and reassembles the parts that composed the ten-year-old Steve. If the mere reassembly of parts that once composed an individual is sufficient to bring back that individual, then it appears that both resurrected bodies are equally good candidates for being Steve (and it would seem arbitrary to choose either one). But they cannot both be Steve, and therefore neither one is Steve—thus, Steve would not be resurrected.

Destruction-Case: suppose that an individual, Smith, meets her unfortunate demise by way of total vaporization, say by a nuclear explosion. Or if such a devastating event is not adequate to destroy all of her parts, it is still possible that all or most of the parts that once composed Smith (at any level of decomposition) are completely destroyed. If the fundamental particles that once composed Smith no longer exist, then how can God bring Smith's body back when there are no parts to reassemble?

Due to such worries, most Christian materialists (and dualists who accept that the resurrected body will be identical to the earthly body) have opted for other

⁶ Clear presentation and discussion of these problems are found in Merricks (2009) and van Inwagen (1978).

⁷ Augustine *City of God* 22.20.

accounts of the resurrection of the body.⁸ van Inwagen suggests that material and causal continuity is required for sameness of body over time, and hence he proposes that God snatches the body (or some crucial part of it, such as the “naked kernel” mentioned by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:37) and leaves a simulacrum of the body which we regard as the corpse of the former person.⁹ The “falling elevator” model suggests that the body fissions prior to death, where the original body is immanently causally connected to both the corpse and to a living body that has “jumped” from one spatiotemporal region to another.¹⁰ Since the living body is the closest continuer of the original person (because the corpse is not a viable candidate), the person survives in a new location. This view preserves the requirement of causal continuity (and perhaps even material continuity)¹¹ but requires denying the “only x and y principle”¹² concerning diachronic identity. Finally, Merricks has argued that there are no informative and non-trivial necessary and sufficient conditions for diachronic identity; identity across time is unanalyzable. Thus, it is a brute fact that the resurrected body is numerically identical to the pre-mortem body; nothing more can be said.

The problems or concerns with each of these accounts need not be mentioned here. But we believe that resurrection by reassembly can be reconsidered as an option that is at least as plausible as these three views. Or at the very least, we aim to show that resurrection by reassembly is not as implausible and worrisome as some may believe. However, we need to discuss a related issue concerning composition, where we provide our own account of when composition occurs.

⁸ Another well-known objection has been stated by van Inwagen as follows:

Suppose a certain monastery claims to have in its possession a manuscript written in St. Augustine’s own hand. And suppose the monks of this monastery further claim that this manuscript was burned by Arians in the year 457. It would immediately occur to me to ask how *this* manuscript, the one I can touch, could be the very manuscript that was burned in 457. Suppose their answer to this question is that God miraculously recreated Augustine’s manuscript in 458. I should respond to this answer as follows: the deed it describes seems quite impossible, even as an accomplishment of omnipotence. God certainly might have created a perfect duplicate of the original manuscript, but it would not be *that* one. (1978, 116–17)

If material objects cannot have a “second beginning” after having ceased to exist, then resurrection by reassembly would be ruled out. Such an objection is tied to the alleged impossibility of temporal gaps or the necessity of (immanent) causal continuity. We leave this objection aside since our view will not address this particular problem. However, there have been, in our opinion, adequate replies to this worry. For such responses, see Merricks (1999) and Davis (1993: 123–8). On the possibility of “second beginnings,” see Quinn (1983).

⁹ van Inwagen (1978). The “naked kernel” suggestion can be found in van Inwagen’s “I Look for the Resurrection of the Dead and the Life of the World to Come” (unpublished).

¹⁰ Originally proposed by Zimmerman (1999), such a view has also been endorsed by Corcoran (2001) and O’Connor and Jacobs (2010).

¹¹ Zimmerman (2010).

¹² The “only x and y principle” states that whether x is identical to y must depend only on facts concerning x and y. To deny such a principle would be to make identity (across time) partly extrinsic.

11.2. COMPOSITION AND THE WILL OF GOD

To begin, a few preliminary notions will have to be defined. Let us treat parthood as primitive, where the parthood relation is reflexive, asymmetric, and transitive. We can now define the following mereological concepts:

x is a *proper part* of $y =_{df}$ x is a part of y , and x is not identical to y .

O *overlaps* $O^* =_{df}$ there is an x such that x is a part of O and a part of O^* .

The x s *compose* $y =_{df}$ the x s are all parts of y , none of the x s overlap with each other, and every part of y overlaps with at least one of the x s.

Now pre-theoretically, it seems that there are composite objects—things made up of proper parts. However, defending a pre-theoretical or naïve conception of material objects has proved to be fairly difficult. One reason is due to the difficulty in answering the so-called Special Composition Question, which asks for the necessary and sufficient conditions under which a plurality of objects composes some further object.¹³ Quite generally, there are three broad answers to the question of when composition occurs: never, always, and sometimes (and sometimes not).

Compositional nihilism (or “nihilism” for short) affirms the first extreme answer that composition never occurs—there are only simple (non-composite) objects such as fundamental particles.¹⁴ Statements involving composite objects must then be paraphrased. For example, a statement such as “I have a table” can be paraphrased as “I have particles arranged table-wise,” “I have particles that would compose a table if they could compose anything,” or “in our discourse (which includes fictional elements), I have a table.”¹⁵ Nihilism is difficult to accept given its denial of many of the objects we pre-theoretically grant as existing. Other objections have been raised against it, such as its alleged incompatibility with the possibility of a gunky world (i.e., a world that is infinitely divisible).¹⁶ We reject such a view not only due to its eschewal of many of the objects we regard as existing but also because we find the arguments on its behalf unconvincing.

Universalism is the view that holds the other extreme answer to the Special Composition Question: composition always occurs (because composition is automatic). Universalism, thus, embraces the principle of unrestricted composition: whenever there are non-overlapping x s, there is a further object composed of the x s. According to Universalism, there are far more objects

¹³ The *locus classicus* of this issue is found in van Inwagen (1990).

¹⁴ It is currently debated whether simples can be spatially extended, but we will leave that issue aside.

¹⁵ For discussion of some of these paraphrasing strategies, see van Inwagen (1990: ch.11), and Gideon and Dorr (2003).

¹⁶ For such criticism, see Sider (1993), though Sider (2013) now seems to advocate compositional nihilism.

than we ordinarily take to exist, including strange objects such as the sum composed of the Eiffel Tower and our noses. Such a view might seem too extravagant; however, Lewis and Sider have offered a powerful case on its behalf: the argument from vagueness. One formulation of the argument can be stated as follows:

- [1] If composition is restricted, then there must be a pair of cases connected by a continuous series such that composition occurs in one case but does not occur in the other.
- [2] In such a continuous series, there is no sharp cut-off regarding when composition occurs (i.e., there is no adjacent pair of cases c and c^* such that composition determinately occurs at c but does not determinately occur at c^*).
- [3] In any case in the series, either composition determinately occurs or it determinately does not occur.
- [4] So, composition is not restricted.¹⁷

Those wishing to resist this argument would seem to require having to endorse indeterminacy or vagueness somewhere in their ontology—either indeterminacy or vagueness in composition, identity, or existence. Some proponents of restricted composition welcome some of these results.¹⁸ When we provide our account of composition, we will offer our reply to the argument from vagueness. Nevertheless, we would like to find another answer to the Special Composition Question than universalism, for not only does it run afoul of ordinary intuitions by including strange, gerrymandered objects, but it also has been argued as not being theoretically superior to restricted compositional views.¹⁹

Nihilism and universalism provide principled and clear answers to the Special Composition Question. Though these views do have some troubling consequences, plausible versions of a moderate view (such that composition sometimes occurs and sometimes does not occur) have been notoriously difficult to advance. van Inwagen has offered decisive reasons for rejecting mere contact or fastening (of a plurality of objects) as the conditions under which composition takes place (and he also argues against any series-style answer such that there are different composition-relevant relations that hold among the parts of different kinds of objects).²⁰ van Inwagen's own view, sometimes labeled "organicism," states that composition occurs whenever the activities of some x s constitute a life (where a life is a self-maintaining, well-individuated biological event that maintains the complex internal structure of

¹⁷ See Sider (2001: 120–32). See also Lewis (1986: 212–13).

¹⁸ For example, van Inwagen (1990).

¹⁹ For such criticisms, see Korman (2007) and Effingham (2011).

²⁰ Though for a defense of a series-style approach, see Carmichael (forthcoming).

an organism). Under such a view, the only material objects that exist are organisms and simples. Merricks (2001b) has advanced a similar view in which the only objects that exist are conscious organisms and simples. He accepts the existence of conscious organisms because they exhibit non-redundant causal powers, but there are no composite objects that would have only redundant causal powers if they existed—and therefore there are no baseballs since the causal activity of the baseball can be sufficiently accounted for by the causal activity of the atoms arranged baseball-wise. A worrisome consequence with these two accounts is that they still deny far too many objects. It is merely nihilism plus (conscious) organisms. In fact, their view of composition is too stringent, denying even the existence of the proper parts of organisms such as brains and hands—which is a difficult claim to accept.²¹

One final answer to the Special Composition Question that we will consider is the theory of brutal composition: there are no non-trivial, finitely long necessary and sufficient conditions for when a plurality of objects compose some further object (cf. Markosian 1998). Given the putative failure of the extant answers to the Special Composition Question, Markosian suggests that we should believe that no satisfactory answer can be given—composition is brute and unanalyzable (in non-mereological terms). We regard such a theory as a last resort for restricted compositional views provided that there are no other plausible theories of composition left on the table.

However, we believe that such an option is not required. We offer a version of restricted composition that we take to be promising and quite plausible, at least for those who embrace Christian theism. The motivation of our preferred account comes from our espousal of the theological claim of divine conservation such that God sustains in existence the world and all of its contents. Many traditional Christians believe that God is not only the creator but also the sustainer of the world. From such a commitment, one of us has argued that the will of God is a necessary condition for diachronic identity.²² Objects lack “existential inertia.” They would cease to exist were it not for God acting or concurring with their continued existence. Metaphorically stated, the will of God is “the glue of the world” (Davis 1993: 120). What we want to propose is a

²¹ Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (1997) have offered another moderate view in which the only composite objects that exist are organisms and mereological compounds, which are objects that have parts that are so tightly joined together that one cannot causally affect one part without affecting the others (and hence, their use of “mereological compound” is non-standard).

²² Regarding diachronic identity, consider the case of fission in personal identity and suppose that psychological continuity is at least necessary for sameness of persons. Rather than adopting a non-branching condition or claiming that identity does not matter, the view holds that a necessary condition for sameness of persons is that God wills that one of the successors be the original person. Though this makes personal identity partly an extrinsic matter, it is not implausible if we take seriously the fact that we live in a world that is ontologically dependent on God. For more on this, see Davis (2010) and Davis (1993: ch. 6).

view where such glue not only sticks things together diachronically but also synchronically. The world would simply be an array of particles were it not for the divine will purposefully joining some of these particles together to form a whole.

We propose, then, that God's will is needed in order for composition to occur. Whatever the conditions are for composition to take place, a necessary condition is that God wills that the matter compose a further object by willing that there be a sum or fusion of that matter. Accordingly, it is not sufficient that the proper parts of a composite merely exist (as it is for universalism) or that the activities of the proper parts constitute a life (as it is for organicism). Whatever other conditions are required, we claim that God must also will that those parts compose some further object. We propose, then, the following theory of composition (which we will call "the Will of God Theory" or "WoG" for short):

[WoG] The *x*s compose some *y* at *t* if and only if (i) the *x*s exist at *t*, (ii) God wills that there be a fusion of the *x*s at *t*.

So merely having particles arranged table-wise is not adequate for there to be a table; rather, God must also will that there be a sum of those particles. The kind of object that such a sum falls under will depend on the specific arrangement of those particles.²³

Strictly speaking, WoG is compatible with the ontology of either nihilism or universalism, for it is possible that either God never wills there to be a fusion, or he wills that there be a fusion for every plurality. However, WoG can be cast as a version of restricted composition for several reasons. First, it may in fact be the case that God wills that there be some composite objects while not willing that there be others (such as strange or arbitrary sums). But the main reason we think of WoG as a version of restricted composition is that it provides a way of responding to the argument from vagueness—which some take to be the primary reason for accepting universalism. The proponent of WoG can deny premise [2] of that argument, claiming instead that there is a sharp cut-off in the continuous series. The plausibility of [2] rests on the fact that a minute physical difference (for example, the presence of a single atom) does not seem to be an adequate "difference-maker" for the occurrence or non-occurrence of composition in adjoining cases. But if the will of God is a necessary condition for composition to occur, then it is not implausible to suppose that there are two adjacent cases *c* and *c** in the series in which God wills that the plurality of objects compose some further object in *c* and does not so will in *c**. Divine volitions would be a robust enough difference-maker between these two cases in the series. Since the proponent of WoG has reasons

²³ We leave open whether there is a restriction to the kinds or sortals that there are, though we are inclined to accept that only certain arrangements are eligible for having an object fall under some kind. Thanks to Hud Hudson for this suggestion and with help in formulating our view.

for denying a key premise in the argument from vagueness, such a view is better construed as an account of restricted composition.

The main advantage for WoG is that it provides an alternative theory of composition that maintains our pre-theoretical intuitions concerning composite objects. Indeed, Markosian has claimed that brutal composition is “the overall theoretical position that best fits standard intuitions about composition and other metaphysical matters” (1998: 237). But our view also fits such intuitions; so there are at least two pre-theoretical, commonsensical views of composition. However, we take WoG to have an advantage over brutal composition because it is able to provide an answer to the Special Composition Question (as opposed to rejecting any possible answer).

Before moving back to the resurrection, we want to consider some possible objections to our account and offer some responses that should provide additional elaboration of our view.

Objection 1: Doesn't WoG suggest that God could will there to be any kind of object whenever there is a plurality of things? Couldn't God then will that particles arranged table-wise compose a human organism? *Reply:* First, recall the role of divine volition: God's will that there be a sum is only a necessary condition for composition to take place (it is not sufficient). Moreover, the divine volition does not determine the kind of object that results; it is the arrangement of those particles that does so. Even if there were particles arranged table-wise, God could not make those particles compose a human organism (on the assumption that a human organism cannot be arranged in a table-wise fashion). But there would be particles that composed a table if God wills that there be a fusion of those particles and that those particles are arranged table-wise. However, if God does not so will, then there would be no table—only particles arranged table-wise.

Objection 2: WoG makes the occurrence of composition an extrinsic matter, but it seems to be an intrinsic matter whether a plurality of objects composes some further object. *Reply:* we maintain that WoG does imply that the occurrence of composition is partly extrinsic, but we are already open to the claim that diachronic identity is partly extrinsic (and one of us has explicitly endorsed that claim). We believe that this should be unproblematic for anyone who holds to a strong view of divine conservation (as we do). Moreover, our account accommodates the intuition that the intention of a designer is a necessary condition for the existence of his or her product²⁴ or the Aristotelian claim that a craftsman puts something of his or her own soul (e.g., the form of the artifact) into the created work.²⁵ The world and its contents can in a sense be regarded as the product of divine craftsmanship such that the existence of these objects depends on the intentions of their maker.

²⁴ Cf. Baker (2004).

²⁵ See Aristotle *Metaphysics* VII.7.

Objection 3: given WoG, we cannot know when composition takes place since we do not know whether God wills composition to occur or not. *Reply:* our account only provides a metaphysical criterion under which composition takes place; it does not necessarily provide an epistemic criterion. Such a consequence might be taken as a drawback, especially since the two extreme views (universalism and nihilism) provide a clear way of knowing when composition has occurred or not (and some of the moderate views do so as well). However, these views require abandoning our pre-theoretical ontology of composite objects. As mentioned earlier, the only other view that keeps our pre-theoretical ontology is the brutal composition account; but such an account also lacks a clear epistemic criterion. Under brutal composition, we might be mistaken that composition has taken place when it comes to a statue, a rock, or an organism; nevertheless, the view provides a framework for maintaining a pre-theoretical ontology of composite objects. And WoG is at least on par with brutal composition, though it might be able to do more since we might discover what composite objects God wills to exist via divine revelation. Or perhaps one way of knowing that God wills to exist just those objects that we pre-theoretically take to exist might be through some *consensus gentium*-style argument: on the assumption that God does not want to massively deceive the overwhelming majority of human beings, the fact that the overwhelming majority of human beings have taken certain objects as existing might be reason for us to believe that God has willed those objects to exist. Regardless, even if we cannot ever know for sure when composition takes place, we nevertheless have a metaphysical framework that is compatible with the existence of all and only those ordinary objects we pre-theoretically regard as existing.

We do not expect that all the worries concerning WoG have been mitigated. But we do offer WoG as a competing theory of composition that seems to fare at least as well as the other possible approaches to the Special Composition Question.

11.3. COMPOSITION AND THE RESURRECTION

We are now in a position to apply our theory to the resurrection. In this section, we will offer an account of the resurrection of the body that comes very close to the patristic account without falling into the same traps. The original patristic account claims that a human body can be brought back by using the same particles that once composed that body and appropriately arranging them. We suggest a modification to that account, one that adopts the additional commitments that follow from an acceptance of a strong view of divine conservation—viz., that the will of God is a crucial feature in both the

occurrence of composition and diachronic identity. In the previous section, we offered and defended WoG as a viable alternative to other theories of composition, and one of us has already argued for the relevance of the will of God concerning diachronic identity. Thus, for anyone who wants to accept an account of bodily resurrection that is inspired by the church fathers, we believe that he or she would benefit from accepting the addition of these two divine volitions.

The modified patristic account can be formulated as follows: God resurrects numerically the same body as the pre-mortem body if (i) a sufficient number of particles that once composed the pre-mortem body are (at the eschaton) suitably arranged, (ii) God wills that there be a fusion of those particles (at the eschaton), and (iii) God wills that the resultant fusion (viz., the resurrected body) be identical to the pre-mortem body.²⁶ We believe these amendments help the patristic account avoid several problems.

The original patristic account seemed to treat (i) as a necessary and sufficient condition for resurrecting the same body. But the modified account does not take sameness of matter arranged in the same way (or in a close enough way) as being in itself either necessary or sufficient. As stated earlier, “same matter in the same arrangement” is clearly not necessary for living bodies since bodies are constantly gaining and losing parts—but the modified account provides only sufficient conditions.²⁷ Moreover, “same matter in the same arrangement” is also not sufficient but is rather a part of a sufficient condition (i.e., (i)–(iii) are jointly sufficient). What more is required are the two divine volitions in (ii) and (iii). Given WoG, the divine will in (ii) is needed to have a composite object, and including the will of God in (iii) is not ad hoc, as one of us has argued for that claim independently of some of the issues raised in this paper.²⁸

According to this modified account of resurrection by reassembly, God can bring back a human body by gathering and appropriately arranging (all or most of) the proper parts that once composed it, will that there be a fusion of those parts, and will that the resultant composite be the same as the pre-mortem body. Furthermore, God can bring back a human body using *any* plurality of particles that once composed the pre-mortem body during its

²⁶ The expression “a sufficient number of particles” in condition (i) is obviously imprecise and unclear. We do not want to take a hard line on exactly how many objects must overlap to satisfy such a condition. Exact overlap seems too stringent, and the minimal bound might seem to be at least half. We could stipulate a number (e.g., at least eighty percent of the particles that composed the pre-mortem body must be included in the plurality of particles that compose the resurrected body); however, we are content to leave it open.

²⁷ This is because we are open to the possibility of a disjunctive criterion of diachronic identity (where each disjunct serves as a sufficient condition). For additional elaboration, see Davis (2001: 237) and Davis (1993: 116–23).

²⁸ See Davis (2010, 1993).

career (i.e., the modified account does not require that the particles that God uses be the ones that composed the body immediately prior to death).

The real advantage of the modified patristic account is that it avoids the problems mentioned in section 1 that beset the original theory. Take first the *Cannibal-Case*. Consider the version of partial overlap between the cannibal and the victim. It seems that God can prevent the particles of the victim from partially composing the cannibal by not willing that they do so even though they are so arranged. Merely being located in the cannibal's body or being involved within such an arrangement is not sufficient for being parts of that body. Interestingly, this response is compatible with Athenagoras' assertion that human flesh is indigestible (which was his solution to the partial overlapping version of *Cannibal-Case*), for it could be the case that God never allows the parts of human flesh to partially compose a cannibal's body.²⁹ Such a response, however, does not handle the case of complete overlap between the parts of the cannibal and the parts of the victim at the time of the cannibal's death. But the modified patristic account has a ready response: God can take the particles that composed the cannibal and the victim at some point in the past in which the proper parts that composed each of them do not overlap with any of their proper parts during the time of the consumption. Then by reassembling those particles—the ones that are never shared by the cannibal and the victim—and having the relevant divine volitions to satisfy condition (ii) and (iii), God can resurrect both individuals.³⁰

Next, consider the *Two-Bodies-Case*. Let "p" stand for the plurality of particles that will compose Steve Davis immediately before his death, and let "p*" stand for the plurality of particles that composed Steve Davis when he was ten years old. With the modified patristic account, there are different ways out of this problem. Even if p and p* were gathered and appropriately arranged by God, it does not yet follow that either p or p* composes some additional object. God could refrain from willing that both p and p* each compose a human body. Or God could will that both p and p* each compose a human body, but he could only will that one of those bodies be identical to Steve's body. This does not contravene divine omnipotence since an omnipotent being cannot bring about a contradictory state of affairs. Hence, God cannot simultaneously will that p and p* each compose a human body and will that p and p* each be identical to Steve's body. Thus, God would either have to not will that p and p* each compose a human

²⁹ See Bynum (1995). Of course, this does not mitigate the worry that the cannibal would then have oddly shaped spatial gaps in his body and whether a living body could exist in that condition.

³⁰ Some have suggested that God could stagger the time of each body's resurrection such that one body is resurrected, and after losing the parts that once overlapped the other body, God then resurrects the second body.

body or not will that p and p^* each be identical to Steve's body. So the will of God guarantees that there can only be a *unique* successor, and therefore no contradiction arises.³¹

Finally, let us consider the *Destruction-Case*. Several responses can be given. First, provided that the account of the resurrection we are offering is merely a "just-so" story, it is possible that God preserves all or most of the particles that once composed me such that total destruction never takes place. Second, we have been discussing the identity conditions of only composite objects, but it may be the case that the identity conditions of simples are quite different. If simples can survive temporal gaps, then even if the particles that once composed a body are completely destroyed, it may be the case that God can bring back those very same simples and use them for reassembly. Thirdly, even if none of the particles that once composed a particular body right before death still exist, God could still use a plurality of particles that once composed the pre-mortem body, where those particles do not overlap any of the particles at the time of total destruction. By appropriately arranging those particles and willing that they compose a human body and that the resultant body be identical to the pre-mortem body, God can bring back the living body even if all of the parts that composed that body immediately prior to death no longer exist in the eschaton.

By overcoming these standard problems to the original theory of resurrection by reassembly, the modified patristic account provides a viable alternative of bodily resurrection to the currently available theories. Of course some worries for such a proposal remain. For one, this account requires the impossibility of two distinct bodies ever having significant overlap of its proper parts throughout their careers. Another objection may come from those who take immanent causal connections as necessary for persistence. So even the modified patristic account has some costs. Nevertheless, these costs seem neither to be any worse nor any more extravagant than the costs required by the other leading views of bodily resurrection.

To conclude, we have shown that by utilizing the concept of the will of God in a theory of composition and diachronic identity, a modified version of resurrection by reassembly can be developed that is both coherent and defensible from certain well-known objections. Hence, the modified patristic account of resurrection by reassembly should be considered as a competitor to the simulacrum, falling elevator, and anti-criterialist accounts. Or at least it should be regarded as no more puzzling and worrisome than these views.

³¹ There might even be a principled reason for God to prefer having p compose the resurrected body and not p^* , see Davis (2001: 236–7).

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