

MATERIALISM AND THE RESURRECTION: ARE THE PROSPECTS IMPROVING?

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Abstract. In 1999 Dean Zimmerman proposed a “falling elevator model” for a bodily resurrection consistent with materialism. Recently he has defended the model against objections, and a slightly different version has been defended by Timothy O’Connor and Jonathan Jacobs. This article considers both sets of responses, and finds them at best partially successful; a new objection, not previously discussed, is also introduced. It is concluded that the prospects for the falling-elevator model, in either version, are not bright.

If humans are purely material beings, an afterlife has to take the form of bodily resurrection. But there are notorious difficulties for materialistic doctrines of resurrection, mainly over the question of personal identity. Most such doctrines fail to allay the suspicion that the “resurrected” person may be a mere replica, rather than the identical individual who formerly lived and died. There are various ways of elucidating this suspicion, but the core question concerns the lack of a certain sort of causal connection between the resurrected individual and the person who perished. It is widely accepted that for a particular material object to exist over a period of time each of its stages must be directly causally responsible (no doubt along with other conditions) for the successor stages. As my car sits in the garage, the positions and activities (if any) of its various parts, from engine and exhaust-pipe down to atoms and molecules, are the direct result of the positions and activities of its parts in the immediate past. But this kind of connection seems to be lacking in materialist accounts of the resurrection. The most common accounts have it that God miraculously reassembles elementary particles (either the original particles or some others) in a configuration that exactly matches the configuration of a person’s body prior to her death. There is here a certain sort of causal

connection, to be sure, but it is not direct: instead, the previously living body furnishes a sort of blue-print in God's mind, according to which the replacement body is constructed. The situation is similar to that of the transporter device featured in the *Star Trek* series: in that case, the bodily structure is "read off" by the sending mechanism, the information is transmitted to the new location, and a body is produced following the instructions (except in rare cases of malfunction, which may prove life-threatening to the person thus "transmitted"). But this sort of indirect connection, it seems, is not sufficient to preserve personal identity: in the *Star Trek* series we actually have a series of different, comparatively sort-lived, individuals playing each of the roles of Kirk, Spock, and the rest – though mercifully, both the individuals in the story and the average viewer remain blissfully unaware of this fact!

Interestingly, a philosopher who has produced one of the most trenchant critiques of "reassembly" theories of resurrection, has also devised the one version of a materialist resurrection that is generally acknowledged to be conceptually coherent. The philosopher in question is, of course, Peter van Inwagen. Here is his proposal in his own words:

It is part of the Christian faith that all men who share in the sin of Adam must die. What does it mean to say that I must die? Just this: that one day I shall be composed entirely of non-living matter; that is, I shall be a corpse. It is not part of the Christian faith that I must at any time be totally annihilated or disintegrate. . . . It is of course true that men apparently cease to exist, those who are cremated, for example. But it contradicts nothing in the creeds to suppose that this is not what really happens, and that God preserves our corpses contrary to all appearance. . . . Perhaps at the moment of each man's death, God removes his corpse and replaces it with a simulacrum which is what is burned or rots. Or perhaps God is not quite so wholesale as this: perhaps He removes for "safekeeping" only the "core person"--the brain and central nervous system--or even some special part of it. These are details.¹

This, then guarantees the individual's continued existence (albeit as a corpse); at the resurrection, God re-animates the corpse, heals its

¹ Peter van Inwagen, "The Possibility of Resurrection," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 9 (1978), pp. 114-21; reprinted, with an Author's Note added in 1990, in Paul Edwards (ed.), *Immortality* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 242-46; pp. 245-46.

fatal injury or illness, and puts the revitalized person on the road to a fuller life.

It seems quite plausible that van Inwagen has presented a scenario that is logically coherent. And upon reflection, it is not surprising that he has succeeded where others have failed. The core difficulty for belief in the resurrection lies precisely in the fact that bodies disintegrate after death, often with their constituent matter widely scattered and even taken up into the bodies of other persons. But on van Inwagen's scenario, this is precisely what does *not* happen – though admittedly, it may seem to our naive and uninstructed observation that it does occur.

This scenario however, suffers from an important weakness of its own: it seems that no one believes that this is what actually happens; perhaps not even van Inwagen himself. The central point is made nicely by Dean Zimmerman, who tells us that he once assisted a friend who was an anatomy student in dissecting a corpse. He observes that

Opening a human skull and finding a dead brain is sort of like opening the ground and finding a dinosaur skeleton. Of course it is in some sense possible that God takes our brains when we die and replaces them with stuff that looks for all the world like dead brains, just as it is possible that God created the world 6000 years ago and put dinosaur bones in the ground to test our faith in a slavishly literal reading of Genesis. But neither is particularly satisfying as a picture of how God actually does business.²

The massive deception on God's part entailed by this scenario is already, one would think, a sufficient reason to reject it. (One may also wonder how our attitude to the "remains" of the deceased would be altered, if we actually took this story to be the true one.) In a later re-publication of his article, van Inwagen appended an "author's note" in which he states, "If I were writing a paper on this topic today, I should not make the definite statement 'I think this is the *only* way such a being could accomplish it [viz., resurrection]'. I am now inclined to think that there may well be other ways, ways that I am unable even to form an idea of because I lack the conceptual resources to do so."³

² Dean A. Zimmerman, "The Compatibility of Materialism and Survival: The 'Falling Elevator' Model," *Faith and Philosophy* 16:2 (April 1999), pp.194-212; p. 196.

³ P. Edwards (ed.), *Immortality*, p. 246.

Dean Zimmerman has come to van Inwagen's assistance by providing a model for resurrection that (he claims) exhibits the virtues of van Inwagen's account without portraying God as, in effect, a body-snatcher. Subsequently at least two philosophers (Kevin Corcoran and Hud Hudson⁴) have embraced the proposal, while others (including David Hershenov, Eric Olson, and me⁵) have criticized it. Zimmerman has recently published an article in which he defends his proposal against objections,⁶ and Timothy O'Connor and Jonathan Jacobs have advocated a slightly altered version as a complement for their own materialist metaphysics of human persons.⁷ It is these developments that form the subject-matter of the present paper. We shall sketch the main outlines of Zimmerman's proposal, and state and assess some of the main objections to it. Then we will consider the variant of the proposal by O'Connor and Jacobs. The question to be answered is: Does the Zimmerman proposal, in either of its variants, offer an improved possibility for a materialist resurrection, over those presented earlier?

The question of Zimmerman's own relationship to his proposed scenario is a bit perplexing. To begin with, Zimmerman himself is not a materialist, but rather a dualist – indeed, an emergent dualist.⁸ His

⁴ Kevin Corcoran, "Physical Persons and Postmortem Survival without Temporal Gaps," in Kevin Corcoran (ed.), *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 201–17; and Hud Hudson, *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), Ch. 7. (Hudson combines the model with a "temporal parts" view concerning the persistence of objects over time, a view that Zimmerman rejects.)

⁵ David Hershenov, "Van Inwagen, Zimmerman, and the Materialist Conception of Resurrection," *Religious Studies* 38 (2002), pp. 451–69; Eric Olson, "Immanent Causation and Life after Death," in George Gasser, ed., *Personal Identity and Resurrection: How Do We Survive Our Death?* (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp. 51–66; and William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 225–31.

⁶ Dean Zimmerman, "Bodily Resurrection: The Falling Elevator Model Revisited," in George Gasser (ed.), *Personal Identity and Resurrection*, pp. 33–50.

⁷ Timothy O'Connor and Jonathan D. Jacobs, "Emergent Individuals and the Resurrection," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2:2 (Autumn 2010), pp. 69–88.

⁸ "Falling Elevator Model Revisited," p. 37. Zimmerman cites Hasker, *The Emergent Self*; he also refers the reader to articles of his own, including "Material People," in M. Loux and Dean Zimmerman (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 491–526; "From Property Dualism to Substance Dualism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 85 (2010); and "Should a Christian Be a Mind–Body Dualist?" in M. Peterson and R. Van Arragon (eds),

primary aim, therefore, was to provide van Inwagen and other materialists with a materialist model for the resurrection that is superior to those previously on offer. However, Zimmerman does have a use of his own for the model, not indeed to preserve personal identity in the resurrection (continuity of soul suffices to accomplish that), but rather to permit him to assert, as many orthodox believers have wished to assert, that the body which is resurrected is identical with the body that previously lived and died. He states, however, “I have no confidence whatsoever that the way I suggest is anything close to what actually happens”⁹; what he is offering is a “just so story” about the resurrection. And yet, as we shall see, there are features of his account which seem to suggest that it should not, for him, be usable even for the more modest purpose of securing identity between the resurrection body and the body that died. Readers must make what they can of these perplexities, unless and until Zimmerman himself chooses to further enlighten us. In this paper, Zimmerman’s scenario will be investigated as a serious metaphysical proposal.

The difference between Zimmerman’s and van Inwagen’s views can be briefly summarized: for van Inwagen, God plays the role of a body-snatcher, whereas for Zimmerman, instead of body-snatching, we have body-splitting. The body fissions in a certain way, with one of the fission products going to the grave and the other appearing in the resurrection world. Zimmerman’s name for his approach is the Falling Elevator Model, drawing on the idea that “according to the ‘physics’ of cartoons, it is possible to avoid death in a plummeting elevator simply by jumping out the split second before the elevator hits the basement floor.”¹⁰ Similarly, the body of a dying person escapes dissolution by “jumping” from the deathbed scene directly into the resurrection world. More details are needed here, of course. But before going into those details, we should point out one formidable difficulty that Zimmerman acknowledges in his scenario: it requires us to accept a “closest continuer” account of personal identity. He argues, however, that a materialism such as van Inwagen’s is bound to affirm a closest continuer view in any case, so this does not amount to an *additional* cost of the Falling Elevator Model.

Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion (Malden, MA: Basil Blackwell, 2004), pp. 315–27.

⁹ “Falling Elevator Model Revisited,” p. 35.

¹⁰ “Falling Elevator Model,” p. 196.

Zimmerman begins by agreeing with van Inwagen that “Whenever some matter constitutes an organism, there is a special kind of event, a Life, that occurs to the matter and that continues for as long as that organism exists.”¹¹ In this Life-event, the “organism displays a distinctive sort of ‘immanent causation,’ its later stages causally dependent upon earlier stages.”¹² This dependence, furthermore, must be *direct*, not mediated through either a teleportation device or a blueprint in God’s mind. Given this,

The Falling Elevator Model is a way to allow the Life of a dying organism to go one way, while the dead matter goes another way. The trick is to posit immanent-causal connections that “jump” from the matter as it is dying, connecting the Life to some other location where the crucial organic structure of the organism is preserved. . . . So every portion of the matter in my body undergoes something like fission at the time of my death. Consider just the atoms in my body; and pretend that my body consists entirely of atoms (and the parts of atoms). The Falling Elevator Model affirms that, at the moment of my death,¹³ God allows each atom to continue to immanently-cause later stages in the “life” or history of an atom, right where it is then located, as it normally would do; but that God *also* gives each atom the miraculous power to produce an exact duplicate at a certain distance in space or time (or both), at an unspecified location I shall call “the next world.” The local, normal, immanent-causal process linking each atom to an atom within the corpse is sufficient to secure their identities; no atom ceases to exist merely because it exercised this miraculous “budding” power to produce new matter in a distant location. Still, the arrangement of atoms that appears at a distance is directly immanent-causally connected to my body at the time of my death; and there are no other arrangements of living matter produced by my dying body that are candidates for continuing my Life. The atoms do something that resembles fissioning – though what they really do is more like “budding,” producing exactly similar offspring in the next world – while the organism does *not* fission. My body’s Life does not divide, but goes in one direction only, carrying my body with it to a new location.¹⁴

¹¹ “Falling Elevator Model Revisited,” p. 35.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 35f.

¹³ There is some ambiguity in various statements concerning the timing of the “fission” event. I will assume that it occurs at the moment dividing life from death, the moment such that at any earlier time the individual is alive, and at any later time life has ceased.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

This, then, gives us the “bare bones” of the Falling Elevator Model; some further details will emerge as we consider various objections.

Here is one question that might occur to us: granted that immanent-causal causation is one constraint on the persistence of organisms, and that the Falling Elevator Model satisfies that constraint, may there not be additional constraints that the model fails to satisfy? David Hershenov has answered this question in the affirmative: the additional constraint he specifies is that, when new matter is added to an existing organism, “There is an overlap of the new and the old, and this enables the new particles to be assimilated into the individual’s body.”¹⁵ This, however, is not possible with Zimmerman’s model: on that model, there is no assimilation of new particles to earlier ones, and thus “the resurrected body is a duplicate, constituted by brand new matter that never had a chance to become part of my body.”¹⁶ Zimmerman’s response to this challenge is both interesting and complex. He writes,

I might be able to accept an assimilation principle that merely rules out the possibility of an organism’s losing all of its proper parts at the same time.. Suppose that, as a matter of necessity, whenever a living thing dies there are some proper parts that also cease to exist (for example, cells or organs that perish along with the organism). I am not at all sure whether this is true. But if it were, then, so long as the resurrection jump works for the organism as a whole, it ought to succeed in bringing these proper parts into the next world as well. And therefore, whenever a living thing survives death by means of the falling elevator method, some proper parts of it will also survive.¹⁷

These remarks seem to imply that it would be an advantage for Zimmerman’s model if, when a living thing dies, its organs cease to exist. But this does not seem to be the case: if the organs cease to exist, then from that time on there simply *are no such organs*, either in our present

¹⁵ “Van Inwagen, Zimmerman, and the Materialist Conception of Resurrection,” p. 462. See Hershenov’s article for an extensive discussion of the role the assimilation requirement plays in our ordinary thoughts about the continuous existence of organic bodies. He also argues (less successfully, I think) *against* the requirement of immanent causation.

¹⁶ “Falling Elevator Model Revisited,” p. 44.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45, emphasis added.

world or in the resurrection world. The important question, however, is whether, at the point of fission, the body “takes with it” its major organs (at least) into the new world; while leaving behind the matter of which those organs were previously composed. Upon reflection, this seems to be what we should expect, given the other assumptions of the model. It would be strange indeed to say that *the same body* has been transferred to the resurrection world, only with a brand-new heart, brain, liver, lungs, and all the rest! The strangeness of this is brought out by the following bit of dialogue:

“That’s a fine new axe you have there!”

“Oh, no – it’s the same old axe I’ve been using for many years. But it just came back from the repair shop, where they fitted it with a new handle and a new axehead.”

If body parts are not transferred along with the body, then the Falling Elevator Model cannot accept even the very modest assimilation principle stated above.

This move by Zimmerman serves to call attention to a feature of his model that might otherwise have escaped our notice. Recall his objection to the idea that, on van Inwagen’s approach, “God takes our brains when we die and replaces them with stuff that looks for all the world like dead brains.” It now turns out that on Zimmerman’s own model (interpreted as above) God does very much the same thing! On that model, the mass of stuff Zimmerman and his friend removed from the skull of the cadaver *was not a human brain*; it had never been part of a human body, had never been enclosed in a human skull or subserved human thought and emotion. The real brain, skull, heart, liver, and so on now exist *only* in the resurrection world. It is true enough that what is left behind “looks for all the world like dead brains,” but that is not by any means what it actually is. To be sure, God’s mode of operation is slightly different in the two cases. On Zimmerman’s model God doesn’t “snatch” the body; instead, he endows it with the miraculous power to transport itself to the resurrection world. And he doesn’t himself craft the “brain surrogate” that is left behind; rather, he creates a situation in which the real brain does that itself, by leaving behind its elementary particles, etc., in the right relative positions as it departs for a better place. Nevertheless,

the similarities are striking. If the deceptiveness of the whole process is a reason to reject van Inwagen's scenario, is Zimmerman's really all that much better off?

But we need to return to Zimmerman's defense of his view. What is needed, he tells us, is a more precise formulation of the assimilation principle. After one less-than-successful effort, he proposes

(AP2) If x persists through some finite period leading up to, but not including, t , then if x exists at t , every set S into which x is decomposable without remainder at t has members with parts that were parts of x before t .¹⁸

This principle, Zimmerman thinks, is what Hershenov needs, and if it is true then the body in the resurrection world, on the Falling Elevator Model, cannot be identical with the body that previously existed in our world. For the body in the resurrection world is presumably decomposable into a set of elementary particles, and we have been told that none of those particles existed here in our everyday world. But, Zimmerman claims, (AP2) is not obviously true. In quantum mechanics, individual particles (for instance, those in one's body) are not "trackable" over time. He asks:

Why do nature's laws fail to distinguish between circumstance A , in which *this* proton shows up *there* and *that* proton shows up *here*, and circumstance B , in which *that* proton shows up *there* and *this* proton shows up *here*? Some say: the best explanation is that the imagined difference between A and B does not exist – these are not two distinct states of the system. If the two protons really persisted over time, A and B *would* be distinct states; and so the protons do not really persist.¹⁹

If this is so, then (AP2), which apparently does require the persistence of particles, is false, and the Falling Elevator Model has nothing to fear. Zimmerman acknowledges that there are alternative explanations that do allow particles to persist. He asks, however, "why gamble on an assimilation principle that requires the falsehood of an attractive explanation of this

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

strange feature of quantum statistics?”²⁰ Due metaphysical caution, then, should lead us to withhold assent from such a principle as (AP2).

The maneuver is ingenious, but I do not believe it succeeds. So far as I know, neither Zimmerman nor anyone else has claimed that quantum mechanics has refuted the relativistic equivalence of mass and energy, enshrined in the famous equation $e = mc^2$. I suggest, then, that instead of particles as the fundamental “parts” of matter we think instead of *parcels of mass-energy*. Such “parcels” have the advantage over particles that they can undergo more changes of state while retaining their identity. (Compare: ice cubes vs. H_2O .) Parcels of mass-energy can exist in the form of discrete particles, but they can transform into different kinds of particles (as happens in high-energy physics experiments), or into radiant energy (as in the thermonuclear reactions in our sun), or combine with other such parcels, and so on. The flexibility built into the notion of parcels of mass-energy means that (AP2) can very well be true, even in the face of the failure of individual particles to persist, *provided that* the “parts” mentioned in the principle are understood as parcels of mass-energy. To make this absolutely clear, we may restate the principle as follows:

(AP2') If x persists through some finite period leading up to, but not including, t , then if x exists at t , every set S into which x is decomposable without remainder at t has members with parts – viz., parcels of mass-energy – that were parts of x before t .

(AP2'), I claim, formulates our belief that assimilation is required in a way that is not undermined by the quantum phenomena adduced by Zimmerman. And it does rule out the Falling Elevator Model; on that model, all of the mass-energy of the original body remains behind in our everyday world.

The other main objection to be considered here is one put forward by me concerning the Falling Elevator Model's endorsement of a closest continuer theory of personal identity.²¹ What is problematic about the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 47.

²¹ The objection presented by Eric Olson will not be considered here. The objection is extremely interesting, but the argument becomes quite complicated and I am inclined to think the result must be inconclusive. For discussion, see Zimmerman's "Falling Elevator Model Revisited," pp. 48-50.

theory is its violation of what has come to be called the “only x and y principle” (OXY), stated roughly by Zimmerman as “the thesis that facts outside the spatiotemporal path swept out by an object could not have made any difference to the question of whether a single object swept along that path.”²²

It is clear that the model does require a closest continuer theory which violates (OXY). Consider a situation in which, as a person approaches death, the body’s particles undergo “budding,” as the model prescribes, and as a result a body comes to exist in the future, resurrection world. Now, if the body in our world were to survive, *that* body would continue to be the body of that person, and in fact to *be* the person,²³ since it would be the “closest continuer” of that person’s life. If on the other hand that body does not survive (as the model prescribes), the closest continuer is the body in the resurrection world.

Now, Zimmerman recognizes that the endorsement of a closest continuer view might strike us as a disadvantage of his model.²⁴ He argues, as has been noted, that any materialist view of human beings can be forced to adopt a closest continuer theory, so this does not constitute an additional cost for the Falling Elevator Model over and above what a materialist is already committed to. I claimed, on the contrary, that a materialist need not, and should not, embrace a closest continuer theory. Here in brief is the case for Zimmerman’s claim: consider an organism that can be divided (more or less) symmetrically into two parts, each of which, if it alone survives, is sufficient to constitute the survival of the organism. (This may not be true of human beings; if it is

²² “Falling Elevator Model,” p. 198. In “Falling Elevator Model Revisited,” Zimmerman devotes some effort towards a more precise formulation of the principle, but this material is not essential for the present discussion.

²³ Or perhaps, to constitute the person. The points discussed here are independent of the difference between the identity of person and body, affirmed by van Inwagen and by O’Connor and Jacobs, and a constitution view such as that held by Corcoran or Lynn Rudder Baker.

²⁴ In 1999 he wrote, “Some will insist that adopting a closest continuer theory of personal identity is just as wildly implausible as supposing that God is a body-snatcher – and, for the record, I am inclined to agree” (“Falling Elevator Model,” p. 196f.). Given this, it is a bit difficult to see how Zimmerman can make any positive use of his model, even for the purpose of securing the identity of the resurrection body with the body which died. It may be that Zimmerman’s views on closest continuer theories have softened in the intervening decade.

not, imagine whatever modification of human anatomy is required in order to make it possible.) If one part of the divided organism survives, then so does the organism. But if both survive, then they cannot both be identical with the original organism, and the apparent conclusion is that the organism's life has ended, with two successor organisms left in its place. Unless, to be sure, one of the successors has for some reason a better claim than the other to be identical with the original – thus, the “closest continuer.” In the Falling Elevator Model, the closest continuer is the body in the resurrection world, because that body alone continues the Life of the person. But any materialist view, Zimmerman contends, can be forced to adopt a closest continuer theory, given that it is possible for person-constituting organisms to be symmetrically divided. Here is Zimmerman's summary of my answer to this argument:

Hasker's discussion involves Mark, a human-like creature whose cerebrum, brain stem, and so on are neatly divisible. Hasker thinks he has found a way for van Inwagen to maintain that: (a) Mark could survive the destruction of half of his matter, (b) fission along the same plane would result in Mark's death, and (c) (OXY) is true. In the case in which half of Mark's cells are destroyed, Hasker claims that it is not “*consistent with the actual history*” of Mark that an “equal claimant” should have existed. The destruction of half of Mark's cells—the ones which, had they been carefully removed, would have constituted an equal claimant—is “*an event in Mark's own life,*” says Hasker.²⁵

Zimmerman, however, is not convinced. He replies:

If this is to represent a way to save (OXY), the claim must be that the events undergone by the series of hunks of matter constituting Mark, in the world that includes destruction of half of his matter, cannot be paired up with intrinsically similar events undergone by a similar series of hunks of matter in a world where Mark undergoes fission. But I do not see why this must be so. Compare two surgeries: in one, an organ is cut away from a living body and simultaneously destroyed; in another, the organ is cut away in the same fashion but preserved for transplantation into another body. There need be no difference between the two surgeries, from the point of view of the

²⁵ “Falling Elevator Model Revisited,” pp. 41-42; the quotation is from *The Emergent Self*, p. 230.

hunks of matter constituting the patient's body before, during, and after the surgery; intrinsically, the events within the body of the patient will "look" exactly the same. Similarly, when considering just the region occupied by Mark's body, and the events that go on within it when half of its matter is cut away and simultaneously killed, I cannot see why a region *just like that* could not contain exactly similar matter undergoing exactly similar events, when the departing organs are cut away and preserved alive.²⁶

Zimmerman, however, has failed to grasp the scenario I was proposing. When I said that half of Mark's cells are destroyed, it was implied that they are destroyed *while they are still part of Mark's body*. (I may not have been sufficiently explicit. However, my reference to "laser surgery" might have suggested the correct interpretation to Zimmerman. There are in fact surgeries where diseased or undesired tissue is destroyed *without* first being removed from the body.) And since the destruction of tissue occurs while the cells are part of Mark's body, there *is not and cannot be*, consistent with this actual history, another "claimant" to Mark's identity. If on the other hand Mark is surgically divided, and subsequently one set of cells is allowed to perish, I would indeed say that Mark has not survived the surgery. We may, to be sure, be thankful that, so far as we know, such procedures are not in the offing for human persons!

In view of this, I stick to my original claim: a materialist such as van Inwagen need not, and since he need not he should not, accept a closest continuer theory of personal identity. I went on to argue that a closest continuer theory is unacceptable because it leads to making identity a contingent relation – but identity that is merely contingent is not *identity*. Now, Zimmerman agrees that a theory that makes identity contingent is unacceptable. He points out, however, that a closest continuer theorist has an alternative to contingent identity, one that is not so clearly unacceptable. (I had alluded to this possibility in a footnote, but did not spell it out or discuss it.) In order to get a grasp on this, consider the situation in which, at the moment of death, an organism has "fissioned" in the way specified by the Falling Elevator Model. There is the original, living person, whom we may call Alphonse. There is the body which is left behind in our everyday world, which we call Boris. And there is the body in the resurrection world, which we shall dub Carlos. (The

²⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

introduction of these names is meant to leave it an open question as to what identity relations may obtain between Alphonse, Boris, and Carlos.) Suppose, furthermore, that after the fission (but contrary to the model) Boris and Carlos both continue to live. After this has occurred, we might imagine Carlos saying, "If Boris had not survived I would have been identical with Alphonse, but since he did survive it is he who is identical with Alphonse and I am not." This scenario makes Carlos's identity with Alphonse contingent, and both Zimmerman and I rule it out. But we can also imagine Carlos saying, "Since Boris survived, I exist as an individual distinct from Alphonse, but had he not survived I would not exist." This may strike us as strange, but unlike Carlos's other response it does not make identity contingent, and Zimmerman argues that it does not give us good reason to reject the closest continuer theory. Readers will have to consider whether this does make his model more acceptable; later on I shall present an argument against Zimmerman's use of this idea.

It is time to assess the Falling Elevator Model in the light of this discussion. If (AP2') or some other appropriate version of the assimilation requirement holds, Boris is identical with the body of Alphonse and Alphonse does not survive. Even apart from the assimilation requirement, if the "only x and y " principle holds and closest continuer theories are rejected, the model again fails. According to the model, both Boris and Carlos are candidates for continuing the life of Alphonse – but if so, then it follows from (OXY) that neither is identical with Alphonse; *his* life comes to an end at the point of fission. So for the model to have a chance of success, we must reject both the assimilation requirement and the "only x and y " principle – already a considerable metaphysical cost.

But suppose that neither of these principles states a necessary condition for personal identity over time. Even so, a case can be made that it is Boris, rather than Carlos, which is the best candidate for identity with the body of Alphonse. Even if continuity of matter, and the gradual assimilation of new matter, are not a logically necessary condition for bodily identity over time, it would seem strange to deny that they have weight – indeed considerable weight – in determining which of two otherwise equal competitors is "closest" to the original body. So it would seem that Boris has a substantial advantage over Carlos in this respect, and we should conclude that Boris, rather than Carlos, is identical with the body of Alphonse. Once again, Alphonse does not survive.

The claim made by the model, however, is that the determining factor is that Carlos, rather than Boris, continues the Life of Alphonse, and in view of this it is Carlos who is identical with Alphonse. At last, then, we have Alphonse alive and ready for his eternal destiny! There is, however, a further objection to this scenario. Zimmerman has indicated his support for a “temporally closest continuer” account of identity over time, where a claimant occurring earlier is deemed “closer” than an otherwise equal claimant occurring at a later time.²⁷ He gives no argument for this view, being content to rely on considerations of general plausibility. Here I propose an argument in support of such a preference – one supporting a conclusion that is stronger than Zimmerman’s. Consider, first of all, the variant of the model in which the resurrection is not immediate, but occurs in the future (perhaps the far distant future). Consider, also, the fact that Boris’s identity or non-identity with the body of Alphonse is an *essential attribute* of Boris, one that Boris must possess, in a determinate form, at every moment of its existence. As we have learned to say in another context, this is a “hard fact” about Boris at t , the moment at which Boris begins to exist. Carlos, however, *does not exist at t* ; at t , there is *no such thing* as Carlos. (I am assuming a “presentist” view in the philosophy of time, a view that Zimmerman endorses.) Furthermore, there is *no determinate fact* at t concerning the future existence or non-existence of Carlos. If it is true that Carlos will exist at a later time t^* , this is a “soft fact” rather than a “hard fact” at t .²⁸ This is so, in spite of the immanent-causal relationship that, according to the model, holds between Alphonse and Carlos. The body of Alphonse may have made its immanent-causal contribution to the existence of Carlos, but it is logically possible that something should occur just prior to the time at which Carlos is to make his appearance that would prevent him from existing, or from existing in the right way to continue the life of Alphonse. (Perhaps a nuclear explosion, detonated just at the spot where Carlos would make his appearance.) But here is the point: *Something that is a hard fact at t logically cannot depend on something that is (at most) a soft fact at t* . It is possible that something should prevent Carlos’s appearance at t^* , but if Boris is identical at t with the body of Alphonse, it is *not* possible that anything should occur at

²⁷ “Falling Elevator Model,” p. 206.

²⁸ Whether there are truths concerning future contingent events is a disputed question among presentists; the argument here does not require an answer to that question.

some later time that would prevent this identity from holding. What this means is, that the appearance of Carlos at t^* is *irrelevant* to the identity of Boris with the body of Alphonse; it cannot therefore *prevent* this identity from holding. We must conclude, then, that Carlos is not in competition with Boris as a continuer for the body of Alphonse; Boris is the only candidate, and so Boris *is* identical with Alphonse's body, and once again Alphonse does not survive.

Further reflection reveals that this conclusion holds even if the "resurrection" is immediate. Now we are supposing that t , the moment of fission which marks the beginning of Boris's existence, is also the moment which marks the beginning of Carlos's existence. Since fission occurred at the moment which marks the end of Alphonse's natural life – the moment such that, at any subsequent moment, he would no longer be alive – we must conclude that at t neither Boris nor Carlos is alive, though they are still in a condition such that their life-functions could be restored.²⁹ Now, according to the model, God does restore Carlos's life-functions soon after t , and it is in virtue of this that Carlos is the closest continuer of Alphonse, and is identical with Alphonse. But the considerations of the preceding paragraph show that this is a mistake. It is already the case beginning at t that both Boris and Carlos determinately exist; their existence is a hard fact. But the restoration of life-functions in the case of Carlos is *not* a hard fact at t ; that restoration is a contingent event which still lies in the future, albeit the very near future. So for the same reasons given above, that restoration *cannot* play a role in determining the identity relations between Alphonse, Boris, and Carlos. What does play that role is the continuity-of-matter criterion, and that criterion decisively favors Boris over Carlos as the closest continuer of Alphonse. We are still forced to conclude that Alphonse does not survive!

I think it is fair to say at this point that the prospects for the Falling Elevator Model, as presented by Zimmerman, are not very bright. In order for the model to work, all of the metaphysical difficulties set forth above need to be overcome. The result, however, will be a model

²⁹ In some of his statements Zimmerman seems to suggest that Carlos is *not* dead – that his life continues, though of course the corpse, Boris, is dead. The view that biological death never actually happens to human beings may well be theologically problematic; certainly it would not be acceptable to van Inwagen. ("It is part of the Christian faith that all men who share in the sin of Adam must die.")

that shares with van Inwagen's model (which it is supposed to replace) the most serious objection to that model, namely that it involves an unacceptable policy of deception on God's part. The only clear advantage, in comparison with van Inwagen, is that the "pseudo-body" that is left behind for the mourners to bury is made of the same "stuff" – elementary particles, parcels of mass-energy, or whatever – that once composed the body of the deceased. This does not seem much of an advantage, given the costs involved – nor does it seem that the prospects for a materialist resurrection are greatly improved by the change.

It remains to consider the variant of the Falling Elevator Model proposed by Timothy O'Connor and Jonathan Jacobs. For the most part, they accept the model as presented by Zimmerman, but there are two significant points of difference. Zimmerman proposed that, at the moment of death, God miraculously confers on the body's particles (or other constituents) the power to immanent-cause particles in the resurrection world. O'Connor and Jacobs say, "We're not so sanguine about the miraculous-addition-of-causal-powers bit, suspecting that it can be bought only by one soft on causation"³⁰ The thought here is that the fundamental causal powers of any entity are intrinsic and essential to that entity, and cannot be added to without undermining the entity's identity. They continue, however,

But no mind: we need only suppose that the features of the constituents of Augustine's body – and as these are no different in kind from the constituents of any material thing, of all material things – and the emergent-level aspects of Augustine jointly have a hitherto entirely latent tendency to jointly cause the composing simples to fission in the requisite context, which is providentially connected solely to situations of imminent demise. (Perhaps God miraculously brings to bear some requisite additional force-like factor that acts as a co-cause with the relevant disposition).³¹

This move greatly expands the scope of the "power to fission": instead of being conferred on a relatively few particles (those that constitute the bodies of persons at the time of their death), this power is an *inherent attribute of all the matter in the universe*. But God's special intervention

³⁰ "Emergent Individuals and the Resurrection," p. 79.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

will, one assumes, still be required, both in “triggering” the actual fissioning at the appropriate moment,³² and in directing the fission products to the appropriate space-time location for the appearance of the resurrection body. Given all this, however, the model still functions in the way proposed by Zimmerman.

The other difference from Zimmerman is of greater moment. They disagree with Zimmerman’s inclusion in his model of a closest continuer theory of personal identity, and they disagree with his claim that any materialist view of persons can be forced into accepting such a theory. Their own proposal amounts to a way in which a materialist view can avoid a closest continuer theory, a different way than the one I proposed above. In order to understand this, we need a brief summary of the ontology embraced by O’Connor and Jacobs. The ontology in question is described by them as an “ontology of immanent universals.” Each and every substance (for instance, an electron which they dub ‘eleanore’) involves features or universals that exist in that substance but can also exist in many others. But given this,

there must be something more to eleanore than a mere cluster of universals, since it is a particular thing, and no cluster of universals can yield particularity. This something extra can only be eleanore’s *particularity* or *thisness*, a non-qualitative aspect necessarily unique to it. Eleanore, then, is constituted by a cluster of universals, plus such a particularity, bound in some sort of non-mereological structure, which we shall call a “state of affairs.”³³

Eleanore’s particularity or thisness, then, is an ontological constituent of eleanore though not, in the proper sense, a “part” of eleanore. It needs to be noted, however, that these thisnesses are more sparingly distributed in the world than one might be inclined to think. They write,

Anyone who embraces this ontology in a serious way should posit distinctive particularities in only mereological simples and those composites that

³² If not, then the particles must somehow be able to recognize, not only the moment of death, but the fact that the body they jointly constitute is that of a *person*, and thus eligible for immortal existence.

³³ Timothy O’Connor and Jonathan D. Jacobs, “Emergent Individuals,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 53 No. 213 (2003), pp. 540-55; p. 546.

exhibit some kind of objective, ontological unity. Substances exhibiting ontologically emergent properties are natural candidates. Those lacking such features, however much they may appear to be unified to the uneducated eye, are individual objects only by a courtesy born of practical concerns.³⁴

We arrive, then, at a metaphysic that exhibits some striking similarities to that expounded by Peter van Inwagen in his *Material Beings*.³⁵ What exists are physical simples and some organisms; strictly speaking there are no chairs but only “simples arranged chair-wise.”

Here is how this metaphysic addresses questions of personal identity: Each person, whether Augustine, Alphonse, or any one of us, has a particularity as a non-mereological constituent. This particularity is, indeed, what makes each of us a genuine individual, rather than a mere collection of components. And in cases that might otherwise seem ambiguous, it is the particularity that determines which of the two “candidates” continues the life of, and is indeed identical with, a previously existing individual. They write,

Now, Zimmerman’s scenario: Take both of my hemispheres out of my body and put each into a separate body. Which one continues my life? Empirically, they are equally well-suited candidates. But on the soul view, Zimmerman claims, “. . . I went wherever my soul went – either with the one half-brain, or with the other, or with neither, as the case may be.”³⁶ In other words, one hemisphere, at least, will generate a distinct mental substance, while another may continue to sub-serve the previously existing soul, or perhaps also give rise to a new one. These possibilities will be empirically indistinguishable, while being plainly distinct metaphysically. Just so, we say, on our emergentist account: where the entire organism that I am fissions into two living organisms, I may be the one on the left, the one on the right, or neither. There is a fact of the matter, even if it is hard to say what determines which fact it is. . . . Given a situation of perfect symmetry from an empirical/observable point of view, the determining factor could only be a built-in ‘bias’ (left, right, or neither) to the latent disposition towards fissioning.³⁷

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 547.

³⁵ Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

³⁶ “Falling Elevator Model,” p. 198.

³⁷ “Emergent Individuals and the Resurrection,” p. 81.

Symmetrical fission, then, need not be the end of an individual's life, on either view. And in the resurrection case, it is Carlos who is identical with Alphonse, without any need for recourse to a closest continuer view.

Now for our assessment of the O'Connor-Jacobs version of the Falling Elevator Model. Insofar as their version resembles Zimmerman's, it inherits both its assets and its liabilities. Their version, like Zimmerman's, must reject the demand for continuity of matter and the gradual assimilation of new matter, as captured in the assimilation principle (AP2'). It seems, on the other hand, that they have eliminated the other main group of objections, those associated with Zimmerman's adoption in his model of a closest continuer theory of personal identity. To be sure, there is a cost involved in this: in order to accept their model, we must also accept as literally true the ontology they present, or one very much like it. Whether this is a serious problem is a question on which opinions will differ, but it needs to be kept in mind.

Things are not, however, quite that simple. Zimmerman's emergent soul is metaphysically separable from any physical embodiment, so it provides a criterion for personal identity that is independent of bodily continuity. The O'Connor-Jacobs particularity, on the other hand, is the particularity of a *living organic body*, and as such it must go where the body goes. We've seen their suggestion that, in the case of symmetrical fission, there might be a built-in bias that would determine that the particularity ends up in one or the other of the fission products. But what shall we say in the resurrection case, where fission is by no means symmetrical but where there are, nevertheless, serious questions about what has happened to the original body? If the particularity goes with the resulting body that is most similar to the body of the dying person, this view will inherit the difficulties of Zimmerman's closest continuer view, as outlined above. I do not think it will be satisfactory to say that it is God who determines which body inherits the particularity: that is too close to saying that personal identity is determined by divine fiat, which is a view we should want to avoid. Probably we will have to invoke once again a built-in "bias" in the material constituents, but this time a bias towards a body *in the resurrection world*, whatever the other characteristics of such a body might be. It's as though each particle in the universe has built into it a *nisus* or *telos*, such that, *if* an organism of which it is a constituent undergoes fission, then the identity of the

organism will go with the “fission product” in the resurrection world, however remote in time or space, whereas (as we have repeatedly been told) the identity of the *particle* remains behind in the ordinary world. Curiouser and curiouser . . .

One final thought: if O'Connor and Jacobs share Zimmerman's tentative assumption that the body that goes to the next world takes its organs along with it, it will be true for them as it is for Zimmerman, that the body that remains behind after a person's death is a mere replica, something which never lived in the world and never subserved the life-experiences of a human person. This has especially interesting implications in the case of organ transplants: an organ transplanted from the “body” of a deceased person *is not a real human organ; it has never functioned as part of a human body*. Such an organ performs an organic function *for the very first time* after it has been transplanted into the body of a recipient. If by this time your skeptical instincts have not been triggered, I am afraid those instincts have suffered serious atrophy! I am reminded in this connection of a remark made by Zimmerman when he presented an early version of the Falling Elevator Model: “I offer Peter this ‘just so story,’ to do with as he will, with my compliments. I'm glad I'm a dualist with less need of it.”³⁸ So far, Peter van Inwagen has shown no inclination to take advantage of the assistance thus proffered. I believe, however, than a great many dualists will join Zimmerman in a hearty sigh of relief that “we have no need of this hypothesis.”³⁹

³⁸ Comment on van Inwagen's “Dualism and Materialism,” delivered at the University of Notre Dame, November 3 1994.

³⁹ My thanks to Dean Zimmerman and Jonathan Jacobs for comments on this material.