

Cartesian Dualism and the Intermediate State: A Reply to Turner Jr¹

Alejandro Pérez

RSCS Institute, Catholic University of Louvain
alejotou@gmail.com

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Abstract

In this paper, I propose to analyse two objections raised by Turner Jr in his paper “On Two Reasons Christian Theologians Should Reject The Intermediate State” in order to show that the intermediate state is an incoherent theory. As we shall see, the two untoward consequences that he mentions do not imply a metaphysical or logical contradiction. Consequently, I shall defend an Intermediate State and I shall propose briefly one metaphysical conception of the human being able to reply to Turner Jr’s objections.

Keywords: *Turner Jr, Resurrection, Intermediate State, Personal Identity, Non-Cartesian Dualism*

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“We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”. Death and resurrection have been two theological and philosophical central topics of the 20th and 21st century. On the one hand, many Christian theologians have rejected the traditional position about death and resurrection, refusing the possibility of an intermediate state [IS] and a beatific vision (Althaus, Chardin, Greshake, Rahner, Balthasar, Lohfink). On the other hand, many Christian philosophers have developed and revisited three central positions in order to think of the resurrection: hylomorphism (Stump, Oderberg), dualism (Plantinga, Swinburne, Hasker) and materialism (Inwagen, O’Connor).

In a recent paper, James T. Turner Jr states:

“In this paper, I focus on The Intermediate State. Though the majority of the Christian tradition affirms it, I think it’s mistaken. To show two reasons why, I argue that a traditional metaphysics of human persons deployed to explicate The Intermediate State brings with it one or the other of at least two untoward consequence for Christian theology.”²

In this paper, I propose to analyse the two objections raised by Turner Jr in order to show that the IS is an incoherent theory. As we shall see, the two untoward consequences which he mentions do not imply a metaphysical or logical contradiction. Consequently, I shall defend an IS and I shall propose briefly one metaphysical conception of the human being able to be compatible with the IS.

First, I shall specify some points of the debate about the IS and the resurrection in the first two sections. In sections 3 and 4, I shall analyse Turner Jr’s objections against the IS. Finally, I sketch and introduce some of the main traits of the NCSD, a model that I think opens a new manner to think of resurrection.

1 THE DEBATE

My objective will not be to explore the long debate around the resurrection.³ I shall rather try to identify the problems raised by the traditional schema as well address any objections. In this sense, I shall not pretend to resolve all difficulties of the traditional conception of the eschaton, but I expect to demonstrate that the classic conception of eschatology is better articulated than in the modern theories.

In the twentieth century, one sees three kinds of positions about the eschaton to be appearing:

1. Many Protestant thinkers gave different reasons for inclining toward monistic anthropology supported by the Bible.

2. Catholic and Protestant theologians allude to the tension inherent in the concept of a soul, according to which it is per se the form of the body and can exist apart from the body.
3. Some Protestant (and Catholic) thinkers have defended the resurrection in death, as a solution able to resolve the problems raised by the traditional conception of the eschaton.

Hence, Protestant theologians suggest, mainly from a biblical point of view that one cannot accept the indivisibility of the human being. Even if Catholic theologians allude to the traditional concept of “soul”, Protestant and Catholic theologians will propose another way to think of the resurrection since this conception appears as incoherent and problematic. The result was the abandonment of the classic conception of the eschatology, and the beginning of a new theory: resurrection *in* death.

Traditional Conception of Eschatology (TCE) implies the following reasoning:

TCE – THREE PHASES MODEL

- (1) There is resurrection. (TCE I)
- (2) There is an IS after death. (TCE II)
- (3) The resurrection takes place at the end of the time. (TCE III)

The Catholic Church and some Catholic theologians have defended TCE against a New Common Conception of Eschatology (NCCE) defending two possible models:

NCCE – TWO PHASE MODEL

- (1) There is resurrection. (TCE I)
- (2') There is no IS.
- (3') The resurrection takes place in death.

And, it is also possible to accept a mixture between TCE and NCCE:

TCE – TWO PHASE MODEL

- (1) There is resurrection. (TCE I)
- (2'') There is an IS, but this takes place in death.
- (3') The resurrection takes place in death.

Even though all theologians do not adopt NCCE, one can regard it as a common modern conception of eschatology. Theologians defending NCCE explore and develop one of the next sentences, or even the whole set:

- (I) Dualism is supposed by the IS.
- (II) Dualism is opposed to biblical anthropology.
- (III) Dualism is opposed to science.
- (IV) Dualism is a wrong metaphysical conception of the human being.

Hence, from one of these sentences, or the set, they deduce (3'), the resurrection in death.

They also argue against TCE, that:

- (I*) Hylomorphism is supposed by the IS.
- (II*) Hylomorphism is a wrong metaphysical conception of the human being.

Hence, from (II*) they deduce (2'). Some theologians also attack (II*) because they consider that hylomorphism implies a kind of dualism, and they use one of the propositions (II)-(IV) in order to abandon the IS. Now, if the IS or a dualist conception of man is left, a resurrection at the end of the time is generally discarded too. Having mentioned these problems, I propose now to analyse them briefly. This step will allow the reader to understand that there are no good reasons to reject the TCE model, and that is why, in my opinion, it remains the best way to think about the eschaton.

2 DUALISM AND THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

Is dualism opposed to the Biblical anthropology? Oddly, dualism has been generally rejected in the theological mainstream. Even though this question is debated, it is bizarre to believe that there is no kind of dualism supposed by the Holy Scriptures. On the contrary, the IS pleads for this metaphysical conception of the human being. Consequently, we must accept with biblical scholars like John Cooper, that in the Holy Scriptures there is a holistic-dualism (or a dualistic-holism).⁴ Indeed, the anthropological conception of the human being in the Holy Scripture is neither a pure monism, nor a pure dualism. This simple distinction is an important one. Distinguishing between monism and holism, is indeed, an important step in order to find a biblical consensus.

Now, accepting dualism is not adopting "Platonic" anthropology. Indeed, "Platonic" ontology supposes that:

- α) We are *essentially* minded beings.
- β) Our bodies are not necessary entities.
- γ) We can exist without a body.

(α), (β), (γ) are common points with dualism. Now, the question is: can one distinguish Platonism from dualism? Jean-Baptiste Guillon distinguishes Platonism from dualism, by affirming that Platonism adopts (δ):

- δ) The body is not important.⁵

I am not sure I have grasped what (δ) exactly could mean. Indeed, it appears to me that there are two ways to understand δ :

- δ') The *body* is considered as a non-necessary part. Hence disembodied existence is possible.
- δ'') There is an ontological dependency between the physical substance (body) and the psychological substance, but this dependency does not lie in the necessity of the *same* body which constitutes it. Hence disembodied existence is impossible.

I shall return to this point later, since some non-Cartesian dualism adopts (δ), but in a particular metaphysical sense of (δ''), and this point is a metaphysical trait allowing to distinguish Cartesian dualism from non-Cartesian dualisms and Platonism.

That said, I think that the main idea of (δ) is true. Dualism has been rejected because theologians believe that dualism supposes (δ). In other words, dualism does not imply hatred towards the body. Now, if dualism does not suppose (δ), I do not see why dualism could be incompatible with the Holy Scriptures. That is why I agree with Turner Jr saying that:

“if the traditional Christian account of The Intermediate State is correct, then the metaphysics of substance dualism is the correct metaphysics of human beings.”⁶

I could add “it is metaphysically necessary to adopt a kind of dualism in order to think of the intermediate state.”

What about hylomorphism? Many theologians and philosophers could reject Turner Jr’s affirmation. Indeed, Hylomorphism has been regarded by many theologians and philosophers as a metaphysical way to think about the traditional conception of the eschaton. However, on the one hand I consider that a monistic-Hylomorphism brings along a categorical mistake because it supposes what Granger and de Libera call “a property-thing”, on speaking about the soul. On the other hand, I defend that only a kind of dualistic-Hylomorphism could be compatible with the IS. However, I shall not analyse here this problem, but for our purpose, I think that monistic hylomorphism may be wrong anthropology of human beings. Nevertheless, a dualistic-hylomorphism could be a possible way.

In sum, I consider that the IS is in itself an argument in favour of dualism. And if dualism does not suppose Platonism, we do not have good theological arguments against Dualism. Maybe, some objections to doing which I intend to analyse now.

3 TURNER’S OBJECTIONS AGAINST DUALISM AND THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

In his paper about the IS, James T. Turner Jr has defended that: “a traditional metaphysics of human persons deployed to explicate The Intermediate State brings

with it one or the other of at least two untoward consequences for Christian theology".⁷ These two problems which he refers to are the following:

Problem (1): Cartesian Dualism implies that Mary Theotokos (i.e. the God-bearer) *is not* Theotokos.

Problem (2): Non-Cartesian kinds of substance dualism imply that The Intermediate State is a spatial location, a state of affairs with absurd consequences.⁸

Turner Jr takes Theotokos affirmation seriously in order to show that dualism is incoherent. Indeed, Incarnation could be metaphysically redundant according to dualism, because God the Son is not properly "Incarnated". I propose to formulate his argument as follows:

- (i) I am a substance, and I am the subject of all and only my own mental states.
- (ii) All bodies are physical substances.
- (iii) Only physical substances are extended.
- (iv) Neither my body nor any part of it could be the subject of all and only my own mental states.
- (v) Hence, I am not identical with my body.
- (vi) If I am not identical with my body, I am not extended.

Up to this point we can see a traditional definition of dualism that Turner Jr could have in mind (even if my formulation is wrong, or Turner Jr has another theory of dualism in mind, it does not change anything in my objection). The problem lies properly in (viii) and (ix).

- (vii) The Triune God is traditionally considered as not extended.⁹
- (viii) God the Son took flesh.

According to Turner's objection, and in order to understand this objection, we must add:

- (ix) Taking flesh implies having the quality of extending.
- (x) God did not take flesh.

Indeed, Turner Jr notes this objection to his own argument, when he says: "all the Cartesian needs to say in response is that a Cartesian soul *is* spatially locatable."¹⁰ Hence, following Turner: if Dualism is true, God the Son did not take flesh, because taking flesh implies being extended.

However, some non-Cartesian dualisms could avoid this argument. In this sense, those that defend a relation of constitution between "I" (or my self) and my body, think that "I" am extended, because according to my relation of constitution I possess physical properties in virtue of having a body.¹¹ See for example, Lowe's definition of constitution relation:

"*x* constitutes *y* at time *t* just in case *x* and *y* coincide spatially at *t* and every component part of *x* at *t* is also a component part of *y* at *t*, but not every component part of *y* at *t* is also a component part of *x* at *t*."¹²

Consequently, non-Cartesian dualisms adopting a constitution relation do not face this objection, but only classic Cartesian dualism who suppose that “I” am unextended. Up to now, I have accepted Turner Jr’s objection. However, I shall demonstrate that this argument is valid but unsound, because the main idea advocated by Turner Jr in the premise (ix) is false.

As said, Theotokos affirmation supposes a more important dogma: the Incarnation. If God the Son did not take flesh, not only is Theotokos affirmation false, but the Incarnation is too. Let us analyse the reasoning followed by Turner Jr:

“if it’s true that human soul lacks spatial location, it follows that the thing with which God the Son *qua* human is identical—his human soul—isn’t locatable. And if it cannot be located, *he*—*qua* human—isn’t locatable; so he *qua* human is not *inside* Mary’s womb... Again, souls, on the standard Cartesian view, aren’t anywhere.”¹³

But, could we say that the standard Cartesian view defends that souls are not anywhere? I think that this reading lies in a strong idealistic view of dualism, a kind of dualism which is rarely defended today.

Indeed, dualism generally accepts (δ) and defend the idea according to which we *are essentially* mental substances. But, once again, saying that my body is not necessary does not imply that my soul is not anywhere. Saying that my body is not necessary is *just* saying that I can continue to exist, even if I do not have this body. Hence, saying that we “are space-less location-less things”¹⁴ does not follow from dualism, but from a wrong conception of the location.

Furthermore, as Ross Inman has shown brilliantly, there are many ways to understand the location of an immaterial thing.¹⁵ The soul could possess fundamental location or derivative location, but Turner does not enter this discussion. Hence, Turner Jr’s conception of the location is a restricted view which turns out to be incompatible with other theological affirmations. In this sense, if Turner Jr’s objection is right, God cannot be omnipresent, and I cannot imagine how we could understand the Eucharist. That is why we must conclude that both Cartesian and non-Cartesian dualists could reject this objection.

With this premise (ix) out of the way, Turner affirms that if one can avoid his first objection, we need to contend Problem 2. As we shall see it, this problem also fails because it lies in the same question: Turner Jr’s accepts a bizarre conception of the location.

Problem 2 lies in adopting Jaegwon Kim’s “Pairing Problem.”¹⁶ When it is applied to our question the following problem arises: “it’s impossible for multiple souls to simultaneously occupy the same region of space”¹⁷. In order to understand where the problem is, we can reformulate this objection as follows:

- (i') There is an IS.
- (ii') After death, some souls go to the IS.
- (iii') Every soul (substance) cannot occupy the same spatial location at the same time.
- (iv') Hence, there is no IS.

As you can note, this time Turner Jr's argument is not valid. Even if we accept (iii') as true, we must add another premise, or rather many premises in order to validate his argument. As said, once again the problem lies with the issue of location. After all, we could recall the medieval question "whether several angels can be at the same time in the same place?" and reply as medieval theologians did and contemporary philosophers continue to do it.¹⁸ On the contrary, we must reject it, but do we have good reasons to do it?¹⁹ Furthermore, this objection supposes that souls are spatial,²⁰ but a soul could be spatial iff this possesses a body. Nevertheless, this position is rarely defended.²¹ If he had in mind the standard vision of Cartesian dualism, here this is not the case.

The difficult is present in the next text:

"even if one were to reject this seeming truism, there doesn't seem to me any ready-to-hand explanation of how more than one soul could be 'in'/at an un-extended geometrical point. What's worse, it's possible that there *isn't*, even in principle, any explication for such a thing; for, extensionless geometrical points might be *abstractions*. And, being located *at* an abstraction is nonsense."²²

So, there is no logical nor metaphysical contradiction in order to think of the IS. What Turner Jr raises is a serious question to which theologians and philosophers need to pay attention to. Let me call this question *the question of corporeal bodies in heaven*.

Thus, in order to reply to different possible objections that one could address to the IS, we may reason as follows:

Christ's and Virgin's Bodies Argument

If Christ's and Virgin Mary's bodies exist in an extensionless place, a corporeal existence after death is possible.

Christ's and Virgin Mary's bodies exist in an extensionless place.

∴ A corporeal existence after death is possible.

Both Christ's resurrection and Dormition or Assumption of Mary are two examples that *this* is possible. There are two corporeal human beings in an extensionless place. It remains to be seen *how* that is possible, but this is a question to which I cannot reply here.

To sum up, the two objections addressed by Turner Jr in order to reject the IS are not successful. The apparent contradictions raised by multi-location of souls in an IS are not greater than the puzzles raised by Christ's (after His resurrection)

and Dormition's bodies (or Assumption of Mary). That is why we continue to defend an IS as long as Christ's body after his resurrection and Dormition or Assumption of Mary are a fact, impossible to deny.

4 ANOTHER POSSIBLE OBJECTION AGAINST THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

If I think that these two objections could be rejected, Turner Jr alludes to Trenton Merricks in order to show that the standard conception of dualism is redundant:

“... having a body, as understood by the dualist, is not sufficient for being human. Nor would it seem to be necessary. For dualists typically allow that you and I can continue to exist—and continue to be human—after our body dies, even before resurrection. Thus, given dualism, having a human body seems to be neither necessary nor sufficient for being human.

The Incarnation is the Son's becoming human. Given dualism, this cannot be a matter of the Son's coming to have a human body. So the dualist must say that the Son, in addition to coming to have a body, also become human. I suppose that, for a dualist, to be human is to be a human soul. So the dualist must claim that the Son, while remaining divine, became a human soul.”²³

Accordingly, the Incarnation is a redundant fact. I think that Merricks and Turner Jr mention what I think is the real problem of dualism, or more precisely, of Cartesian dualism. This reasoning could be represented as follows:

Argument of Redundancy

If the Incarnation must be corporeal, having a body is sufficient and necessary for being human.

Having a body is neither sufficient nor necessary for being human.

∴ Incarnation must not be corporeal.

I think that many Cartesian dualist must face this argument, and I do not see how they could avoid it.

However, many other non-Cartesian dualisms evade this objection. For example, all non-Cartesian dualists that reject the idea according to which the psychological substance (soul or mind) that *I am* is unextended do not face this argument against dualism. I tend to think that the standard accounts of identity (e.g. E.J. Lowe, D. Wiggins) or constitution relation (e.g. M. Johnston, E.J. Lowe, M. Burke, D. Wiggins, K. Corcoran) also circumvent the argument of redundancy, and that is because they defend a kind of (δ''). That is why even if I cannot develop these metaphysical theories of human being here, I believe that they will be revealed to have many virtues up to now ignored, and to be promising theories of personal identity after death. Allow to me develop briefly the approach to my eyes, which theologians and philosophers will gain to pay attention to.

5 A SKETCH OF A SOLUTION

A non-Cartesian substance dualism (NCSD) as developed by Lowe, is the kind of dualism able to avoid Turner's objections. I think that Lowe's NCSD is justified or grounded in its ontological and metaphysical coherence. That is why I tend to defend this position by appealing to the inference to the best explanation. Thus, NCSD may be true or close to the truth, because this seems to reply better to different problems.

That said, I shall introduce the main argument in favour of NCSD, advocated by Lowe. This argument is called by Lowe: "the unity argument". This argument is the following:

- (I) I am the subject of all and only my own mental states, [...]
- (II) Neither my body as a whole nor any part of it could be the subject of all and only my own mental states.
- (III) I am not identical with my body nor with any part of it.²⁴

One must agree with Lowe saying that (I) is a self-evident truth, and that (III) follows from the two premises. So, the question is: can one defend (II)?

The response lies in the next point. Following Lowe, "no entity can qualify as the *subject* of certain mental states if those mental states could exist in the absence of that entity".²⁵ Indeed, one can imagine that I experience pain in my arm that I lost some years ago. Thus, like many people, I can suffer from pain in this arm, even if I do not have it. This idea argues in favour of a non-physical subject of mental states.

What is more, if my pain is not attributed to any part of me, according to Lowe, we cannot attribute it to my body as a whole. That is why Lowe defends that: "my body does *as a whole* not need to exist in order for me to have *every one* of the mental states that I do in fact have."²⁶ Hence, if (II) is true, we must conclude that I am not identical with my body nor with any part of it. Hence, I *am* a psychological substance.

Now, as noted before, I am extended in virtue of my constitution relation (see *supra*). Indeed, this NCSD adopts (δ) which does not entail a disembodied existence. Consequently, this metaphysical theory of mind possesses two metaphysical commitments which allow differentiating from other kinds of dualism: the extension of the self, and the impossibility of a disembodied existence.

Let us imagine now how it works. When someone dies, he does not cease to exist in virtue of a Divine miracle. In this sense, I do not consider the psychological substance as immortal; in fact, I do not see any argument in favour of this statement. Let us call, this someone, Chloe. When Chloe dies, her psychological substance continues to exist because, at time *t*, when she dies, God gives her a new body before the final resurrection. Chloe does not cease to exist *because*

her psychological substance has not ceased to exist, *in virtue* of her new body. One could object that a *special* body after death is just incoherent. Nonetheless, I think that it is impossible to reject this possibility. *Christ's and Virgin's bodies argument* is, in this sense, central for my purpose. That is why I insist on paying attention to *the question of corporeal bodies in heaven*. These appear as new facts from the Biblical/theological terrain allowing reconsideration of afterlife before the final resurrection.

Why could it not work? Because it is not necessarily a traditional way to think of resurrection. But is this really a problem? Accepting a bodily existence after death and before resurrection explains better *what we are*, that is a psychological substance entertaining a constitution relation with a body. These identity conditions are necessary to talk about the human being, and they allow explaining in a more harmonious way how an existence (or at least a dynamic rather than static existence) post-mortem could be. But, undoubtedly, the most crucial point is that it gives a central place to the body. Purification is not only addressed to the soul but so must it be to the body. And when one believes in the resurrection of the body, it really makes sense.

6 CONCLUSION

After having introduced the recent theological and philosophical debate about the eschaton, I have proposed to examine Turner Jr's arguments against the IS. An analysis of his arguments has shown that Turner Jr points out many important theological and philosophical questions, but that they are not successful when they try to object the existence of the IS. Nevertheless, I am convinced that these questions will allow a theoretical turn in the discussions about the eschaton. Indeed, as we have proposed, philosophers and theologians need to pay attention to the *Question of the corporeal beings in heaven* and Christ's and Virgin Mary's bodies Argument, in order to think of a more coherent theory of the afterlife. What is more, if Christ's and Virgin Mary's bodies Argument is correct, many dualisms (Cartesian-dualisms) are not capable of facing this argument. Consequently, they must be rejected.

My second objective in this paper has been to demonstrate that a NCSD such as the one developed by Lowe allows avoiding Turner's objections. But I think that the most exciting point about this kind of non-Cartesian dualism lies in thinking of a new but classic model of the eschaton, which contemplates the possibility of a corporeal existence after death.

NOTES

1. A version of this paper has been presented in the XXIV International Congress “Human, Nature, Soul and Body. Perspective Convergence” organized by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Rome) and the Jacques Maritain Center of the University of Notre Dame (Indiana). I would like to thank the members of Athens’s Analytic Theology Cluster, specially Stelios Virvidakis, for many interesting discussions about personal identity and resurrection. A recent conversation with K. Corcoran in Athens has also been helpful in writing this paper. I also thank Costas Catelas and Simone Ferrecchia for their linguistic help.
2. James T. Turner Jr, “On Two Reasons Christian Theologians Should Reject The Intermediate State,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11 (2017), pp. 121–139.
3. One could read the recent study of Yates about this debate: Stephen Yates, *Between Death and Resurrection. A Critical Response to Recent Catholic Debate Concerning the Intermediate State*, Bloomsbury, New York-London 2017.
4. See, John W. Cooper, “Biblical Anthropology is Holistic and Dualistic,” in Jonathan J. Loose, Angus J.L. Menuge, J.P. Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion to Dualism*, Willey-Blackwell, Oxford 2018, pp. 413–426; John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Cambridge 2000.
5. See Jean-Baptiste Guillon, “Heaven before Resurrection: Soul, Body, and the Intermediate State,” in Simon Cushing, *Heaven and Philosophy*, Lexington Books, London 2017, pp. 45–76.
6. James T. Turner Jr, o.c., p. 123.
7. James T. Turner Jr, o.c., p. 121.
8. James T. Turner Jr, o.c., p. 123.
9. I thank a referee for drawing my attention to this missing premise.
10. James T. Turner Jr, o.c., p. 130.
11. Lynne Ruder Baker does not defend this position, but this idea has been defended by E. J. Lowe and Kevin Corcoran.
12. E. J. Lowe, *More Kind of Being: A Further Study of Individuation, Identity, and the Logic of the Sortal Terms*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2009.
13. James T. Turner Jr, o.c., pp. 127–128.
14. James T. Turner Jr, o.c., p. 127.
15. See his excellent paper: Ross Inman, “Omnipresence and the Location of the Immaterial,” in Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion, Vol 8*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, pp. 168–206.
16. According to this problem, causation requires a spatial relation. See for example, Bailey et alii response to this argument: Andrew W. Bailey, Joshua Ramussen, Luke von Horn, “No Pairing Problem,” *Philosophical Studies* 154 (2011), pp. 349–360.
17. James T. Turner Jr, o.c., p. 134.
18. For a contemporary reply to this question, see: A. J. Cotnoir, “How Many Angels Can Be in the Same Place at the Same Time? A Defence of Mereological Universalism,” *Mind* 125 (2016), pp. 959–965.
19. See for example, Aquinas’s negative response to this question in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 52, a. 3.

20. James T. Turner Jr, o.c. p. 134.
 21. Kevin Corcoran and the author of this paper are the only authors to do it.
 22. James. T. Turner Jr, o.c. pp. 135–136.
 23. Quoted by James T. Turner Jr, o.c., p. 125.
 24. E. J. Lowe, *Personal Agency: The Metaphysics of Mind and Action*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, p. 96.
 25. E.J. Lowe, o. c., p. 96.
 26. E.J. Lowe, o. c., p. 96.
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