

The Metaphysical Problem of Intermittent Existence and the Possibility of Resurrection

If one does not possess an immaterial and immortal soul, then the prospect of conscious experience after death would appear to depend upon the metaphysical possibility of the resurrection of one's biological life.¹ By "resurrection," I don't mean just the possibility that a dead but still existing and well preserved individual could be brought back to life. My contention is that the human organism can even cease to exist, perhaps as a result of cremation or extensive decay, and yet still can be brought back into existence at a later time. That is, the same organism can live again after a period of nonexistence. However, a number of philosophers, religious and secular, insist that once an individual ceases to exist he does so forever, regardless of whether God or a future technology reassembles his atoms. Their claim is that the resulting human being would be a duplicate, for intermittent existence is impossible - at least for living creatures. In the pages that follow, I aim to establish, not that the dead will be resurrected, but that some of the alleged barriers to such an event are dubious. My contention is that resurrection after a period of nonexistence is not a metaphysically impossible state of affairs.

The purpose of the first and longest section of this paper is to challenge Peter van Inwagen's claim that were God to reassemble the scattered atoms of a destroyed individual, the resulting living being would not be the human being that had died but a duplicate of him. However, I do agree with van Inwagen that it would be metaphysically impossible for each of us to be resurrected as we were at the age of twenty if we die as senior citizens, say as infirm eighty year olds. But I do not believe that we are condemned forever to that frail form with which we must be resurrected. The second part of this paper aims to provide a plausible explanation of how it is possible for us to experience a resurrection and healthy afterlife without violating any of our fundamental mereological and biological convictions. This includes a response to the worrisome possibility that many of our

molecules once were (or will be) in someone else at the time of the latter's death. But even if the parts we each shared with another were vital or numerous, this does not rule out the resurrection of either of us - although it does prevent our simultaneous resurrection. Nevertheless, the proper account of part replacement would permit us both to eventually be resurrected and to coexist for eternity.

Part I

Van Inwagen doubts that resurrection can occur where the dead human being has not been preserved in a condition nearly identical to that in which it took its last breath. Even God cannot reassemble the molecules of a cremated individual in a manner that will make the miraculously assembled person one and the same as the individual cremated. Van Inwagen, of course, acknowledges that it is within God's power to reassemble all the atoms of someone destroyed through cremation, explosion or ordinary graveyard decay. But he insists that the resulting being would be someone else - a duplicate of the man who died and not the dead person restored to life.

Van Inwagen's religious beliefs and his materialism lead him to suggest that at the moment we die, God replaces the newly dead form with a simulacrum and stores the preserved body somewhere for the resurrection.ⁱⁱ Since van Inwagen's account has God involved in "body snatching," family members actually bury or cremate illusions of loved ones and cannibals make virtual rather than real meals out of explorers, missionaries and anthropologists.ⁱⁱⁱ This seems so bizarre that even the staunchest materialist, if he has any religious leanings, may be tempted to give dualism another hearing.

Why is God unable to resurrect a destroyed being whose parts have been scattered? Van Inwagen's reasoning is that God's gathering of scattered human particles would mean that a

miraculous force rather than the essential life processes of the organism are responsible for the location and organization of the constituent matter of the life. Van Inwagen insists that an organism at one time is identical to an organism at another time if there is the proper biological continuity linking the two. The organism's parts must be caught up in the same life processes and these life processes must be responsible for the role and position of the parts. Since such processes are absent from miraculous reassembly, this makes God's deed a duplication rather than a resurrection of the original life.^{iv}

Van Inwagen illustrates his claim with the analogy of an artwork.^v God can no more restore the cremated human being to life than he can restore an artist's sculpture that was melted or beaten down into a lump. The artwork's identity depends upon its causal origins - the intentions and the actions of the sculptor that give each piece of clay its shape and position. The artist's handiwork individuates the artwork, makes it the artwork it is and numerically distinguishes it from other qualitatively identical artworks. What matters is not just that the parts of the original artwork are where they were once before, but how they got there. According to van Inwagen, whether it be a freak storm, another man, or even God who destroys the sculpture and then reassembles each molecule of clay to where it was before, the original artist would be wrong to see this as his original sculpture. He is not responsible for this new creation. It is not his artwork, for its matter is not positioned by his hand. And likewise, van Inwagen concludes, even God cannot *reassemble* numerically the same human being. Just as the artwork needed to have its arrangement of parts caused by the artist, a living human being needs the arrangement of his particles to be caused by biological forces.

If the reader's initial reactions were like my own, she will find van Inwagen's account of the

persistence conditions of artworks rather convincing. Nevertheless, it is worth taking a closer look and questioning whether van Inwagen did not rather tendentiously choose his examples from the world of artifacts. Not all artifacts appear to have persistence conditions that rule out “gappy” or intermittent existence, as *appears* to be the case with the before-mentioned sculpture. Some artifacts could not only have been put together by others, but “folk ontology” (metaphysical commonsense) suggests that they can be disassembled and reassembled. In fact, this category of artifacts which can be assembled, disassembled and reassembled even includes some *artworks*. Many modern art constructions and displays involve a number of pieces which can be packed up, carted off to another museum and reassembled without being the creation of a new artwork. Such artworks might be understood as either not existing when disassembled and thus capable of intermittent existence, or as continuing to exist throughout the interim period - though as a scattered object.

Leaving artworks aside for the moment, consider a gun that can be disassembled and put in a carrying case. This is not a new gun that comes into existence when it is reassembled. If new guns could so appear, a hired killer standing on trial could protest to the judge that the gun the prosecution has introduced as evidence could not possibly be the murder weapon because it had not even been in existence at the time of the killing, since the police have recently taken its parts out of the briefcase in which it was discovered and assembled them for display in court.

Consider also that paradigmatic scattered object - the watch under repair. Its numerous pieces can be spread out on a repairman’s table. Many laymen and philosophers believe the watch continues to exist in such a scattered form. It should not be thought that it is because disassembled and reassembled watches and guns are taken apart and put back together in ways predetermined by the manufacturer that their restoration is successful, while the reassembly of a cremated being is the

creation of a duplicate rather than the resurrection of the original. My intuition is that the assassin intending to conceal his gun in a briefcase can cut up and store the gun in ways the manufacturers did not design it to be disassembled.^{vi} Likewise, the repairman does not have to separate the watch at its joints but can break off parts that were not the size and shape of the components originally assembled. He can break apart the watch any way he pleases so long as he can still reassemble the object.

Nor do I think that there is a limit on the size to which the parts can be reduced and still be considered parts.^{vii} Admittedly, there is a difference between the atoms that compose the gun and large parts such as the barrel and trigger. The atoms aren't noticeable gun parts. They could just as well each be a part of something other than a gun, unlike the barrel and trigger. Still, if a laser can manipulate a single atom component of a gun (and we can imagine that such a procedure is necessary to repair a precision atomic gun of the future), there is no reason not to consider the atom a part of the watch. Furthermore, the atom is a part of the object according to standard mereological definitions. And I don't see any reason for believing that something can be reassembled only when it has been reduced to large parts rather than atomic parts. Many viewers of *Star Trek* don't find it counterintuitive to imagine that a gun can be broken down into its elementary particles and beamed to another location and then reassembled. But if the beam malfunctions, scattering the atoms across the galaxy, and then, just by chance, the same atoms coalesced in the shape of the gun years later, it won't be the same gun, or a gun at all. An artifact has relational properties essentially. An object must be intentionally made in order to be an artifact. But if the parts, no matter how small and scattered, are deliberately reassembled in accordance with the original intention of its maker, it strikes me as intuitively the same object. This intuition can be reinforced if we compare a watch that

continues to exist even though its parts are scattered across the repairman's table to the qualitatively similar parts in the garbage can that do not compose a watch, even a scattered one. Because of the craftsman's involvement with the parts of the watch, we are disposed to claim the watch still exists. But there is no involvement with nor intention to reassemble the parts in the trash. However, if the craftsman changed his mind and the parts were retrieved from the trash, wouldn't they compose the same watch that they did the last time they were assembled? I would think so. The reader who says no would be committed to the watch on the repairman's table permanently going out of existence if the craftsman decides not to reassemble the parts. (Perhaps there is no market for such watches any longer.) But if the craftsman changes his mind (perhaps due to another shift in the market) and decides to assemble the parts on his repair table, it seems farfetched to claim that they would compose a new watch.

It is worthwhile to reflect upon the originating causes of artifacts in order to determine which are essential to individuating objects. My contention is that while a manufactured object must be the result of someone's intention to be an artifact, and (most of) its original matter is essential to it, other causal facts and processes responsible for the arrangement of its original material are not.^{viii} If it is not important where the material was or how it came together when an artifact *first* came into existence, perhaps it should not be thought relevant to the identity of any object what events preceded the assembling of its parts for a *second* time. That is, if possible variations in the causal origins of an object would not affect the identity of the first assembled object, why not consider the second assembly of the numerically identical parts to be a rebuilding of the original artifact rather than the creation of a duplicate? By analogy, why not consider the reassembled remains of the cremated human organism to be the resurrection of the original individual rather than the creation of

a duplicate?

It would no doubt be helpful to provide a concrete illustration of the thesis of the last passage. Consider your purchase of a prefabricated toolshed that has never been assembled. Does it matter if your delivery and assembly person is Smith rather than Jones? That is, if Smith assembles the purchase is it a different tool shed than if Jones had been the first to assemble it? It does not seem plausible that the identity of the assembler determines which tool shed you bought and own. Moreover, can't you have Smith assemble your toolshed on the showroom floor and then have Jones disassemble it, pack it up and then reassemble it in your back yard without affecting the identity of your purchase? I would think so. Now consider the machine gun that you bought to protect your new toolshed from graffiti-writing vandals. Each part of it was manufactured separately by an assembly line machine. Does it matter if machine A rather than machine B assembled the gun? That is, would it be a different gun if a different machine had assembled the very same parts? My intuition is that it would be the very same gun. Ask yourself whether you have created a *new* gun that needs to be licensed every time you take the gun out of its carrying case, screw its barrel, handle, trigger, and telescopic sight together in order to shoot a young vandal with a can of spray paint. If you answer yes, your metaphysics seem to me to be as dubious as your morals.

Thus van Inwagen's reliance upon our intuitions about artifact identity in order to reinforce his claim about the impossibility of our existing again after our biological components lose their structure and proximity to each other, appears less compelling after we have observed that some artifacts can survive as scattered objects when disassembled or can even exist intermittently. Which type of artifact, if any, are human beings more like? Are we more similar to the sculptured artworks or the mass produced and variously assembled artifacts? Perhaps the correct answer is that we are

quite unlike both. Despite some misgivings about the entire enterprise of comparing artworks and human animals, I want to push the artifact/artwork/animal analogy a little further. Consider human sexual reproduction. It does not involve anything like the artist leaving his intentional mark on the product. There are millions of sperm heading for an egg and the parents do not intend which sperm meets the egg or what combination of genes are formed by fertilization. So no artist-like intention is the source of the arrangement of the zygote's essential matter. Absent from a human being's origin is an artistic concern with the details of creation and the location of the incipient human being's parts which characterized the statue. Whether the same sperm meets the same egg earlier or later, or which technician carries out the in vitro fertilization of that egg, should not affect our identity. This perhaps makes our origins more like those of artifacts that can be assembled by anyone at different times without this affecting their identity.

But even if it is thought that the proper analogy is between the human being and the sculpture, rather than the human being and the toolshed or the gun, I do not think this will support van Inwagen's thesis.^{ix} Consider a sculpture made in a studio of a master sculptor. The apprentice of the master places each piece of clay in a position at the direction of the master. Who is the art work's creator? I tend to think that it is just the master unless the apprentice is doing something highly skilled.^x Even in the latter case, my judgement would be that the sculpture is a co-creation rather than the artistic creation solely of the apprentice. If the master can create or co-create an artwork that another assembles, why can he not be rightly considered the creator or co-creator of a statue that results from others *reassembling* the clay of his now destroyed statue, if they do so in accordance with the intentions that he originally conveyed to his apprentice? Perhaps we should see the product of the second assembly as numerically identical to the first one completed by the dutiful apprentice.

Thus such a sculpture could have a “gappy” or scattered existence.

Why not view God’s behavior as analogous to the directions the master sculptor gave to the apprentice? God could be understood as the “original artist” who created the world and arranged its matter and laws so that there would be organisms. Such background assumptions would make it plausible to think that God could resurrect people if He were faithful to His original blueprint that formed and maintained the human beings in question. So just as there are not any metaphysical principles that rule out the restoration of a destroyed statue, it appears that none render our resurrection impossible.

However, even if the claims above were to lead van Inwagen to admit that his account of artifacts is flawed, he could insist that this just means that artifacts are not like human beings in the relevant ways and thus are not useful for making any identity claims about the latter. He might maintain that his position is not at odds with the story I told about the details and the causes of our origins. He can grant the essentiality of the original matter and the irrelevance of much of the causal history that culminated with our origins. He can then admit that the “when,” “where,” and “how” our matter first came together is metaphysically irrelevant. Van Inwagen might insist that whether we came into existence through a sexual act, an advanced biotech procedure, or whether God just miraculously merged the matter that would otherwise have been so arranged by a natural process of fertilization and zygote formation, is all moot, for the only position he is committed to is that of the metaphysical importance of our *continuity* as human organisms. His central claim is that an individual’s constitutive matter must remain caught up in a life without interruption and when the various particles are eventually replaced it is by ongoing biological processes characteristic of every organism. Both the self-maintained structural integrity of the organism and the addition of new

matter must be due to biological processes involving the metabolizing of food, the assimilation of oxygen, the excretion of wastes, the maintenance of homeostasis etc. So what matters to identity is that a human being's parts are where they are due to the *continual biological processes* of the organism rather than some other cause such as God's miraculous tracking and reassembling of matter that has long ceased to be caught up in any life processes.

My contention is that the issue of what manner of resurrection is metaphysically possible is not unrelated to the possibility that we could have originated in a different manner than we actually did. I have been insisting that it is not important how our parts come together in their *first* assembly at the time of our origins, in order to downplay the significance of any events preceding a *later* assembly to object identity. If it does not matter whether we are initially a result of a miracle, in vitro fertilization or sexual reproduction, why should it matter when the parts are reassembled a second time? I am emphasizing that what is essential is that *certain* matter be caught up in a life, rather than how it got there or even whether the life continued uninterrupted.

To weaken the hold that van Inwagen's biological continuity intuition might have on you, consider for the sake of argument that someone came into existence through fertilization in a petri dish at an infertility clinic at T_1 . Surely this individual could have come into existence later at T_2 if the union of the same sperm and egg had been delayed a little while. So the same organism that might have originated at T_1 in $World_1$ has now come into existence at T_2 in W_2 . Now imagine in W_3 that the same being is destroyed an *instant* after it originates as a zygote and before it had physically changed at all. The destroyed parts of the zygote are then reassembled at T_2 in W_3 and are physically identical to the parts of the organism that they would have composed if that organism had first come into existence at T_2 in W_2 . There is absolutely no quantitative or qualitative physical difference

between the parts of the one celled organism in the different worlds. Can it really matter that the organism at T_2 in W_3 is not the result of a continuous biological processes from T_1 ? If it does not seem to matter that the organism in W_1 or W_2 or W_3 comes into existence *initially* from a test tube or normal conception or a miraculous fusion of the matter essential to the zygote at either T_1 or T_2 , can it really matter metaphysically if in W_3 the zygote at T_2 consists of the reassembled parts of the zygote at T_1 rather than possesses those same parts due to biological continuity? There are no physical differences in the zygotes separated by the temporal gaps. The zygote in W_3 at T_2 is physically identical to how it would have been if it had originated then rather than been reassembled at that time.

It should not be thought that the identity claims in the above passage are only plausible because the entity discussed is a one cell organism of the type that we all originate from. A similar point could be made with a complex organism rather than a zygote. God could have brought you into existence just a split second ago complete with “quasi - memories” of having lived for decades. God also could have had you originate two days from now. Consider the possibility that God destroys you a moment after creating you and then two days later, at the exact time that God could have originally brought you into existence, He reassembles your parts exactly as they were at the time he destroyed you. I find it difficult to believe that this is a duplicate rather than you, especially when we have already established you could have been brought into existence in that condition and at that moment for the first time. Can it really matter if at that later time the assembled entity is not biologically continuous with you from your origin? There would have been no physical change between the two beings because you were destroyed an instant after being created.

I have probably pushed the readers as far as they will go on the previous issue. So let us turn

now to a second argument that van Inwagen offers to show that the manner in which an individual's parts are united in the future determines whether that individual continues to exist or if a duplicate has replaced him.^{xi} Van Inwagen maintains that the reassembly of the matter that once composed an individual is not sufficient for his resurrection. To show this, van Inwagen makes use of a thought experiment in which all the matter that composed him when he was ten years old is reassembled across the room from him. Which individual is van Inwagen? It seems obvious that van Inwagen would not be the youthful-looking person who just appeared, even though, years ago, van Inwagen was composed of the numerically same atoms. But van Inwagen insists that those who claim resurrection just involves the reassembly of an individual's atoms, have no grounds upon which to reject the claim of the youngster that he is Peter van Inwagen.^{xii}

Van Inwagen overlooks alternative explanations available to the believers in the reassembly model of resurrection. One reason that many people might not think that Peter van Inwagen would be the individual with the childish appearance is that van Inwagen already exists. Already existing, his identity cannot be threatened by what happens elsewhere. But this response could not be made to another thought experiment that van Inwagen puts forth in a later article.^{xiii} Van Inwagen imagines that a thousand years from now, God could reassemble the atoms that composed him when he was twenty and could also reassemble the atoms that composed him at his death decades later, say when he was eighty. Van Inwagen asks: "And which will be I? Neither or both, it would seem, and, since not both, neither."^{xiv} But van Inwagen's thought experiments do not support the conclusion that resurrection through reassembly is impossible. Most of us who believe that we can cease to exist and then reappear, insist that the reassembly must be of the parts we had at the time of our destruction. To come back as a robust twenty year old when one died as a frail eighty year old is to deny sixty

years of one's existence. One's life had continued throughout those years. That is why in either of the two thought experiments, the presence of the individual with the youthful appearance does not make it difficult for us to identify van Inwagen. Even though the being with the youthful appearance is composed of the original atoms that constituted the older man years earlier, he is not identical to the latter.

The reader should not think that this principle that one can exist again only if one returns as one last existed is ad hoc. The same principle governs the intermittent existence of other entities. A baseball game suspended in the sixth inning due to rain or darkness cannot resume the next day in the second inning. But just as the game can resume in the sixth inning, my intuition is that a person who died when he was eighty could exist again if the parts he had at the last time of his existence were reassembled. The same point holds in other cases of intermittent existence such as trials, classes, and theatrical plays. A trial can be suspended but it must resume where it left off or it would be a new trial. For instance, if all the previous oaths, testimony, motions, evidence, depositions etc. were not considered part of the trial when the court was next in order, it won't be the same trial. A similar point can be made of a class that is suspended due to a school shooting, teachers' strike or natural disaster. The same class can resume only if the assignments and tests previously completed are counted towards the class's requirements. If they were not, we wouldn't describe the class as being numerically the same as the one interrupted. Readers who would identify the classes even if the earlier work was not accepted may be guilty of a type-token fallacy.

An analogy with artifacts can again be used to weaken van Inwagen's claims. Even if all of a car's parts that had been replaced over a period of twenty years were of sufficient number to compose a car when they were reassembled, one would not think that the latter would be the same

car that had left the factory assembly line twenty years earlier. And this is true even if the twenty year old car was disassembled and undergoing repairs in a service garage at the time that its discarded parts from the previous twenty years were reassembled. (Like the gun and the toolshed mentioned earlier, the car can be disassembled and reassembled.) So there is plenty of evidence that it is an entity's most recent parts and their position relative to each other that matter to its continued existence. These parts need not be immanent causes of the entity at a later stage, for the entity can be disassembled and reassembled. Nevertheless, the parts an entity had at its most recent moment of existence are necessary for it to exist later, just as the parts that an entity had at its actual origin, would, of necessity, have to be its constituent matter if that entity were to have come into existence at a different time.

If God reassembles a cremated individual, the parts of the resulting individual are not where they are *merely* because of biological processes. But that doesn't mean the individual's atoms are where they are *solely* because of God's miracle. God has miraculously placed them where they are in relation to each other because of the relative position the biological processes last bestowed upon them. The biological processes thus have a causal role, it is just not one of immanent causation. If God chooses to resurrect an organism, that last material arrangement of the biological processes determines the location of the divinely reassembled parts.^{xv}

Part II

Whether the reader agrees with what I have said so far, or accepts van Inwagen's "Body Snatching" account, she still probably wants to know why it is that someone is not stuck after resurrection with the frail eighty year old form she had at her death? And what keeps her from immediately dying again of the same disease or injury? Undoubtedly, God could remove the lethal

threat in the blink of an eye, but wouldn't she still be frail and old? I can't make another appeal to God's power to instantaneously restore a woman to her youth since I claimed earlier that God could not bring any of us back into existence as robust twenty year olds if we die at eighty. My response is to begin with noting the obvious: that we can delay aging without feeling we are violating any metaphysical truths. No one thinks that when people take vitamins containing antioxidants they have done something to threaten their identity and survival. Since some people age more slowly than others, could the aging process of the latter naturally speed up or the former slow down? I do not see why not and since at all ages we are replacing old cells with new ones, why could not the new skin cells of an eighty year old resemble those that replaced the earlier dead cells when she was in her twenties? It is not much of a step from admitting this is metaphysically legitimate to allowing the reversal of the aging process.^{xvi} As long as restoration of a youthful form does not happen too quickly and the replacement parts are not too large, the result should be metaphysically and biologically acceptable.

But why, the reader might ask, does the speed or size of the part replacement matter? The key lies in the concept of "assimilation."^{xvii} Assimilation has to do with how an entity integrates new parts with its old. Not any kind of part replacement will preserve the existence of the entity in question. Our attitude about part replacement is determined by what is the norm for the type of entity in question. That our familiarity with this norm makes us doubt that a person could survive any process that diverges greatly in speed or size of part replacement is no reason for suspicion if such an attitude reflects biological fact about what it is to be a part of an organism. Consider the replacement of a human being's parts. Human organisms naturally replace all of their matter slowly over a period of time. If we imagine thought experiments where our parts are changed in different sizes and at

different speeds, our intuitions about our survival are correlated with how closely the thought experiments parallel normal, natural biological replacement. If a person's parts are replaced in two steps, first by an exact duplicate of his entire left side from his brain to his toes, and then by an exact duplicate of his right side, our attitude would be that he did not survive but had been replaced by a duplicate, who thought he was the original person in question. So size matters.

Speed also matters. If I were informed that all my parts were shortly to be replaced in succession in a process taking only a matter of seconds, I would believe that a duplicate would soon take my place. I believe that it is the lack of assimilation that precludes surviving speedy part replacement. The importance of assimilation can be seen in cases in which it is lacking. Consider replacing the parts of a child that has been cryogenically frozen. Could the child survive all of its parts being replaced in a split second? I doubt it. Because the low temperatures have suspended all life processes, the portions of new matter are never caught up in the child's physiology. The result is that the original child has been replaced by a duplicate. That one could not survive speedy part replacement because of the lack of assimilation is even more evident if we imagine a person being teletransported. Most people, though not van Inwagen, probably believe they could survive teletransportation from Earth to Mars if their original Earth atoms were reassembled on Mars. But we are less likely to believe that we would survive if all of our deconstructed parts were, while on route to Mars, removed one by one from the teletransportation beam and replaced sequentially with small, qualitatively identical but numerically distinct parts, and these new parts were reassembled on Mars when the beam arrived there. This lack of survival is even clearer if the being that ends up materializing on the teletransportation platform on Mars has a qualitatively very different brain, body and psychology from that of the person whose parts were the original ones in the beam. But the same

qualitative changes in body, brain and personality that result from part replacement wouldn't threaten the reader's identity if they were to occur slowly outside the beam in the normal course of life. Such changes would roughly parallel the ordinary physiological and psychological growth and changes of any person from youth to old age.

Why do we have this intuition that we could not survive even qualitatively identical part replacement in the teletransportation beam, but could survive even greater qualitative and quantitative changes outside of the beam over a longer period? The answer is that the new parts inserted into the beam containing us in scattered form were not assimilated into our body, gradually becoming caught up in the same life functions and psychology. Standardly, the new parts of one's body and mind only become parts of the old body and mind when they become involved and integrated into the same biology and psychology. A "foreign body" is something that does not become caught up in the life process of an organism. No potential body part can be biologically assimilated by a body while the latter is scattered in a teletransportation beam.

The last problem I want to consider is whether resurrection is possible if one's parts were posthumously assimilated into another human being. The concern motivating this is that if some of one's parts at the time of one's death were later assimilated into another human organism, remaining there until death, then both can be resurrected with the same parts only as Siamese Twins, sharing perhaps a limb that we had both possessed. Coming back as Siamese twins, seems more in line with a spoof of this debate rather than a solution to it.

We clearly do not need all of our original parts. We can lose legs, add prosthetics and still exist. Of course, God does not have to resurrect us with prosthetics - He can make new limbs for us. But a problem occurs if too much of one's vital matter becomes part of the vital matter of another

person. Both of us could not survive without that particular chunk of matter, so substituting two new chunks of matter for it, as was done in the case of the shared limb, would result not in our resurrections but in our duplications. However, we do not have to fall back on van Inwagen's body-snatching simulacra-making divinity to avoid this. The answer is just that we cannot all be resurrected at the same time. However, God could speed up our part replacement to the maximum point where any faster matter exchange would result in duplication rather than resurrection with newly assimilated matter. So after the one first resurrected assimilates new matter and releases the old, the "old matter" could be used in the resurrection of the other being. We eventually could both coexist, and could do so for eternity. This staggered version of resurrection surely seems a preferable solution to having God leave us believing we are burying what is really but an illusion.^{xviii}

Conclusion

So it appears that the changes of matter necessary for a healthy resurrection are not of a size or speed that would cause us to doubt whether the living being is the same individual who existed before at death's door. The fact that the individual's life would involve gaps may be no more problematic than the disassembly and reassembly, or even the destruction and restoration, of artifacts and artworks. Since the artist can create or co-create a work of art by giving instructions to others who use their own hands to arrange the matter of the artist's creation, there doesn't seem to be any good reason for rejecting the claim that the reassembly of such an object's parts, when done in accordance with the original artist's intentions, brings about the existence again of the original artwork. So van Inwagen's analogy to our own destruction and resurrection cannot receive any support from the realm of artworks and artifacts. And if we are God's creations, the result of biological processes that He put in motion, then we too should be able to exist again when our parts

are reassembled in very much the same manner that they were at the time of our destruction. And we have seen that this position can be reinforced by the possibility that we could have come into existence with the very same matter at different times. This makes it plausible to maintain that we could have been destroyed a moment after our actual origins and then brought back into existence with the very same matter and at the very same time that it was possible for us to first have originated. And such an event could be accurately described as a type of resurrection.

i. My aim in this essay is to investigate the possibility of an afterlife for soulless material beings. I am not denying that there exist immaterial beings (e.g. God, Angels), I just doubt that we belong to this category. Unfortunately, to defend the claim that we lack immaterial souls would result in too much of a digression. All that I can say here is that what we know about the neurological dependence of thought provides us with reason to doubt that we possess an immaterial mind/soul. For an elaboration see Peter van Inwagen's *Metaphysics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993) pp. 178-180 and also Paul Churchland's *Consciousness and Matter*. (Cambridge: Bradford Books, 1990) pp. 18-21.

ii. Van Inwagen, Peter. "The Possibility of Resurrection." *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion*. Op. cit. p. 121.

iii. The "Body-Snatching" description of van Inwagen's account is a phrase taken from Dean Zimmerman's article on the same question. See his "Materialism and Survival" in *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions* ed. Stump, E. and Murray, M. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) pp. 379-386. In a postscript added in 1997, van Inwagen acknowledges there could be other ways in which God accomplishes resurrection of the dead that "I am unable to even form the idea of because I lack the conceptual resources to do so." *The Possibility of Resurrection and other Essays in Christian Apologetics*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997) p. 50.

iv. Van Inwagen writes: "The atoms of which I am composed occupy at each instant the positions

they do because of the operations of certain processes within me (those processes that taken collectively, constitute my being alive.) Even when I become a corpse, provided I decay slowly and am not say cremated. - the atoms that will compose me occupy the positions relative to one that they do occupy largely because of the processes that used to go on within me: or this will be the case at least for a short period. Thus a former corpse in which the processes of life have been “started up again” may well be the very man who was once before alive, provided the processes of dissolution did not progress too far while he was a corpse. But if a man does not simply die but is totally destroyed (as in the case of cremation) then he can never be reconstituted, for the causal chain has been irrevocably broken. Thus if God collects the atoms that used to constitute the man and ‘reassembles’ them, they will occupy the positions relative to one another because of God’s miracle and not because of the operation of the natural processes that, taken collectively, were the life of the man.” “The Possibility of Resurrection.” *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion*. Vol. IX No. 2 1978. pp. 119.

v. Van Inwagen’s actual examples are of a ancient manuscript penned by St. Augustine that is burned and the parts miraculously reassembled by God and a modern child’s house of blocks construction that is knocked down and then reassembled by the parent. Since I am interested in the resurrection of a human being it is useful to contrast this with the reassembly of a statue of a human being. Furthermore, the statue example in a sense combines traits of both of van Inwagen’s examples of a famous creation made by the hand of a historical figure and the “lumpy” construction as involved in the blocks. I don’t think any harm is done by the switch.

vi. Bill Forgie has pointed out to me that matters are complicated if the parts are scattered and used

in other artifacts. Can they ever be reassembled into the earlier artifacts that they were part of? I will address this near the end of the paper, since we are really interested in the resurrection of human beings.

vii. William Hasker's questions provoked the discussion in this passage.

viii. See Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) pp. 113-116.

ix. It may be thought that genetic engineering of children in the future will make their creation more like that of an artwork for particular genes will be placed in specific chromosomal areas just as particular pieces of clay are placed by the sculptor in specific locations.

x. Or consider a print. Isn't the creator the artist and not the person who runs off the prints?

xi. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer who urged me to take up this second argument of van Inwagen's.

xii. Van Inwagen. "The Possibility of Resurrection." Op. cit. p. 120.

xiii. Van Inwagen. "Dualism and Materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?" *Faith and Philosophy*. vol. 12 No. 4. October 1995.

xiv. *IBID.* p. 486.

xv. This stress on the last material arrangement frees my account from the critique that defenders of

immanent causation direct against those who think that identity over time just amounts to spatial-temporal continuity. This leaves them without grounds to deny the identity of a being that is destroyed with the duplicate that replaces it if this all occurs without any spatio-temporal gap. For discussion and references see Dean Zimmerman's "Immanent Causation." *Philosophical Perspectives*. 11, 1997. p. 435.

xvi. By "reversal" I do not mean regression to infancy.

xvii. See Peter Unger's *Consciousness, Identity and Value*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.) pp. 147-156 for an informative account of part replacement and assimilation. I am quite indebted to Unger on this matter.

xviii. I would like to thank Bill Forgie, Nathan Salmon, Saul Hershenov, William Hasker and a pair of anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on this paper.