DISPOSABLE BODIES, DISABLED MINDS, AND CHRISTIAN HOPE: RESURRECTION IN LIGHT OF TRANSHUMANISM AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

by Andrew Sloane iD

Abstract. This piece brings into critical conversation Christian resurrection hope, virtual versions of transhumanism, and intellectual disability and demonstrates that Christian resurrection provides a more cogent hope for people with severe intellectual disabilities than transhumanism. I argue that transhumanist virtual futures are theologically problematic, as bodily resurrection is neither required nor desirable. It is particularly problematic for people with severe intellectual disabilities given the way they would be excluded from these futures. Disability theology also raises issues with the traditional notions of "healing" in the resurrection and the implications for the value and identity of persons with intellectual disabilities. Starting with these problems, I explore the nature of Christian hope, noting the inadequacies of a virtual transhumanist future with respect to both resurrection faith and intellectual disability, and address how resurrection hope can account for issues raised in disability theology, and so properly include people with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: hope; intellectual disability; resurrection; transhumanism

INTRODUCTION: FROM SAN JUNIPERO TO ETERNITY?

"Black Mirror" paints a notoriously dark and dystopian vision of technological futures. But one episode in Season 3, "San Junipero" breaks the mold. Here, we find an unusually up-beat vision of technology and human experience. A virtual world in which the uploaded consciousnesses of two damaged people find satisfaction and fulfilment—even joy and love—in defiance of bodily limitations. It is a particular—and particularly evocative—form of a transhumanist vision of the future, one in which individuals can live on indefinitely in a virtual world after the death of their bodies, satisfying dreams and desires long denied them in the old, physical world. It seems like a dream come true.

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I am not convinced. Whatever the likelihood of such scenarios coming to pass (and I, for one, am highly skeptical, cf. Gouw 2022), I wonder how *desirable* they are, and how *adequate* they might be. The questions of desirability and adequacy are particularly pointed when considered in light of Christian resurrection hope, and the phenomena of intellectual disability. In this piece, I argue that the "hope" provided in transhumanist virtual futures is neither desirable for people with severe intellectual disabilities, nor adequate in light of both the nature of what it is to be human, and the hope that Christ offers us. I will begin by briefly outlining the virtual version of a transhuman future, before noting the ways this excludes people with intellectual disabilities, and fails to adequately account for the essentially embodied nature of human life (and human minds). I will then address ways in which Christian resurrection hope has been seen as also marginalizing people with intellectual disabilities. In so doing I aim to demonstrate that, while disability theology raises questions for both virtual transhumanist futures and the traditional doctrine of the resurrection, Christian resurrection hope is better able to address them, and so provides a more cogent hope for people with severe intellectual disabilities.

Disposable Bodies: Transhumanism and Hope

Let me acknowledge from the start that transhumanism is a diverse—even somewhat anarchic—phenomenon with no single, unified agenda (Shatzer 2019; N. Bostrom 2005; N. Bostrom et al., 1999; More and Vita-More 2013; Childs 2015; Sweet 2015; Thweatt-Bates 2012). Nonetheless, it has had a significant impact on popular culture. Its ideas are reflected in narratives as diverse as *Robo-Cop*, *Altered Carbon*, *Ghost in the Machine*, *Blade Runner*, and the novels of Greg Bear and others. What links transhumanisms is their belief that humanity 1.0 needs to be upgraded—especially in relation to bodily limitations, ageing and deterioration, and cognitive capacities. Some take that in the direction of "re-embodied" humanity, cyborg-enhancement of the human body—and mind (Altered Carbon, and some of the narrative strands in Years and Years, come to mind); others see it as taking a "virtual" form (another strand in Years and Years—one of the few hopeful elements in it—and, of course, "San Junipero").[1] It is the latter form that I want to address in this piece.

Let me note a few things before I move on. The (often overblown) transhumanist rhetoric speaks of transcending bodily limitations through uploading an individual human's consciousness into a virtual world. This is misleading in at least two ways. First, it is not and could not be a *dis*-embodied existence, whatever the rhetoric states; it is, rather, otherwise-embodied in a virtual reality that depends upon complex physical information systems for its establishment and maintenance—and a *lot* of hardware and energy (as is at least nodded-toward in "San Junipero"). Some glimpse

of that is evident in the contemporary phenomenon of "bitcoin mining," which, while very much less complex than the machinery that would be needed to develop a virtual world capable of supporting consciousness, requires increasingly sophisticated hardware, and consumes significant amounts of energy (https://www.thebalance.com/how-much-power-does-the-bitcoin-network-use-391280). The virtual version of a transhumanist future would be embodied in an even more complex machine environment. The limitations may not be those of a carbon-based life-form, but silicon (or whatever) has its own limitations. Second, the virtual world is generally mapped along the lines of embodied human existence—and the continuation (if enhancement) of bodily pleasures associated with it (again, so "San Junipero"). The *Transhumanist FAQ* puts it this way:

> A common misunderstanding about uploads is that they would necessarily be 'disembodied' and that this would mean that their experiences would be impoverished. Uploading according to this view would be the ultimate escapism, one that only neurotic body-loathers could possibly feel tempted by. But an upload's experience could in principle be identical to that of a biological human. An upload could have a virtual (simulated) body giving the same sensations and the same possibilities for interaction as a non-simulated body. With advanced virtual reality, uploads could enjoy food and drink, and upload sex could be as gloriously messy as one could wish. (Bostrom 1999, similarly, 2.6; NBostrom 2005)

The projected, virtual future—at least the only truly *desirable* future—is of minds "inhabiting" a reproduced physical landscape in simulacra of human embodied existence (contra Moravec 2013). And this is no surprise, given the fundamentally embodied and relational nature of human thought and the metaphors that shape it (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Lorrimar 2019; Sanders 2016; Scheidt 2015; Johnson 2022). A projected future of one's (human) self as a fleshless mind, even a *trans*human one, is virtually unimaginable, and almost universally undesirable (Scheidt 2015, 326).

Nonetheless, this is a virtual future divorced from biology. Any experiences, communication, relationships, would be formed by fleshless selves and enacted in a nonphysical "landscape." While, as we have seen, it would most likely be modeled on the physical world of prior human experience, intolerable and undesirable restrictions would be reduced or removed. Limitations imposed by the constraints of the external environment, such as gravity, spatial distance, and the like, would be little more than bad memories. And, of course, more to the point, disease and disability and death would be eradicated, and familiar limitations on thought and action imposed by the body would be eliminated (Bostrom 1999; Bostrom 2005, 2008). Organic bodies are undesirable and disposable.

It should come as no surprise that, whatever might be said in favor of *other* forms of transhumanist futures (Burdett and Lorrimar 2019;

Macaskill 2019; Zahl 2019; McKenny 2019; Jones 2020), *this* particular vision of "hope" is in deep conflict with the Christian tradition (Gallaher 2019, 2022; Sweet 2015, 362–64; Herzfeld 2002, 2022; Winyard 2020; Waters 2015). Indeed, it is worth noting that the Christian Transhumanist Association specifically affirms both the renewal of creation and of the body: there is no role for a fleshless future in their vision for technology (https://www.christiantranshumanism.org/affirmation; Redding 2022; Cole-Turner 2022; cf. Thweatt-Bates 2012, esp., 72–77, 135–42). This conflict becomes all the clearer when we clarify the nature of Christian hope. An orthodox Christian vision of the ultimate future of the cosmos and those who inhabit it entails a new heavens and a new earth—a new *physical* creation—whatever that might look like and whatever rules might operate in it (Davis 2008, 2010; Polkinghorne 2000; Russell 2012, 2016; Sloane 2019b; Wilkinson 2010). The future for which we hope is not a mere outgrowth of historical processes: there is radical newness in the new creation that entails both God's sovereign vindication of God's work in creation and history, as well as judgment on what does not conform to the divine purpose. The *eschaton* consummates physical creation, it does not negate it (Bauckham and Hart 1999; Moltmann 1981; 2002; O'Donovan 1994; Pannenberg 1991, 230−57, 1998, 527−646; Wilkinson 2010). And our vision of our ultimate future as individual humans is bodily resurrection into that new cosmos, in fellowship with other embodied beings and with the Triune God (Deane-Drummond 2022; Wright 2007). I cannot see how a transhumanist virtual existence—as a *final* state for uploaded selves—is in any way consistent with that.

Now, a Christian Transhumanist might contend that uploaded consciousness provides a penultimate rather than an ultimate hope—a kind of technologically mediated intermediate state. I must confess that as a nonreductive physicalist I am not persuaded by traditional notions of an intermediate state for the soul, be they purgatorial, or an experience of anticipatory bliss or punishment.[2] However, for the sake of argument, let us suppose that human beings are constituted in such a way that they have a soul that survives physical death in some form or another (Wood 2020). This raises interesting questions about what might be uploaded into the transhumanists' virtual world, and in what way it might be human. Depending on which theological category is seen as determinative in answering this question, it is conceivable that the physical substrate of the fleshless self might allow for the upload to be the bearer of the image of God, or of the soul. It is open to question whether those fleshless selves would be *human* selves (Playford 2022), or nonhuman bearers of the divine image (Fisher 2015). Be that as it may, such a state could not rightly be seen as a corollary of the intermediate state as traditionally understood. For traditionally, the intermediate state is the product of God's own work in judgment, purgation, or reward, and the bliss that the blessed

experience is found precisely in the presence of God. In a fleshless virtual world, rewards or punishments (if any) would be brought to bear on uploaded consciousnesses through the agency of the human (or perhaps transhuman) architects of the virtual reality system they inhabit, and so would be subject to the architects' flawed values. Nor would God be any more present in this virtual world than in the physical world of God's own making. This fleshless state would be an impoverished extension of the experience of history, not an anticipation of the eschatological justice of God or the final beatific vision.

There are further conceptual and practical problems with a virtual existence, be it seen as a final or penultimate state. For what really matters in the virtual transhumanist vision is rational cognitive agency (Waters 2015; Scheidt 2015; Hall 2016, xxi, 137). The body is simply a temporary (and deeply flawed) repository for it. It might be the means that evolution used to generate consciousness, but the human body is little more than a disposable delivery system (Bostrom 1999; More 2013). It is mind—and the choices and experiences, plans and actions associated with it—that really matter (Koene 2013; Merkle 2013; cf. Hughes 2013). Such a view clearly reflects the problematic late-modern fixation on rational cognitive agency (Swinton 2012, esp., 14–15, 81, 115–16, 2016, 12–14; Sloane 2021). We have already noticed the conceptual problems this raises, even in relation to mind itself given the fundamentally and inescapably bodily nature of human knowing and cognition. Moreover, such a techno-gnostic anthropology and eschatology marginalizes, disparages, and excludes people with intellectual disabilities, for such persons lack those capacities and functions that are so valued in the transhumanist vision. Setting aside the question of who would enable someone with an intellectual disability to access the virtual world, we need to consider the kind of future they would enjoy—or endure—in it.

To be clear, we are considering people with diminished rational capacity (Smith (2019) discusses the criteria and their limitations). Some experience such severe cognitive disability that—as far as we can tell— they have no capacity to form intentions and enact plans; little ability to communicate, perhaps no linguistic ability at all (Swinton 2016, 89). This may be congenital, the result of genetic or chromosomal abnormalities or birth trauma. It may be acquired, the result of stroke or trauma, or a progressive degenerative condition such as dementia. Their current cognitive functions would allow little, if any, meaningful engagement in a virtual world—and I should think it unlikely that they would be granted access to it, anyway. Lest that seem an unduly negative prediction, it is worth noting two things. First, the current state of medicine and biotechnology betrays stark inequalities that favor those already in affluent and influential positions to the detriment of both minorities (and many majority groups) and the marginalized (Cahill 2005). Second, many

of the most vocal advocates of various transhumanist agenda occupy privileged positions themselves, and are not noted for their concern for those who are unable to participate in a post-industrial, knowledge-based "creative" economy (Childs 2015, 17; Deane-Drummond 2015; Imbert 2017; Preece 2021; Playford 2022, 43–44). I cannot see any reasonable prospect for the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in those transhumanist futures: Bostrom (1999, 3.2), for instance, speaks only of the future eradication of disabilities.

Let us consider a child born with severe, irreversible intellectual disability—say as the result of hypoxia during a traumatic delivery. This person—for surely we need to recognize them as a person, as a vulnerable member of the human community—never developed those higher functions we take for granted (Hammond 2017; Sloane 2019a). They have no capacity for language, and little ability to communicated nonlinguistically. Their senses may work, but they have none of the neocortical function required to make sense of the world through them. We may be able to love them and care for them, but they cannot respond to that care; indeed, we have no idea to what extent they are able to experience it *as* care. As far as I can tell, such a person has no ability to form and enact plans; no ability to understand the world and navigate their way in it; no knowledge of others as persons; perhaps, not even any knowledge of themselves (for self-awareness and critical self-reflection are high-order functions).[3] If they were to be uploaded with their current capacities, it is hard to imagine that they would be able to make sense of this virtual world or of themselves in it. Given their lack of "higher order" functions, they are unlikely to have the capacity to navigate a virtual landscape, let alone to enjoy it. Moreover, it is hard to imagine how they might acquire such capacities given that, as far as we know, the only way human minds can be properly formed is by way of bodily interaction with others and the world. Indeed, such bodily interactions are the principal ways such people experience others and the world, and they do so as primarily as recipients of the (loving) bodily actions of others (Swinton 2012, 153–85; 2016, 201–204). But this complex corporeal, physical-relational experience is the very thing the virtual transhumanist vision "transcends." Without either the tactile experience of the love of others, or the cognitive capacities that might enable them to meaningfully experience a virtual world, these people would be marooned in an alien environment. Such a vision provides no real hope for these people, or those who care for them.

Or perhaps we might think of someone who had these higher functions, but has lost them either suddenly (by way of a serious stroke, or a major traumatic brain injury, or perhaps post-operative complication), or gradually through a degenerative condition such as dementia. They may have had plans, the ability to communicate, and complex experiences of the world and of others in reciprocal relationships. They may once have

been agents in the world, but no more. All that has been erased—choked off, cut out, tangled, or mangled—those capacities and memories, those signs of personhood are drastically diminished, or irrevocably lost.

For me, this is very particular and deeply personal. For such was my brother Alisdair's experience. In 1972, when he was eight years old, he came off his bike and, in those days of no helmets and few CT scans, he suffered a devastating traumatic brain injury. Even after years of rehabilitation, he struggled to form new memories, could read only the simplest texts, and was never able to follow complex arguments. Cognitively and emotionally, he was frozen, so to speak, in early primary school until his death shortly before his eighteenth birthday. He has been dead, now, for many years; but had he survived until the dawn of the transhuman virtual world (and been allowed access to it), it is worth considering what would be "uploaded." If he were uploaded with his post-traumatic capacities, given the limited ability he had to understand and navigate the familiar physical world, it would be difficult or impossible for him to understand and navigate this unfamiliar virtual environment. But perhaps some mechanism might be deployed to recover what was lost, either prior to uploading, using a much more sophisticated iteration of something like *Neuralink* (https://neuralink.com/applications/; Portillo-Lara et al 2021), or in the process of uploading and orientation to the virtual world. Given the transhumanist commitment to going beyond "humanity 1.0," this would be the most logical option for his inclusion in their virtual world. This would entail "repairing" missing linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and social skills which would, in turn, entail decisions about what capacities need to be repaired, the end goal of that healing, who would make those decisions, and what values would guide the reparative process and its goals. All of this presupposes current "normal" cognitive function as a minimal base that must be restored, and on which transhuman enhancement would then build. The ableist assumptions implicit in these decisions, and in the nature of the anticipated virtual world and how we might inhabit it, are apparent (Hall 2013, 2016). Unless they were transformed beyond all recognition, there seems to be no place for people like Alisdair in a fleshless virtual world. In *this* transhumanist vision, it is not just bodies that are disposable, so too are certain kinds of people.

Disabled Minds: Intellectual Disability and Hope

Let me be clear: it is not just transhumanists who have difficult questions to answer regarding their vision of hope and people with intellectual disabilities. So do we Christians who hold to the orthodox hope of the resurrection of the body—and some of them are very similar to the ones I have just been asking of the transhumanists. Disability theology is a relatively recent phenomenon, which has evolved in important ways.

Disability theorists have rightly criticized the traditional *medical model* of disability for its tendency to medicalize disability, reduce persons to "patients," and ignore the distinction between (physical) "impairment" and (socially constructed) "disability." The latter is the focus of the *social model*, which particularly emphasizes the role of discrimination in generating a surplus of disability. Conceptual and practical issues associated with that model led to the development of a *limits* or *cultural model*, which recognizes the complex of medical, social, and cultural factors that shape disability, and ensures that the lived experience of disability informs theory. (Brock 2019; Creamer 2012; Hall 2016, 29–56; Messer 2013, 55–79; Petro 2016, 363–69; Swinton 2012, 27–69). There are questions that could be raised about whether it is possible to determine the nature of disability or its primary meanings and what role notions of proper function ought to play in our understanding of and response to impairment (Sloane 2021). Nonetheless, while disability theory challenges key elements of transhumanist discourse, it also raises important questions for Christian theology. One particularly acute set of questions relates to traditional notions of the resurrection, and of resurrection bodies.

Traditional Christian hope entails "healing" of body and mind (and soul, for that matter, however we construe that) in the new creation: the reversal of those incapacities and disabilities that impinged on the person's creaturely capacities. And this has truly provided hope to many people with disabilities and those who care for them. Me, for instance. When my brother died in 1982, I mourned his death. Deeply. But I still vividly recall the comfort, even joy, I experienced from the sense that my brother was now in God's presence, healed in body and mind.

But this is seen as both denigrating those with disabilities, and marginalizing and stigmatizing them in typical "ableist" fashion. This notion of resurrection, it is argued, envisages people with disabilities as "defective" humans who find no place as themselves in the Christian future. Such a future vision, it is claimed, effectively erases fundamental features of their bodies, their stories, their identity. This vision needs to be replaced. Nancy Eiesland put it this way:

> Resurrection is not about the negation or erasure of our disabled bodies in hopes of perfect images, untouched by physical disability; rather Christ's resurrection offers hope that our unconventional, and sometimes difficult, bodies participate fully in the imago Dei and that God whose nature is love and who is on the side of justice and solidarity is touched by our experience. God is changed by the experience of being a disabled body. This is what the Christian hope of resurrection means. (1994, 107)

Although she speaks of disabled bodies, similar claims have been made about disabled minds.

Note that this has a number of entailments. First, God does not merely embrace and welcome people with disability, but incorporates disability into God's own being, as evident in Eiesland's famous (or infamous) vision of "God in a sip-puff wheelchair" (Eiesland 1994, 89). Second, while disability (as a social experience) is excluded from the eschaton, impairment (as a bodily phenomenon) persists. Further, disability is seen as inextricably linked to personal identity in such a way that erasing the disability entails erasing the person. John Swinton (2011) has critiqued the notion of a "disabled God," so let me leave that aside and focus on the last two claims.

Allied with what is called the "social model" of disability, impairment, while acknowledged in views such as Eiesland's, is seen as less significant than "disability," the social meanings ascribed to particular bodily or mental states, and the (largely) excluding, marginalizing, and belittling behaviors and social arrangements that bedevil the lived experience of people with disabilities. What is "healed" in the resurrection is disability, not impairment: with the transformation of the eschatological "body politic," there is no need for physical healing (Brock and Wannenwetsch 2018; Brock 2019, Chapter 8). Now this, it is argued, is required in order for our vision of the future to properly shape our response to people in the present (Yong 2007, 291). I am not convinced of that; but more to the point, it requires that the third, and for my purposes most important claim, is true.

This claim is that disability is fundamental to identity, and in such a way that to erase the disability is to erase the person. Candida Moss, for example, argues that if disability is "healed" in the resurrection, "not only, then, is disability rendered unimportant to the construction of one's identity, it becomes—as a corruption—a hindrance to finding God. Human identity, as a reproduction of the divine image, is only fully present in the non-disabled" (2011, 18). Amos Yong presents one of the more cogent and nuanced versions of that claim. He states: "it is difficult to imagine how someone with trisomy-21 (for example) can be the same person without that chromosomal configuration… There may be no way, in this case, to eradicate the disability without eliminating the person" (2011, 166; similarly, 2007, 270). In making this claim Yong draws on the work of Stanley Hauerwas in relation to "retardation" and medicine. The context of Hauerwas' argument is important in understanding just what it is Hauerwas is claiming, lest we draw unfortunate metaphysical conclusions about disability and identity (Mullins 2011; Yong 2012). Hauerwas is arguing that medicine should not use abortion or embryo selection to prevent the birth of children with disabilities (1986, 160, 164). In such an instance, he states, "to eliminate the disability is to eliminate the subject," for the "treatment" aims precisely at ensuring that a particular person does not come into existence, an ultimate exclusion from human community. But that is not the case in healing in the resurrection. Whatever that healing entails,

it aims precisely at full inclusion of particular persons in the eschatological community of worship, work, and delight.

Indeed, the logic of Hauerwas's argument points in that direction. Later in the same essay he makes a parallel claim in relation to the intractable nature of injustice: "If justice comes to mean the elimination of the victim of injustice rather than the cause of injustice, we stand the risk of creating admittedly a less troubled, but deeply unjust world" (Hauerwas 1986, 172). There, it seems to me, the logic of his case speaks directly against what Yong seeks to do with it. For, I take it to be the case (as does Yong), that the eradication of injustice is integral to God's eschatological purposes and, that in the new heavens and earth, injustice will be a condition that no one endures. But this will not be achieved by the elimination of victims of injustice; nor will removing the injustice that has shaped them and their story somehow invalidate their identity or the goods produced through their experience of injustice (or those goods produced by those who have combated injustice here and now). This analogy between the healing of disability and the eradication of injustice in the new creation is closer than it might at first appear: for injustice is a significant contribution to many instances of intellectual disability, even a causative factor in it. Indeed, analogy and reality merge at many points: for instance, malnutrition in pregnancy or early infancy is clearly associated with global developmental delay; and malnutrition is often the result of structural injustice.

Now, perhaps I am doing Yong, at least, a disservice here. For elsewhere he talks not of the persistence of *disabilities* per se, but of their "marks," the ways in which they have shaped the persons whose embodied identities are shaped by the stories in which disability plays such a crucial role (Yong 2007, 273, 281, 288; 2012, 7). And here the analogy with the resurrection body of Jesus is helpful. For, contrary to Eiesland and others, Jesus is not raised *disabled*, but with the marks of crucifixion embodied gloriously.

This is worth teasing out, as the notion that Jesus continues to bear the wounds of his crucifixion in his resurrected and glorified body has become an important, if contested tenet of much disability theology (Wall 2015). Clarity about the nature of those marks of his crucifixion borne in the body of the risen Lord is crucial to getting clarity about the kind of continuity we ought to expect between pre- and post-resurrection human embodiment, and its implications for personal identity. Given the ambiguity of Yong's claims, it is worth turning to someone who seeks clarity on this matter. In her recent PhD thesis Maja Whitaker presents a sophisticated argument for at least some disability being identity-forming, and so persisting in the post-resurrection bodies (and minds) of disabled persons (2021). She rightly notes that personal identity, while a contested notion in theology and philosophy, is best understood as a multi-faceted phenomenon in which experience, bodily continuity, relationships and the narrative structure of a life all play a constitutive role (Whitaker 2021, §8.4.1; so, too,

Murphy 2002; Sloane 2019a). Some disabilities, she contends, are *identity-forming*: that is, they are such a central and noneliminable feature of a person's body and experience, and shape their relationships and so storied identity so profoundly, that their personal identity is inextricable from, or at least inextricably linked to, their disabled body and/or mind. In order for there to be continuity between the pre- and post-resurrection person such that it is the self-same person who lived and died who is raised from the dead, those identity-bearing disabilities will persist in the eschaton, but without the pain and social disadvantage that attends them in premortem existence. A key warrant for this set of claims is the presence of the wounds of the crucifixion in the glorified body of the Lord Jesus (Whitaker 2021, §8.4.1; 2021). And Whitaker argues that the language of the gospel narratives suggests that they are best understood as *open wounds*—persistent disabling impairments—not as *scars*—the physical marks left by now healed, and so no longer disabling, injury. This, she argues, justifies the notion that the wounds of crucifixion are identity-forming disabilities that persist in the post-resurrection body of Jesus (Whitaker 2021, §8.4.1, 2021; similarly, Wall 2015, 57; *pace* Moss 2019, 22–40).

Whatever the virtue of the linguistic claims, it is difficult to see how the persistence of the wounds of crucifixion as open, or *disabling* wounds is consistent with the gospels' resurrection narratives (Beasley-Murray 1987, 385; Carson 1991, 657). Consider this. Whether the nails of the crucifixion go through his hands or his wrists, significant damage would be caused to metacarpal or carpal structures, making the kind of hand function required for Jesus to break bread or cook fish difficult or impossible. Similar damage would be done to tarsal or metatarsal structures by the nails through his feet (or ankles), making unimpeded walking unimaginable. Further, for the sake of argument let us suppose that the spear-thrust pierced Jesus' thorax. This would result, at the very least, in a traumatic hemo-pneumothorax, and the collapse of one or both lungs. In addition, it would most likely result in damage to major vessels such as the pulmonary artery or vein, or even the aorta, vena cava, or the heart itself.[4] For this wound to persist as an *open* wound would mean that the resurrected Jesus had a sucking chest wound (or perhaps tension pneumothorax), and visible bleeding. Not only is this unremarked upon by the evangelists, it also seems inconsistent with him engaging in meaningful conversation with the disciples.

Now, it might be argued that I am being unreasonable here, that what I have described is not what is being supposed by the notion of the disabled Christ. I fail to see how that works. For the sort of wounds we need to consider necessarily entail the kind of damage to key anatomical structures that I have described, and the resulting dysfunction. If the matter at issue is that they are disabling *wounds*, then they are, *ex hypothesi*, still patent, open wounds: collapsed lung (and, I suppose, persistent bleeding, or seeping

of the wounds) and all. If they are not patent, then they are no longer wounds, but marks of prior injuries: scars if you will. One final possibility is that they are still patent, but that the glorified body of Jesus is such that he can function in the ways the gospel narratives describe without being incapacitated by them (Whitaker 2021, §8.4.2). In that case, it is hard to see how they are *disabling* in the requisite sense. The linguistic evidence is consistent with understanding them as healed wounds, marks or scars; the logic compels it.

But it would be a mistake to simply dismiss the concerns of disability readings of Jesus' resurrection. It is worth listening carefully to both the narratives, and to what disability theologians have helped us see in them. The embodied, resurrected and glorified Christ does not have a repristinated body. His resurrection does not undo the passage of time and what his history means for who he is. The crucifixion is central to his identity at every stage of the gospel story, whether the narrative speaks of his anticipated future, suffering present, or remembered past—and to him being *identified as their Lord Jesus* after his death and resurrection by his disciples. To erase those traces is to erase that aspect of his identity. And that, it seems to me, has bearing on the post-resurrection identity of people with disabilities—cognitive or otherwise. An essential aspect of their being raised gloriously is the visibility of the traces of disability in their embodied, narrative self. This is how they are known by God and others, and how they will know themselves as truly themselves. Here we need to recall that disabled persons can exemplify particular aspects of what it means to be human, and particular forms of human flourishing, not just *elicit* them, and these dimensions of what it means to be human not only persist into the eschaton, they are glorified in it, and contribute to its glory and that of the Triune God (Hauerwas 1986; Messer 2013, 94–101; Moss 2019, 38; Sloane 2021, 415, 420).

For people with disability, their disability shapes who they are, and how we relate to them. It is part, now, of what makes them the person they are (Whitaker 2021, esp., §5.7., §6.3). True, they are rendered vulnerable by their disability. Actually, that is not quite right. For to be human is to be vulnerable. That inherent frailty and fragility is rendered visible in particular ways in people with disabilities, including intellectual disability. The giftedness of personal identity is more apparent in their stories, in part because it is not clouded by the rational cognitive agency that we in the late modern West see as the determiner of our value. But they are still persons, with stories, stories that show us ways in which human beings can flourish, and which elicit from us particular expressions of human community, forms of human flourishing (Sloane 2019a, 2019b, 2021).

Whatever else the resurrection does by way of healing and transformation, it validates and vindicates those forms of life. It shows the ways in which they too evidence the glory of the gospel of the crucified and risen

Christ, and lays claim to those with disability as integral parts of God's grand story of grace and love. All of this is part of their narrative identity that is affirmed even as it is transformed in the resurrection (Batchelder 2023; Rosner 2017). Moreover, as Yong rightly notes, a dynamic view of the new creation allows for the growth and development of people with intellectual disabilities (2007, 282, 285–86). Resurrection vindicates the particularity of their narrative identity, and that identity will be embodied in ways that reflect the particularities of their story; but that need not entail that disability per se is a human "good" that will be exemplified in the resurrection, any more than injustice will be.

So Christian hope, properly understood, allows for the full incorporation of people with intellectual disability in a future resurrection in a new creation (Sloane 2019b; Whitaker 2021, §8.6). Although people like my brother Alisdair might have no place in San Junipero, they will be welcomed into God's ever more glorious future—yes, and healed along with us and all God's redeemed creatures.

Known, and Knowing Bodies: Christian Hope For the (Ultimate) Future

Christians hope, in the end, for a new heavens and a new earth in which justice is at home—and which will also be our home as transformed, embodied beings, and in which people with intellectual disabilities can truly be at home. This is a very different hope to that rather thin and exclusive future held out by some transhumanists. Hope for a fleshless existence in a virtual world in which the bodies that shape who we are as thinking beings are disposable, and disposed of. Even if we were only "thinking things," minds trapped in meat bags (and we are much more than that), in such a "hope" too much is lost. It is not just bodies that are fundamental to who and what we are, so are many of the people who make up the human community. People we know and love who would have no future in that virtual world. True, the eschaton is a future over which we do not have ultimate control, and which will not be of our making. It is God's crowning gift to the groaning creation that God so dearly loved and that is, in turn, caught up in the transforming death and resurrection of Christ. But it is a future to which all are invited, and from which none are excluded by disability or the exigences of life in a broken world. A future in which disabled minds and bodies, raised glorious, will find their home. A future from which people like my brother are in no way excluded.

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Notes

1.   For a range of views see, https://www.transhumanism.com.au/; https://whatistranshumanism.org/; https://humanityplus.org/")https://humanityplus.org/. For ethical critique of the movement, especially its elitist tendencies and complicity in late modern capitalism, see https://theconversation.com/super-intelligence-and-eternal-life-transhumanisms-faithful-follow-it-blindly-into-a-future-for-the-elite-78538.

2.   I am aware, of course, of the long tradition in Christian theology of belief in a (more-or-less) disembodied intermediate state between death and resurrection, and the associated belief in a soul that survives death in one form or another (Aquinas *ST* 1a.75–76, suppl. 69; Calvin 1960, §3.XXV.6.; *The Westminster Confession*, §32; Cooper 1989, 183–86; Wright 2007; Grenz 1994, 766–78; Erickson 1998, Chapter 57). I am not persuaded of the cogency of the notion, or the biblical warrants generally used in support of it (Green 2008, esp., 152–65). Nonetheless, the traditional notion of the intermediate state is radically different to what is proposed by transhumanists. For, as noted below, the intermediate state is not seen in Christian tradition as a desirable alternative to current physical embodiment, but as a temporary, partial, and inadequate anticipation of a final state of embodiment. Indeed, for Aquinas and others, the union of body and soul is necessary for proper human existence, hence the necessity of the resurrection in the *final* state. In that respect, the question of whether we *have* souls or we *are* souls (however those notions may be parsed), while interesting in its own right, has little bearing on our current concerns.

3.   Please note: I am not here claiming that their current experience of world is distressing, nor that they are to be less valued than others. Impairment, value, and distress are quite discrete phenomena.

4.   I am not here trying to diagnose the precise nature of Jesus' injuries on the basis of the gospel accounts, nor to suggest a patho-physiological mechanism for the flow of "blood and water" from his side as some have attempted (Zugibe 2005, esp., Part I). I doubt that these were the writer's concerns (nor those of the earliest witnesses on whose testimony they depend), and so it seems foolish to attempt such diagnoses. Rather, I am positing these as the most likely injuries that would be inflicted by the kinds of Roman practices that the gospel writers describe.

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