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## THE LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY RESURGENCE OF NATURALISTIC RESPONSES TO JESUS' RESURRECTION

GARY R. HABERMAS\*

The last twenty years or so have witnessed the inevitable march of new theological trends. Gone are scholars like Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr. In their place, less centralized currents have captured the spotlight. Through it all, many publications on the subject of Jesus' resurrection have continued to appear. As the center of Christian theology, this would seem to be inevitable. Yet, to the careful observer, some different tendencies are becoming apparent.

It could be argued that the most captivating theological topic at present, at least in the United States, is the historical Jesus. Scores of publications by major scholars have appeared since the mid-1970s, bringing Jesus and his Palestinian setting to our attention. More recently, the apostle Paul has been the subject of numerous other influential studies. Almost unavoidably, these trends add to the opportunities to discuss the resurrection and its meaning.

Over the last two years, I have tracked more than twelve hundred publications on the subject of the resurrection of Jesus. Each source appeared between 1975 and the present, with the vast majority written by critical scholars. Out of this contemporary milieu, my purpose here will be to outline what appears to be a growing, although still fairly limited, trend. In recent years, some of the old, naturalistic theories that rejected the historicity of Jesus' resurrection have reappeared after a lengthy hiatus.

This essay concerns some of these most recent scholarly trends regarding the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. I will note the emergence of almost a dozen different alternative theses that are variously suggested or favored by more than forty different scholars, some of whom endorse more than one theory. While some of these works are lesser known or more popularly written, others contain suggestions or assertions held by highly influential authors. There is an interdisciplinary flavor here, as well. Most of the critics are theologians or NT scholars, while a number of them are philosophers, along with a few others from diverse fields.

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My effort here will attempt to categorize and list these natural hypotheses, including naming two alternative proposals that have so far eluded any generally recognized appellation. Hopefully, even this broad scholarly demarcation will serve the purpose of calling attention to the current skeptical trend, which may become more helpful if the recent trickle becomes a torrent.

### I. A BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR NATURALISTIC THEORIES

What is a naturalistic theory concerning the resurrection of Jesus? Drawn from a host of philosophical backgrounds, the basic idea is to suggest an alternative explanation in place of divine causation. Thus, a naturalistic theory is an assertion something like this: "Jesus didn't rise from the dead. What *really* happened is (fill in the blank)."

Notice that my explanation *requires* that the notion of Jesus' resurrection be *replaced with a specific variety of natural substitute*. The seeming supernatural portion of the religious claim is explained in terms of a natural occurrence. Thus, a comment along the lines of a simple *denial* ("There's no way that events like resurrections ever take place!") does *not* qualify as a naturalistic theory. Affirmations can be made as easily as denials can. In short, the blank needs to be filled in with an *alternative explanation*.

Some may assume that these naturalistic hypotheses regarding the resurrection have always been very popular in scholarly circles right up until the present, but this is not the case. While there have been many examples throughout the centuries,<sup>1</sup> besides David Hume's influential argument that natural explanations are always more likely than supernatural ones,<sup>2</sup> the golden age of such theories came during the reign of nineteenth century German liberalism. Albert Schweitzer lists many examples in his classic volume, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.<sup>3</sup>

As with the larger question of miracles, the predominant liberal approach was to accept fairly large portions of the gospel accounts as historical, while presenting rationalized alternatives to unwanted portions. Liberal irritation was chiefly provoked by two sorts of

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<sup>1</sup>For example, the late second century critic Celsus challenged the belief in the resurrection on several grounds: pagan mythology, the disciples stealing the body, and the vivid imagination of Mary Magdalene (cf. Origin, *Against Celsus*, 2:55-58). The English deist Thomas Woolston charged that Jesus' disciples stole his dead body and then lied about the appearances (*Sixth Discourse*, 1729), while deist Peter Annet proposed an early version of the swoon theory (*The Resurrection of Jesus Considered in Answer to the Trial of Witnesses*, 1744).

<sup>2</sup>David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 10: "Of Miracles," Part 1 (ed. Tom L. Beauchamp; Oxford Philosophical Texts; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (trans. W. Montgomery from the 1906 German version; New York: Macmillan, 1968), 21-22, 43, 47, 53-55, 60, 64, 83, 162-63, 165-67, 170, 179, 187.

biblical data: dogmatic theology and supernatural reports. With the latter, the texts were generally not taken at face value; an alternative sequence of events was supplied.

For example, this approach of accepting a fair amount of gospel content while rejecting the supernatural elements can be seen in Ernest Renan's famous *Vie de Jesus*. Renan generally tended to favor the fourth gospel's account of Jesus, informing his readers more than once of the general accuracy of this gospel's resurrection account.<sup>4</sup> In the French edition, a footnote by the author also points out that, in the fourth gospel, Mary Magdalene was "*le seul témoin primitif de la resurrection*"—the only original witness to the resurrection. Having thus identified her, Renan a moment later tells us that it was Mary's love and enthusiasm that caused her to hallucinate, giving the world a resurrected God!<sup>5</sup> Thus even Renan's favorite gospel is countered when it comes to miracles.

However, other liberals like David Strauss challenged these approaches, favoring a second, more radical strategy. He treated the gospel texts as if they were largely mythical compositions containing very little history. Such a method thereby questioned or rejected "[a] large portion" of the gospel records.<sup>6</sup> In the process, Strauss created more of a dispute than he had perhaps envisaged. Besides repudiating the historicity of miracles, this minority trend even undermined the predominantly historical emphasis of his colleagues!<sup>7</sup>

One trend in German liberalism was that these scholars criticized the approaches to the gospels taken by their fellow liberals. Additionally, the naturalistic alternatives to Jesus' resurrection favored by some were also frequently rejected by others. For example, David Strauss belittled the swoon theory held by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Heinrich Paulus, and others. Strauss concluded that such a scenario would utterly fail to account for the disciples' passionate belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead as the Lord of life.<sup>8</sup> Schweitzer noted that these rationalistic approaches suffered the "death-blow at the hands of Strauss."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Schleiermacher, Paulus, and later Theodor Keim took aim at subjective responses like Strauss's hallucination hypothesis.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jesus* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1864), 419-20. On p. 423 Renan states: "*Ainsi, dans le récit de la vie d'outre-tomb de Jésus, le quatrième Évangile garde sa supériorité.*"

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>6</sup>David Strauss, *The Old Faith and the New* (trans. Mathilde Blind; New York: Henry Holt, 1872), 59.

<sup>7</sup>Strauss freely (although often gently) criticized other liberals for taking too much for granted in their approaches to the study of the gospels (*The Old Faith*, 42-62).

<sup>8</sup>David Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879), 1:408-12; cf. *id.*, *The Old Faith*, 43.

<sup>9</sup>See Schweitzer's assessment (*The Quest*, 56-57).

<sup>10</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (trans. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart; 2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 2:420; Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 53-55, 210-14.

After the demise of German liberalism, usually dated shortly after the termination of World War I, the next few decades of the twentieth century witnessed a decreasing interest in naturalistic alternative theories to Jesus' resurrection. There were several reasons for this, not the least of which was that theological studies had entered what might be called a "No Quest" period. Due to the influence of Schweitzer's major study on the historical Jesus, along with Martin Kähler's *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* in 1896,<sup>11</sup> plus the growing influence of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann,<sup>12</sup> historical Jesus studies were severely curtailed.

During this time, it was often the case that any historical emphases, even naturalistic ones, were shunned. It might be said, then, that alternative responses to the resurrection were ruled out by the same tendency that disparaged any significant value being placed on historical studies of Jesus. But it was also well-recognized that there were significant factual problems with these challenges to the resurrection.

In the second half of the twentieth century, theological trends began moving in another direction. Even Bultmann's students argued that at least some historical knowledge was indispensable for the Christian faith. Ernst Käsemann's famous 1954 essay "*Das Problem des historischen Jesus*"<sup>13</sup> and James M. Robinson's call for a New Quest<sup>14</sup> marked a very limited interest in historical matters. But as scholars like Wolfhart Pannenberg moved to the forefront of theological discussions, history again regained a place of prominence.<sup>15</sup> Over at least the last twenty years, the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus has dominated the theological landscape.<sup>16</sup>

For most of the century, then, critical scholarship has largely rejected the naturalistic approaches to the resurrection. In fact, they have usually done so in a wholesale manner. After noting that "the older criticism took some strange paths," Karl Barth named some of these alternative hypotheses. Then he summed up the matter: "Today we rightly turn up our nose at this" because of the problems

<sup>11</sup>Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (trans. Carl E. Braaten; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).

<sup>12</sup>Two dominant works were Karl Barth's volume written in 1918, *The Epistle to the Romans* (trans. Edwyn Hoskyns from the 6th ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1933) and Rudolf Bultmann's 1941 essay, "New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (ed. Hans Werner Bartsch; rev. ed.; trans. Reginald H. Fuller; New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

<sup>13</sup>Originally presented as an address in 1953, Käsemann's essay is included in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (trans. W. J. Montague; Naperville: Allenson, 1964), 15-47.

<sup>14</sup>James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959), esp. part 1.

<sup>15</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History* (trans. David Granskou; London: Macmillan, 1968).

<sup>16</sup>Among dozens of prominent works are the projected multi-volumed sets by John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1991, 1994) and N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 1996).

with the theses. As a result, "these explanations . . . have now gone out of currency."<sup>17</sup> While discussing several naturalistic approaches, Raymond Brown concluded:

The criticism of today does not follow the paths taken by the criticism of the past. No longer respectable are the crude theories.... Occasionally some new mutation of the "plot" approach will briefly capture the public fancy, but serious scholars pay little attention to these fictional reconstructions.<sup>18</sup>

This aspect of recent thought is actually quite amazing. Theologians across a very wide conceptual spectrum have agreed in rejecting naturalistic approaches as explanations for the earliest Christians' belief in Jesus' resurrection. Even a sampling of these scholars is impressive.<sup>19</sup>

In the last decade or so, several influential theologians and philosophers have continued to concur with these assessments. James D. G. Dunn judges that "alternative interpretations of the data fail to provide a more satisfactory explanation" than the Christian proclamation that God raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>20</sup> Steven T. Davis agrees:

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<sup>17</sup>Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4, part 1 of *Church Dogmatics* (12 vols.; ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 340.

<sup>18</sup>Raymond Brown, "The Resurrection and Biblical Criticism," *Commonweal* 87 (Nov. 24, 1967): 233. For Brown's similar and much more recent response to these naturalistic theories, see id., *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist, 1997), 163-66.

<sup>19</sup>Some examples include Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 2: esp. pp. 155-56; Michael C. Perry, *The Easter Enigma* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 120-33; Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson; New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 181-85; A. M. Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ* (rev. ed.; London: Collins, 1961), 48-53; Helmut Thielicke, "The Resurrection Kerygma" in *The Easter Message Today* (trans. Salvator Attanasio and Darrell Likens Guder; London: Thomas Nelson, 1964), 87-91, 103-4; Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (trans. James W. Leitch; New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 186, 198-200; Neville Clark, *Interpreting the Resurrection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 99-105; A. M. Hunter, *Bible and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 111-12; Joachim Jeremias, "Easter: The Earliest Tradition and the Earliest Interpretation," in *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (trans. John Bowden; New York: Scribner's, 1971), 302; John A. T. Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 123-25; Ulrich Wilckens, *Resurrection: Biblical Testimony to the Resurrection: An Historical Examination and Explanation* (trans. A. M. Stewart; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1977), 117-19; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (2d ed.; trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 88-97; Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), 120-26; John Macquarrie, "The Keystone of Christian Faith" in *"If Christ Be Not Risen . . .": Essays in Resurrection and Survival* (ed. John Greenhalgh and Elizabeth Russell; San Francisco: Collins, 1986), 18-22.

<sup>20</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster, 1985), 76. For another recent and influential theologian who speaks similarly, see N. T. Wright, "Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem," *STR* 41 (1998): 118-22.

All of the alternative hypotheses with which I am familiar are historically weak; some are so weak that they collapse of their own weight once spelled out. . . . the alternative theories that have been proposed are not only weaker but far weaker at explaining the available historical evidence.<sup>21</sup>

Richard Swinburne concludes: "alternative hypotheses have always seemed to me to give far less satisfactory accounts of the historical evidence than does the traditional account."<sup>22</sup>

Still, an unusually large number of positive reassessments of naturalistic hypotheses were published in the last ten to twenty years, often put forward by influential scholars. No new evidence favoring these alternative responses has emerged. After a lengthy lapse, it is difficult to account for this trend.

## II. THE PRESENT SCENE

The latest research on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection reveals other very intriguing trends. Perhaps more firmly than ever, the vast majority of contemporary scholars are agreed that the earliest followers of Jesus at least believed that they had experienced their risen Lord. Even radical scholars rarely question this fact. It may well be one of the two or three most widely established particulars about Jesus' life. Therefore, any attempt to explain what happened in natural terms must be able to adequately account for this early conviction.

As Reginald Fuller remarked years ago, Jesus' disciples believing that he was raised from the dead "is one of the indisputable facts of history." That they had experiences that they thought were Jesus' appearances to them "is a fact upon which both believer and unbeliever may agree."<sup>23</sup> Later, Fuller pointed out that these experiences must be adequately explained: it "therefore requires that the historian postulate some other event over and above Good Friday, an event which is not itself the 'rise of the Easter faith' but the *cause* of the Easter faith."<sup>24</sup>

James D. G. Dunn speaks similarly:

<sup>21</sup>Stephen T. Davis, "Is Belief in the Resurrection Rational?" *Phil 2* (1999): 57-58.

<sup>22</sup>Richard Swinburne, "Evidence for the Resurrection," in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 201.

<sup>23</sup>Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), 142.

<sup>24</sup>Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1980), 169 (emphasis added).

It is almost impossible to dispute that at the historical roots of Christianity lie some visionary experiences of the first Christians, who understood them as appearances of Jesus, raised by God from the dead.<sup>25</sup>

And they were not merely speaking about an internal realization or conviction: "they clearly meant that something had happened to Jesus himself. God had raised *him*, not merely reassured *them*."<sup>26</sup>

Even more skeptical scholars often grant the grounds for the appearances. Norman Perrin concluded, "The more we study the tradition with regard to the appearances, the firmer the rock begins to appear upon which they are based."<sup>27</sup> Helmut Koester concurs:

We are on much firmer ground with respect to the appearances of the risen Jesus and their effect. . . . that Jesus also appeared to others (Peter, Mary Magdalene, James) cannot very well be questioned.<sup>28</sup>

How we explain the nature of these early experiences, then, is the chief issue. Peter Carnley sets up the issue rather nicely:

Meanwhile, there is no doubt that the first disciples interpreted the Easter visions or appearances as signs of the heavenly presence of Christ. *Why they should be minded to do this with the degree of conviction that is so clearly reflected in the early testimony is what we must seek to explain.*<sup>29</sup>

The different sorts of explanations can perhaps be categorized briefly, at the expense of some oversimplification. The major disagreement, of course, comes from those scholars who hold that natural hypotheses can explain the data better than the thesis that Jesus appeared alive after his death. Of these natural suppositions, some appeal to the earliest Christians' subjective, internal states, while others prefer objective solutions involving external events and conditions. I will call these two perspectives the naturalistic subjective and the naturalistic objective theses, respectively.

Similarly, of those who think that Jesus was really raised from the dead and appeared to his followers, some prefer manifestations that did not involve Jesus' physical body. Others think that Jesus appeared in an external, bodily form.<sup>30</sup> But what they both have in

<sup>25</sup>Dunn, *Evidence*, 75.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.* (his emphasis).

<sup>27</sup>Norman Perrin, *The Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 80.

<sup>28</sup>Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (vol. 2 of *Introduction to the New Testament*; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 84. Koester does not explain the sense in which he thinks that Jesus appeared.

<sup>29</sup>Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 246 (emphasis added).

<sup>30</sup>It is no secret that I think that Jesus appeared bodily. For just some of the details, see my publications such as *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of*



common is the conviction that Jesus really appeared to his followers. So I will call these the supernatural subjective and the supernatural objective theses, respectively. We will have much less to say in this essay concerning these supernatural categories, since neither involves natural explanations in order to account for the central phenomena, which are our main concern here.

It is my contention that, while not approaching large proportions in terms of the total number of commentators, we are at present witnessing a noteworthy comeback of scholars who espouse naturalistic hypotheses to account for Jesus' resurrection. Some of us have been predicting this for years, and so we are not really surprised. Although we have seen comparatively little of this activity for perhaps several decades, attitudes do change.

### III. CHARTING NATURAL HYPOTHESES

The last couple of decades have produced more than forty suggestions<sup>31</sup> favoring about a dozen different alternative scenarios to account for the NT report that Jesus was raised from the dead. With few exceptions, these theses are paralleled in the older liberal literature and elsewhere, although they occasionally include new twists. Many of the suggestions are expressed in fairly popular works, while others are published for scholarly consumption. Some are no more than brief mentions, while others are developed in detail. These natural hypotheses are of both the subjective and objective varieties. My purpose here is simply to note some of these trends.

#### A. Naturalistic Subjective Theories

As with later nineteenth century liberalism, so today some of the most popular alternatives to belief in Jesus' resurrection are that the *internal states* of the earliest Christians were such that they became convinced that Jesus was alive, even though nothing happened to Jesus himself. Perhaps this approach is largely prompted by the trends that we just noted: the critical community most frequently acknowledges that the disciples at least *believed firmly* that the risen Jesus had appeared to them. What could give rise to such a conviction? In this general category, two major answers include

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*Christ* (Joplin: College Press, 1996), esp. chaps. 4, 11; with J. P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidences for Immortality* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), chaps. 5-6, 12; "The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," in *In Defense of Miracles* (ed. Gary Habermas and Doug Geivett; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997); co-authored with Antony Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate* (ed. Terry L. Miethe; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); and *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976).

<sup>31</sup>Again, some of these scholars list or propose more than one naturalistic hypothesis.

hallucinations (often called subjective visions) and what I will call the illumination hypothesis.

After a decades-long hiatus, the subjective vision theory is making a comeback and is again the most popular natural response to Jesus' resurrection. The most influential version is that argued by German theologian Gerd Lüdemann. After a study of the major resurrection texts in the NT, Lüdemann appeals to "stimulus," "religious intoxication," and "enthusiasm" as the states of mind leading to the visions seen by Peter, as well as by others who concluded that Jesus was alive. Lüdemann prefers to speak of these experiences as visions rather than hallucinations, but he is clear that nothing literally happened to Jesus himself.<sup>32</sup>

Another influential version is held by Michael Goulder, who employs subjective visions or hallucinations in a more limited fashion than Lüdemann. For Goulder, these psychological states of mind ("conversion visions") particularly explain Peter's experience and Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus and are rather typical of religious conversions even today.<sup>33</sup> Closer to Goulder, Jack Kent employs grief hallucinations and conversion disorder to account for Jesus' appearances.<sup>34</sup>

Other recent discussions in German circles have touched on a related thesis. Samuel Vollenweider has argued that in the history of religions, group visions are quite rare.<sup>35</sup> But Ingo Broer notes a decades-old wartime story involving a reported vision by a group of German soldiers. Yet in the very next sentence, Broer questions the report.<sup>36</sup> He concludes his essay while still leaving some question regarding the veridical status of the resurrection appearances.<sup>37</sup>

Other examples of the subjective vision thesis have also emerged, but without the details provided by Lüdemann, Goulder, and Kent. A few scholars have built on some of the ideas of Carl Jung and his "collective unconsciousness," with visions providing

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<sup>32</sup>Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 106-7, 174-75, 180. An example of the German outcry is the lengthy book review by Andreas Lindemann in *Wege zum Menschen* 46 (November-December 1994): 503-13. A popular version of this volume is Gerd Lüdemann with Alf Ozen, *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection* (trans. John Bowden; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

<sup>33</sup>Michael Goulder, "The Baseless Fabric of a Vision," in *Resurrection Reconsidered* (ed. Gavin D'Costa; Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 48-61. A shorter version is Goulder's "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" in *Resurrection: Essays in Honour of Leslie Houlden* (ed. Stephen Barton and Graham Stanton; London: SPCK, 1994), esp. 58-62.

<sup>34</sup>Jack Kent, *The Psychological Origins of the Resurrection Myth* (London: Open Gate, 1999), 6-11, 49-61, 85-90.

<sup>35</sup>Samuel Vollenweider, "Ostern—der denkwürdige Ausgang einer Krisenerfahrung," *TZ* 49 (1993): 41-43.

<sup>36</sup>Ingo Broer, "Seid stets bereit, jedem Rede und Antwort zu stehen, der nach der Hoffnung fragt, die euch erfüllt (I Petr 3,15): Das leere Grab und die Erscheinungen Jesu im Lichte der historischen Kritik," in "*Der Herr ist wahrhaft auferstanden*" (Lk 24, 34): *Biblische und systematische Beiträge zur Entstehung des Osterglaubens* (SBS 134; ed. Ingo Broer and Jürgen Werbeck; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 54-56.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 60-61.

the catalyst for early Christian belief.<sup>38</sup> Philosophers Antony Flew<sup>39</sup> and John Hick<sup>40</sup> also prefer the hallucination thesis. Historian Michael Grant thinks that this is a possible explanation of Paul's conversion experience.<sup>41</sup> Jewish scholar Dan Cohn-Sherbok favors such an explanation,<sup>42</sup> while John Barclay seems at least open to it.<sup>43</sup> Somewhat distressingly, even though Carnley supports the occurrence of the resurrection, he considers the subjective vision scenario to be a very difficult one to answer on the grounds of the historical data.<sup>44</sup>

What I have called the illumination thesis argues that, through some nondescript internal process, the disciples became convinced that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Rarely are many details provided. Almost always, the apostle Peter is the key. His insights provided the initial impetus, and his enthusiastic encouragement was the engine that powered and persuaded his friends. As a result, the contagious conviction that Jesus was alive spread to the others. Some idea of autosuggestion or other form of transmittable faith is thereby suggested.

Championed by Willi Marxsen in a day when his treatment was a rare but perennial example that dismissed the historical resurrection, his was the prototypical position that espoused such an inner enlightenment on Peter's part, leading to the belief of the other disciples.<sup>45</sup> In a later volume, he continued to hold that Peter's faith was the primary motivation for the other disciples' faith, although Marxsen concluded that he did not know whether this vision(s) of

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<sup>38</sup>Margaret E. Thrall, "Resurrection Traditions and Christian Apologetic," *The Thomist* 43 (1979): 204-5, 209-11; Christopher Knight, "Hysteria and Myth: The Psychology of the Resurrection Appearances," *Modern Churchman* 31 (1989): 38-42; id., "The Resurrection Appearances as Religious Experience," *Modern Believing* 39 (April 1998): 16, 21-22; Robert C. Ware, "The Resurrection of Jesus, I: Theological Orientations," *Heyj* 16 (January 1975): 24; id., "The Resurrection of Jesus, II: Historical-Critical Studies," *Heyj* 16 (April 1975): 191-94.

<sup>39</sup>Habermas and Flew, *Did Jesus Rise*, 50-59, 79-91, 98-102, 112-116.

<sup>40</sup>John Hick, *The Center of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 25. It would be fair to note, however, that in a dialogue between Hick, myself, and three other scholars that took place at Louisiana State University, April 26-27, 1987, Hick favored Jesus' actual resurrection, but in a form that did not involve a physical body. This is probably also the best interpretation of his treatment of the subject in *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 171-81.

<sup>41</sup>Michael Grant, *Paul: The Man* (Glasgow: Collins, 1976), 108.

<sup>42</sup>Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish View," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 197.

<sup>43</sup>John M. G. Barclay, "The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 25-26.

<sup>44</sup>Carnley, *Structure*, 64, 244-45; cf. 69-72, 79, 82.

<sup>45</sup>Willi Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), esp. 88-97. An earlier essay by Marxsen was a forerunner here, although it differed somewhat: "The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical and Theological Problem," in *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ* (ed. C. F. D. Moule; London: SCM, 1968), 5-50.

Jesus was subjective or objective.<sup>46</sup> There is a marked sense here in which the fading influence of Rudolf Bultmann can be seen.<sup>47</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx expressed similar thoughts, without necessarily denying the resurrection appearances.<sup>48</sup>

Don Cupitt expresses some reluctance to outline precisely the nature of the resurrection appearances. But like Marxsen, he is also much more interested in the disciples' faith than in any event, for (contrary to the vast majority of recent commentators) Cupitt thinks that the former precedes the latter. Through "a shocking flash of recognition everything fell into place and they saw the meaning of this man."<sup>49</sup>

Thomas Sheehan perhaps supplies the most details concerning the new understanding of Jesus arrived at by Peter and the other disciples. In a flash of revelatory "insight," they understood that Jesus had been exalted and glorified by God. So, in some "ecstatic" occurrence that could have been as "ordinary as reflecting," Peter and the others began proclaiming that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Like Marxsen and Cupitt, we do not really know what happened, although Sheehan is quite clear that no resurrection took place. Rather, all we have is the interpretation of what Peter and the other disciples experienced.<sup>50</sup>

John Shelby Spong's writings on the subject have created quite an uproar. Again Peter is the key individual. It was he, not Jesus, who "was resurrected to new life, a new being." Standing "as if in a trance," Peter was "suddenly aglow with life." But there were no visions, hallucinations, or anything to do with the real world. No one else in the room (including Peter) really saw Jesus. He then helped to open the eyes of the other followers of Jesus.<sup>51</sup> In a later work, Spong provides the disclaimer that we really cannot know what happened. He also removes Peter's transformation to about six months after Jesus' death.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Willi Marxsen, *Jesus and Easter: Did God Raise the Historical Jesus from the Dead?* (trans. Victor Paul Furnish; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 70-74.

<sup>47</sup>Also reminiscent of Bultmann's emphasis on the centrality of the disciples' faith are the approaches of Karl Lehmann, "Zugang zum Ostergeschehen heute: Am Beispiel der Emmauserzählung," *IKaZ* 11 (January 1982): esp. 45-49; Robert F. Scuka, "Resurrection: Critical Reflections on a Doctrine in Search of a Meaning," *Modern Theology* 6 (October 1989): esp. 79, 85, 90.

<sup>48</sup>Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (trans. Hubert Hoskins; New York: Crossroad, 1987), 369, 385-90.

<sup>49</sup>Don Cupitt, *Christ and the Hiddenness of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 143, cf. esp. 164-67. Cf. C. F. D. Moule and Don Cupitt, "The Resurrection: A Disagreement" in Cupitt's, *Explorations in Theology 6* (London: SCM, 1979); Carnley (*Structure*, 154-82) includes an in-depth critique of both Marxsen and Cupitt.

<sup>50</sup>Thomas Sheehan, *First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity* (New York: Random House, 1986), 103-9, 112-14, 118.

<sup>51</sup>John Shelby Spong, *The Easter Moment* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 196-98.

<sup>52</sup>John Shelby Spong, *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 239-41, 255-57.

Without resorting to the full ramification of the illumination thesis, Rudolf Pesch's early work is perhaps the major example of a few scholars who thought that Jesus' pre-crucifixion teachings and authority were largely sufficient to help his followers survive the crucifixion and retain their faith.<sup>53</sup> Pesch later changed this position, granting that Jesus' appearances could be established by careful research.<sup>54</sup> However, largely due to the influence exerted by Pesch's earlier position, scholars like Hansjürgen Verweyen continued to emphasize the part that the pre-Easter message of Jesus played in preparing his disciples. Still, Verweyen is more positive towards the importance of the disciples' visionary experiences after Jesus' death.<sup>55</sup>

These two hypotheses—hallucinations (or subjective visions) and what I have called the illumination thesis—are the chief examples of subjective naturalistic theories. There has definitely been an increase in the number of scholars who have held these positions during the last ten to fifteen years.

#### B. Naturalistic Objective Theories

Recent attempts have also been made to explain away the NT accounts of Jesus' resurrection in terms of *external states and conditions*. This category involves more options and, not surprisingly, includes a wider range of scenarios.

The swoon theory has reappeared recently in a few places, although seldom among specialists. One of the only exceptions is the brief article by Margaret Lloyd Davies and Trevor A. Lloyd Davies. It develops the hypothesis that Jesus lost consciousness, causing the bystanders to conclude that he was dead. When taken down from the cross, he revived and was treated. Surprisingly, the appearances apparently seem not to be caused by Jesus actually being seen after his recovery, but by some unspecified sort of "perceptions," raising once again the issue of hallucinations.<sup>56</sup> The medical outcry against

<sup>53</sup>Rudolf Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu," *TQ* 153 (1973): 219-26; id., "Materialien und Bemerkungen zu Entstehung und Sinn des Osterglaubens" in *Wie kam es zum Osterglauben?* by Anton Vogtle and Rudolf Pesch (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1975), 157-68.

<sup>54</sup>Rudolf Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu: Ein neuer Versuch," *FZPhTh* 30 (1983): esp. 87; John Galvin, "The Origin of Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus: Two Recent Perspectives," *TS* 49 (1988): 27-35 contains an excellent summation of the shift in Pesch's thought.

<sup>55</sup>Hansjürgen Verweyen, "Die Ostererscheinungen in fundamentaltheologischer Sicht," *ZKT* 103 (1981): 429. See Galvin's contrast of Pesch and Verweyen ("The Origin of Faith," 35-40). A later contribution to the subject is Verweyen's "Die Sache mit den Ostererscheinungen" in "Der Herr ist wahrhaft Auferstanden" (*Lk* 24,34), esp. pp. 77-78.

<sup>56</sup>Margaret Lloyd Davies and Trevor A. Lloyd Davies, "Resurrection or Resuscitation?" *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* 25 (April 1991): 167-70. It is difficult to know the specifics regarding the brief mention of an "appearance." In fact, the entire article is less than two pages long, plus the endnotes.

the Davies' stance was instructive, with multiple reasons being given to indicate that Jesus really died by crucifixion.<sup>57</sup>

Barbara Thiering has a habit of publishing rather nontraditional items about Jesus. According to her, Jesus married Mary Magdalene, had children, got divorced, and also married Lydia of Philippi. She continues: Jesus was crucified at Qumran, along with Judas Iscariot and Simon Magnus. But none of them died, even though the other two men had their ankles broken. Jesus was drugged, given an antidote later, and traveled all around the Mediterranean with his followers, dying in the 60s A.D.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps needless to say, scholars have not taken her hypotheses very seriously.<sup>59</sup>

Every once in a while, the swoon theory appears again.<sup>60</sup> But it has not really been very popular since Strauss's devastating critique in 1835.<sup>61</sup> By the turn of the century, it was declared to be only a curiosity of the past.<sup>62</sup>

Some commentators have responded to the burial and empty tomb accounts in the gospels by returning to hypotheses reminiscent of nineteenth century efforts. John Dominic Crossan, for example, made headlines by asserting that Jesus' dead body was either simply left on the cross or buried in a shallow grave. Either way, he

<sup>57</sup>"Letters to the Editor," *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* 25 (July 1991): 268-72.

<sup>58</sup>Among her books explaining these suppositions is Barbara Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1992).

<sup>59</sup>N. T. Wright says, concerning a listing of some of these items, "Once again, it is safe to say that no serious scholar has given this elaborate and fantastic theory any credence whatsoever. . . . The only scholar who takes Thiering's theory with any seriousness is Thiering herself" (see N. T. Wright, *Who was Jesus?* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 22-23). Edwin M. Yamauchi calls her ideas "an Alice-in-Wonderland scenario" (see Edwin Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?" in *Jesus Under Fire* [ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 210.)

<sup>60</sup>Some examples are Gaalah Cornfeld, *The Historical Jesus: A Scholarly View of the Man and His World* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Duncan M. Derrett, *The Anastasis: The Resurrection of Jesus as an Historical Event* (Shipston-on-Stour, England: P. Drinkwater, 1982); Rolland E. Wolfe, *How the Easter Story Grew from Gospel to Gospel* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1989), 92-103; Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2000), 222-24. Derrett's text employs other naturalistic theories as well, further supposing both that the disciples cremated Jesus' body after his later death, and that the disciples experienced visions of the departed Jesus! Two other exceptionally brief mentions of the swoon thesis are B. C. Johnson, *The Atheist Debater's Handbook* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1983), 121-22, and Rupert Gethin, "The Resurrection and Buddhism," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 206. Another example of a popular treatment is Richard Andrews, *The Tomb of God: The Body of Jesus and the Solution to a 2000-Year-Old Mystery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996).

<sup>61</sup>Schweitzer comments on Strauss's attack (*The Quest*, 56-57), and does not list any nineteenth century proponents of the swoon theory after 1838.

<sup>62</sup>See Eduard Riggenbach, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1907), 48-49; James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (1908; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 92.

concludes, "the dogs were waiting."<sup>63</sup> Others agree, suggesting that Jesus' body was placed in a common grave and covered. The body decayed rapidly so that nothing was left.<sup>64</sup>

Barnabas Lindars is an example of those who have argued that while the resurrection appearances of Jesus are founded upon strong evidence, the empty "tomb legend" arose as a "late element" extrapolated from the resurrection accounts.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Adela Yarbro Collins charged that Mark composed his story of the empty tomb to complement his own belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead and appeared to his disciples.<sup>66</sup>

Certainly the majority of scholars think that Jesus' body was placed in a tomb. But Michael Martin asks why we can rule out the thesis that someone other than the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb.<sup>67</sup> A. N. Wilson suggests the possibility that the young man at the tomb stole the body and took it elsewhere, but admits that we will never know for sure.<sup>68</sup>

Another rather unconventional criticism has also emerged in recent years, as it did more than a century ago. It has been proposed that a twin brother or another person who looked like Jesus represented him after the crucifixion. A. N. Wilson suggests that this person was James, the brother of Jesus. Their resemblance would explain how James could represent his brother in the post-crucifixion appearances.<sup>69</sup> Greg Cavin supports a bit more forcefully the twin brother scenario.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 152-58; cf. id., *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 392-94.

<sup>64</sup>Spong, *Resurrection: Myth*, 239-41; Hick, *The Center of Christianity*, 25; Kent, *Psychological Origins*, 88.

<sup>65</sup>Barnabas Lindars, "Jesus Risen: Bodily Resurrection But No Empty Tomb," *Theology* 59 (1986): 90-96. See a subsequent version by Lindars, "The Resurrection and the Empty Tomb," in *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (ed. Paul Avis; London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1993), 128-34.

<sup>66</sup>Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Empty Tomb in the Gospel According to Mark," in *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (ed. Eleanore Stump and Thomas P. Flint; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 128-31. It could be questioned why I am including Lindars and Collins in the naturalistic objective category. For Collins, Mark did not simply invent the empty tomb story (p. 129), but was probably influenced by the "form, content, and style" of Greco-Roman literature, especially by its tales of mythical heroes (pp. 126, 130-31). So she has some similarities to other theses in the legendary category below. But Lindars is a different case, in that he only accepts a natural explanation for the empty tomb, while accepting the historicity of Jesus' appearances.

<sup>67</sup>Michael Martin, *The Case Against Christianity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 95.

<sup>68</sup>A. N. Wilson, *Jesus* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), 242.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 243-44.

<sup>70</sup>Robert Greg Cavin, "Miracles, Probability, and the Resurrection of Jesus: A Philosophical, Mathematical, and Historical Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Irvine, 1993), vii, 314-58. Some related thoughts are found in Cavin's, "Is There Sufficient Historical Evidence to Establish the Resurrection of Jesus?" *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (July 1995): 361-79.

In answer to my request that critics be willing to offer naturalistic hypotheses, Frank Miosi offers a similar "likeness" view—what he terms the "John the Baptist Theory." Just as some thought that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead (Mark 6:14-16), Miosi thinks that early believers may have concluded that Jesus was raised when they saw someone else who reminded them of Jesus.<sup>71</sup> Martin also mentions very briefly the possibility of a look-alike individual seen by the followers of Jesus.<sup>72</sup>

Crossan also offers another provocative thesis. It is not even necessarily a naturalistic account of the resurrection appearances, but seems to function that way in his system. Crossan holds that in Paul's account in 1 Cor 15:1-11, the stories are chiefly concerned with explaining the authority structures in the early church, not in proclaiming supernatural acts. Accordingly, Jesus' appearances are divided into three groups, denoting "three types of recipients" of Jesus' "apparitions or revelations." These three groups are the individual leaders (like Peter, James, and Paul), two leadership groupings (the Twelve and the apostles), and a general community of believers. The accounts are "quite deliberate political dramatizations . . . primarily interested . . . in power and authority."<sup>73</sup>

As in the nineteenth century, forms of the legend theory also existed at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>74</sup> To some extent, of course, many alternative hypotheses employ legendary *elements* that still do not involve full-blown proposals of this sort. For example, we have seen that Lindars and Collins employ such processes regarding the empty tomb narratives.

But others have stretched legendary accretion to cover a much wider scenario.<sup>75</sup> The best known and most radical of these theses is probably that by G. A. Wells, who has written numerous works on the subject. He asserts either that Jesus never lived at all or that he was an obscure ancient personage who cannot with certainty even be dated to the first century A.D. In the legendary process, Wells

<sup>71</sup>Frank Miosi, "The Resurrection Debate," (review of Gary R. Habermas and Antony G. N. Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*), *Free Inquiry* (Spring 1988): 56-57.

<sup>72</sup>Martin, *The Case*, 93.

<sup>73</sup>Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 169-70. Some similar thoughts are found in Evan Fales, "Successful Defense? A Review of *In Defense of Miracles*," *Philosophia Christi* 2d series/3 (2001): esp. 29-34.

<sup>74</sup>Some more popular efforts are those by Bruce Puleo, "Jesus was in Good Company: Other Claimed Resurrections From the Dead," *American Rationalist* 30 (January-February 1986): 80-82; Randall Helms, *Gospel Fictions* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1988), 121-49; Lloyd M. Graham, *Deceptions and Myths in the Bible* (New York: Bell, 1975), 362; Gethin, "The Resurrection," 207.

<sup>75</sup>One version is Hugh Jackson, "The Resurrection Belief of the Earliest Church: A Response to the Failure of Prophecy?" *JR* 55 (October 1975): 415-25. Jackson uses dissonance theory to argue that Jesus' teachings prepared his disciples for his death, leading them to conclude that, contrary to appearances, Jesus was somehow still alive in heaven (pp. 422-23). Unfortunately, Jackson fails to provide many details on how the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection actually evolved.



notes what he takes to be stages of development regarding the NT books, as well as the evolution of ideas concerning both the historical Jesus and Christology. He thinks that there was very little early interest in the historical Jesus and that by the time of the gospels, we are more or less dealing largely with fabrication. The resurrection appearances are similarly to be explained as the growth of legend.<sup>76</sup>

Michael Martin defends Wells's program on the historicity of Jesus, quoting it widely. But he notes that, since "Wells' thesis is controversial and not widely accepted, I will not rely on it. . . ." <sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, Martin's recognition of the scholarly response to Wells is still a bold understatement! Concerning the resurrection, Martin also adds the features noted below.

Evan Fales is one of the few recent representatives of the nineteenth century theory popular among the *Religionsgeschichte* scholars, who traced the origination of NT teachings to the ancient mystery religions. Similarly, Fales thinks the best approach is to study Near Eastern mythical figures like Tammuz, Adonis, Isis, and Osiris.<sup>78</sup>

Robert Price concentrates on historical examples where, in a religious context, legendary growth appeared very quickly. He chides Christian apologists for not doing their homework on these cases. Yet, while he concludes that legend also infests the resurrection accounts, he makes a surprising comment:

One need not assume that there was no resurrection. Indeed it was precisely because of *experiences* of some kind (such as those intriguingly listed but not described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15) that anyone cared to glorify Jesus.<sup>79</sup>

Thus Price apparently thinks that, while much legend has crept into the NT texts, it does not explain entirely the core of the resurrection tradition.

The last naturalistic hypothesis that we will mention is often treated as a relative to hallucinations because of obvious similarities. Yet, what I will term the illusion theory really needs, upon further reflection, to be cataloged differently. It is an objective alternative response because it is concerned largely with conditions in the external world, although this is seldom noticed.

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<sup>76</sup>G. A. Wells develops this thesis in volumes like *Did Jesus Exist?* (2d ed.; London: Pemberton, 1986), esp. chaps. 2-3; *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1988), esp. chaps. 1, 4; *A Resurrection Debate: The New Testament Evidence in Evangelical and Critical Perspective* (London: Rationalist, 1988), esp. chaps. 5, 7-8.

<sup>77</sup>Martin, *The Case*, 67; cf. chap. 2.

<sup>78</sup>Fales, "Successful Defense," 29-34. Robert Funk briefly mentions the mystery religion thesis in *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 35.

<sup>79</sup>Robert M. Price, "Is there a Place for Historical Criticism?" *ReIS* 27 (1991): 383 (emphasis added). Cf. id., *Deconstructing Jesus*, 52-61, 214-21, 260-61.

Perhaps we need briefly to differentiate hallucination from illusion. The former is a seeming perception that is not linked to the real world—"false sensory perception not associated with real external stimuli." Hence, in their very nature, hallucinations are subjective. On the other hand, an illusion is the mistaking of one natural condition for another—the "misperception or misinterpretation of real external sensory stimuli."<sup>80</sup> Accordingly, and unlike hallucinations, the illusion theory builds on situations where people, singly or in groups, mistake actual phenomena for something other than what they are in reality.

Martin enumerates several illusions (which he also calls mass hysteria) that he thinks are parallels to the early Christian belief in the resurrection appearances of Jesus. His examples certainly include some curious cases—UFOs, cattle mutilations in the western United States that were thought to indicate the activity of satanic cults, as well as reports of witchcraft and related phenomena in colonial America, which Martin especially treats in detail.<sup>81</sup> Wells similarly uses witchcraft trials as an example, although he incorrectly refers to this illusionary data as hallucinations.<sup>82</sup> Goulder also employs some odd illusionary incidents as being analogous to the resurrection—like statues of the Virgin Mary that reportedly move, while he concentrates especially on stories of Bigfoot appearances!<sup>83</sup>

With regard to the resurrection appearances, then, illusion theorists hold that *something real* was mistakenly thought to be *something else*—namely, the risen Jesus. As Martin suggests, "a person who looked like Jesus could have triggered a collective delusion."<sup>84</sup> Presumably, the other believers enthusiastically agreed that they had seen their Lord.

I could give other examples of these naturalistic theories that have appeared in the last decades of the twentieth century. Further, as can be initially noted from this presentation, even the options within the same general species of alternative responses can exhibit many dissimilarities. But hopefully this demarcation will provide a framework for observing that these alternative theses seem to be making a comeback. That alone is worth noting.

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<sup>80</sup>See Jerrold Maxmen and Nicholas Ward, *Essential Psychopathology and Its Treatment* (New York: Norton, 1995), 483-85; Harold I. Kaplan, Benjamin J. Sadock, and Jack A. Grebb, *Synopsis of Psychiatry* (7th ed.; Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1994), 306-7.

<sup>81</sup>Martin, *The Case*, 92-95. Similar delusional data are also cited by Frank J. Tipler, *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 310-12.

<sup>82</sup>Wells, *A Resurrection Debate*, 39-40.

<sup>83</sup>Goulder, "The Baseless Fabric of a Vision," 52-55.

<sup>84</sup>Martin, *The Case*, 93.

### III. CONCLUSION

Even many scholars seem to be unaware of the current revival of naturalistic theories aimed at the resurrection appearances of Jesus, let alone the history of such alternative theses. This recent trend has not been torrential, and is still not the critics' first option, but the change is nonetheless quite noteworthy. While some of these critics only briefly mention their response in a sentence or two,<sup>85</sup> many others are serious, detailed efforts to dismiss the central event and doctrine of orthodox Christianity. Perhaps surprisingly, very few alternative attempts appear in the works of the scholars who are currently the most influential in the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus. Given the exceptional amount of attention to this area of contemporary study, this is surely remarkable.

This study was necessarily sketchy, consisting chiefly of a brief survey of current trends on the subject of naturalistic approaches to Jesus' resurrection. I tried to map a wide range of positions, including differentiating four categories of explanations regarding the resurrection appearances, pro and con.<sup>86</sup> From the more than forty scholars and almost a dozen alternative theses, I also tried to name and describe two of these positions that are seldom, if ever, differentiated in the literature—the illumination and illusion views.

What responses might be given to the challenge of these naturalistic theses, especially the last two, concerning which there are comparatively few treatments? Detailed rejoinders must be forthcoming.<sup>87</sup> The more thoroughly naturalistic theories are dismantled, the more the solid data in favor of Jesus' resurrection is displayed.

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<sup>85</sup>Mere suggestions or passing comments, as these sometimes are, can be frequently found ever since the nineteenth century heyday of these hypotheses.

<sup>86</sup>These were the naturalistic subjective and objective theories, and the supernaturalistic subjective and objective approaches.

<sup>87</sup>I have critiqued several versions of these recent naturalistic theories in a number of journal articles. For a detailed response to Evan Fales's rendition of the legend theory, see "On the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," in *Philosophia Christi* 2d series/3 (2001): 76-87. Concerning G. A. Wells's form of the legend theory, see "A Summary Critique: Questioning the Existence of Jesus," *Christian Research Journal* 22 (Spring 2000): 54-56. (For a more detailed critique of both Wells and Michael Martin, see my *The Historical Jesus*, chap. 2.) On the hallucination theory, see "Explaining Away Jesus' Resurrection: The Recent Revival of Hallucination Theories," *Christian Research Journal* 23 (2001): 26-31, 47-49. For a response to a chief proponent of the illumination theory, see "The Early Christian Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus: A Response to Thomas Sheehan," *Michigan Theological Journal* 3 (Fall 1992): 105-27.