

Jesus' Resurrection in a Social-Scientific Perspective: Is There Anything New to be Said?

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Abstract

Recent overviews confirm that for decades the scholarly debate about Jesus' resurrection have centred on the question whether or not it refers to an actual event in history. Despite an endless stream of publications no real new answers have been found by those affirming and those denying a literal, bodily resurrection. A social-scientific perspective is described as that approach informed by historical consciousness and the affirmation of multiple cultural realities. From this point of view, the textual data on the visionary encounters are taken as evidence for the reality of Jesus' resurrection as a cultural event but without claiming universal validity. Like many examples of intentional objects, constituting *cultural reality* for subjects sharing a cultural system, it is suggested that Jesus' resurrection should be seen as such a reality. Thus it is suggested that a social-scientific perspective offers an alternative framework for understanding the resurrection, and consequently for a renewal of the scholarly debate.

Keywords

Historical consciousness, Jesus' resurrection, multiple cultural realities, resurrection as a cultural reality, scholarly debate on Jesus' resurrection, social-scientific interpretation, visionary experiences

Introduction

In all its variations, the debate about Jesus' resurrection is simply about 'whether or not "resurrection" refers to an actual event in history'.¹

¹) Robert B. Stewart, 'Introduction', in Robert B. Stewart (ed.), *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), pp. 1–15 (1).

And for the last 200 years scholars have taken two opposing views on Jesus' resurrection: some affirming and some denying a literal, physical bodily resurrection.² Despite many new voices and apparent great variation in the research answers these two trends remain intact, for, as Dale Allison, after an extensive overview, concludes: the 'countless books and articles dedicated to this subject have not, despite manifold differences, produced a plethora of truly disparate answers to this question'.³

The thousands of publications over the last three decades, Gary Habermas⁴ points out, have concentrated on theories either claiming that something happened to Jesus, or claiming that something happened to the disciples—in his terminology a distinction between *supernaturalistic* and *naturalistic* theories.⁵ Whether this distinction, or the one between *literal* versus *metaphorical* employed in the debate between Crossan and Wright⁶ is used, at the one end of the spectrum there are the New Testament scholars who insist that the historical truth of Jesus' resurrection can probably be confirmed by historical inquiry,⁷ while at the other end there are the critical or sceptical scholars who maintain that the Gospel accounts must be seen as mythical or legendary creations with little connection to any historical reality.

On the one hand there are the traditional or orthodox scholars (probably the majority of New Testament scholars) who support the traditional

² John M.G. Barclay, 'The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship', in Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Resurrection Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), pp. 13-29 (15); Stewart, 'Introduction', p. 2.

³ Dale C. Allison, 'Explaining the Resurrection: Conflicting Convictions', *JSHJ* 3.2 (2005), pp. 117-33 (117).

⁴ Gary R. Habermas, 'Resurrection Research from 1975 to the Present: What Are Critical Scholars Saying?' *JSHJ* 3.2 (2005), pp. 135-53 (135).

⁵ Gary R. Habermas, 'Mapping the Recent Trend toward the Bodily Resurrection Appearances of Jesus in Light of Other Prominent Critical Positions', in Robert B. Stewart (ed.), *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), pp. 78-92 (81).

⁶ N.T. Wright and John Dominic Crossan, 'The Resurrection: Historical Event or Theological Explanation? A Dialogue', in Robert B. Stewart (ed.), *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), pp. 16-47.

⁷ Barclay, 'The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship', p. 15.

Christian position that Jesus was literally, bodily and physically raised from the dead. These scholars are convinced that something happened to Jesus after his death: his tomb was really empty and his followers actually objectively saw him in some kind of physical body. The texts are analyzed and scrutinized in order to make out a reasonable case that there is sufficient historical reason to accept the historicity of these events.⁸

On the other hand, there are the critical scholars for whom the contradictory details in the Gospels together with the mythological or legendary claims about a dead person becoming alive exclude that anything happened to Jesus, and therefore it is maintained that something happened to his followers. These scholars find that almost ‘every detail of the resurrection of Jesus in one Gospel is contradicted in another Gospel’.⁹ To them the empty tomb was a Marcan creation (e.g. Crossan¹⁰), and while in all the accounts some form of reality lies behind the resurrection accounts, the post resurrection sightings were either hallucinations or visions in the context of grief.¹¹ According to this view, the resurrection of Jesus ‘must be a myth, must belong not to the real world but solely to the religious imagination’.¹²

This structure of the scholarly debate is confirmed by one of the best overviews of current research, namely that of Allison who presents it as a choice between a literalistic understanding or not: Jesus was

⁸ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 825–76; N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), p. 717.

⁹ John S. Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), p. 15.

¹⁰ Wright and Crossan, ‘The Resurrection’, p. 33.

¹¹ As argued by Michael Goulder (see ‘The Baseless Fabric of a Vision’, in Gavin D’Costa [ed.], *Resurrection Reconsidered* [Oxford: Oneworld, 1996], p. 54), visions are indeed real experiences but should best be considered as hallucinations or collective delusions because of their situation of grief. The ‘baseless fabric’ of the visions, although bodily real, cannot be taken as a solid basis supporting the resurrection of Jesus. This is the view in recent years popularized by Gerd Lüdemann (see *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection* [London: SCM Press, 1995]) and also supported by James G. Crossley (see ‘Against the Plausibility of the Empty Tomb Story and the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus: A Response to N.T. Wright’, *JSHJ* 3.2 [2005], pp. 171–86).

¹² Allison, ‘Explaining the Resurrection’, p. 117.

‘literally raised’ from the dead or it was mere illusion; Jesus’ tomb was either ‘unoccupied’ or ‘belief in the resurrection imagined it unoccupied’; the resurrection was either ‘sober, rock-solid history’ or ‘altogether illusory’.¹³ Allison’s summary of the debate between the sceptical New Testament scholars and their conservative counterparts clearly captures the mood:

Contrary to the gung-ho apologists, it is possible in theory that Jesus indeed awakened from death, that the tomb was empty, that he appeared to some of his followers, and that historians cannot prove any of this to anyone. And contrary to the evangelistic skeptic, it is equally possible, again in theory, that when Jesus died he died for good, that the appearances were altogether illusory, that his tomb remained forever full, and that historians cannot establish any of this.¹⁴

Beyond the above opposing positions there is little other debate so the title of this paper has a double meaning: can, from a social-scientific perspective, anything new be said about our understanding of the resurrection accounts (what they were about) and about the scholarly debate (how they can be understood)? In order to answer in the affirmative to the above it is necessary to explain what the *social-scientific perspective* is, and what difference it makes. It will be suggested that a social-scientific perspective can take the debate beyond this dichotomy into new territory while simultaneously offering a different historical answer to the question about Jesus’ resurrection.

What is a *Social-scientific Perspective*?

Bruce Malina defines social-scientific interpretation as follows:

Social-scientific interpretation of the New Testament documents involves reading some New Testament writings by first selecting a *suitable model* accepted in the social-scientific community and using the model *to form*

¹³) Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 214–15, 331, 338–39.

¹⁴) Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, p. 339.

adequate scenarios for reading the document in question. Forming adequate scenarios involves retrojecting an appropriate model to the first-century eastern Mediterranean culture area by a process of abduction, while making it applicable *by using proper filters* to keep out anachronism and ethnocentrism.¹⁵

While *suitable and appropriate social-science models* are readily applied to all aspects of New Testament interpretation in order to form *adequate scenarios*, it is not immediately apparent what the *proper filters* are to keep ethnocentrism and anachronism at bay. I suggest that one, if not the most important, filter is *historical consciousness*. Historical consciousness is a picture of the nature of the world that determines everything that follows in interpretation.¹⁶ In his discussion of Malina's 1986 book, Leland White points out that in social-scientific interpretation, historical consciousness is the precursor of *cultural pluralism*. While ascribing to the notion of *historically conscious cultures*, White says that it 'requires that we illustrate and account for thought patterns within the network of symbolic transactions and productions people carry out in their lives'.¹⁷ It is precisely historical consciousness understood in its full implication that gives us a view of the world consisting of multiple cultural realities with divergent rationalities. This can be illustrated by means of the following example from anthropological studies.

Shweder¹⁸ points out that anthropologists who regularly come across people who believe in and live by witches, ghosts, jinn, demons, dreams, transmigrating souls, visitors from distant worlds, soul travellers to upper

¹⁵ Bruce J. Malina, 'Social-Scientific Methods in Historical Jesus Research', in W. Stegemann et al. (eds.), *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), p. 3 [emphasis mine].

¹⁶ Historical consciousness, Gadamer ('The Problem of Historical Consciousness', in P. Rabinow and W.M. Sullivan [eds.], *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979], pp. 103–60 [110]) suggests, can be described as 'the privilege of modern man [and woman] to have a full awareness of the historicity of everything present and the relativity of all opinions'.

¹⁷ Leland J. White, 'The Bible, Theology and Cultural Pluralism', *BTB* 16.3 (1986), p. 111.

¹⁸ Richard A. Shweder, 'Divergent Rationalities', in Donald W. Fiske and Richard A. Shweder (eds.), *Metatheory in Social Science: Pluralisms and Subjectivities* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 163–96 (171–72).

or lower worlds, the evil eye and the like have at least three basic choices of how to represent such alien phenomena. Since anthropologists, like all other people, hold deep convictions about what is real and what is unreal, in much of twentieth-century anthropology such alien beliefs and practices have often been called deluded, wrong, confused, irrational, misinformed or superstition.¹⁹ Such reactions were preferred to the risk of being ridiculed themselves (*do you really believe that ghosts, demons, or the heavenly land of the shaman exist?*). By taking such entities literally and objectively, anthropologists could either dismiss them, or, most unlikely, affirm their reality. However, unlike such ethnocentric reactions (dismiss or affirm) some anthropologists adopt an alternative (third) response, arguing that ghosts, spirits, demons, witches, souls or ancestors are

in some important sense, real and objective, and that if we understood the meaning of those concepts properly and learned how to apply them to experience, we would see there exist things to which ghosts, demons, witches, and souls refer, things that can be interpreted using those concepts.²⁰

The latter response is historical consciousness in action, for it is not saying that in addition to all other entities which anthropologists take for real in their own world they also add these ones, but it is maintaining that they acknowledge the existence of multiple cultural realities with divergent rationalities. In philosophical terms, this view of the world is probably nowhere better described than by what Bernstein calls *engaged fallibilistic pluralism*:

For it means taking our own fallibility seriously—resolving that however much we are committed to our own style of thinking, we are willing to listen to others without denying or suppressing the otherness of the other. It means being vigilant against the dual temptations of simply dismissing what others are saying by falling back on one of those standard defensive ploys where we condemn it as obscure, woolly, or trivial, or thinking

¹⁹) Shweder, 'Divergent Rationalities', p. 168.

²⁰) Shweder, 'Divergent Rationalities', p. 172.

we can always easily translate what is alien into our own entrenched vocabularies.²¹

The position to be presented here is not merely a version of post-modern relativism, namely, ‘they saw the world in that way’ while ‘we see it in this way’ and therefore, ‘it is only a matter of perspective’. *Engaged fallibilistic pluralism* carries the notion of engagement as well as dialogue between subjectivities (or *othernesses*) and does not shy away from cultural critique because not every subjectivity is livable.

A World of Multiple Cultural Realities

This view of the world may be characterized by the following:

(1) The world is populated by groups of people who live in divergent consensus realities. How the world is, or what reality is like, is partly subject-dependent. According to this view, reality is not *out there* simply to be discovered, but is partly created by the subjects. What human beings take as reality is partly the product of their own making. The history of scientific thinking shows that what we call *reality* does not exist out there waiting to be described by scientists, but is constantly redescribed or represented, depending on the scientist’s theory.²² There is no theory-independent position from which to claim that one theory is closer to, or corresponds better with, *reality*.

If ‘the “hard” data of experimental physics leave scientists free to choose between several different basic conceptions about the nature of matter’, Shweder²³ points out, it is more so with regard to the social

²¹) Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 336.

²²) Aristotle’s physics, Newton’s mechanics and Einstein’s relativity theory are successive theories about the same material world, but in a sense they are not even about the same ‘reality’. Einstein’s theory indeed solves certain problems in a much better way, but who would be brave enough to claim that it represents the material world as it actually is? The problem is that the mind cannot get beyond the skin in claiming that one theory corresponds more with reality than another because we do not have independent access to reality to know what corresponds with it (see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Second Edition, Enlarged* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970], pp. 205–206).

²³) Shweder, ‘Divergent Rationalities’, p. 174.

world: ‘theories, doctrines, and concepts often classified by outside observers as symbolic, delusional, ideological, supernatural, or religious, not only are viewed as reasonable, natural, and objective to the insider, but are also sufficiently explained by reference to processes legitimately classified as rational ... The object world ... is subject dependent. Subjectivity is objectlike.’²⁴

In this view, the earth is populated by multiple cultural realities with divergent rationalities.

(2) In all cultural systems a (but not the same) distinction is made between what is real and what is unreal—a distinction based on rationality.²⁵ As Shweder points out:

Rationality is compatible with diversity. Reality is not independent of our version of it. Within any version there is a distinction to be made between what’s real and what’s unreal, but not necessarily the same distinction. The counterpoint is that not every version of reality is livable, and there is much to be learned by examining the difference between those speculative ontologies, conceptual reference points, and the root metaphors that we live by and those that we can’t.²⁶

Therefore, something such as a witch²⁷ or the evil eye could be real for insiders, but not for outsiders. There are no people with eyes that emit powerful, invisible supernatural beams that can alter the material

²⁴) Shweder, ‘Divergent Rationalities’, p. 191.

²⁵) ‘A rational process is a self-regulating process controlled by, or at least guided by, impersonal criteria, reason, and evidence. It can be distinguished, on the one hand, from nonrational processes, where reason and evidence are irrelevant to subjective experience. The process that accounts for tastes, preferences, likes or dislikes in food are prototypical examples of nonrational processes. On the other hand, rational processes can be distinguished from irrational processes, where there is a breakdown or degradation of the capacities that support rationality. Examples from our own culture include the loss of voluntary control, the failure to distinguish self from other or to discriminate past, present, and future’ (Shweder, ‘Divergent Rationalities’, p. 180).

²⁶) Shweder, ‘Divergent Rationalities’, p. 191.

²⁷) For insiders, witches are real; for Western-minded rationalists, they are delusions, but in a cultural-sensitive understanding the answer is ambiguous: yes and no. Yes, there are people who act as such and who influence the lives of many who live within their spheres. They do cast spells that often hugely impact such people’s lives. But no,

world or invade or affect another person's body. However, the evil eye as a mechanism of social and cultural control whereby people at whom it has been directed are severely affected exists in many cultural systems.²⁸ So, do these things exist? Yes and no!

Imagine how much evidence would be needed to convince a Western sceptic that dreams may somehow originate from outside, and not from inside, the body. Yet, for most people on this planet whose worlds are populated with spirits, gods and ancestors, communication from a world beyond does not need evidence of that kind. It is quite imaginable, and indeed often experienced, that dreams are interpreted as blurry perceptions or degraded signals received over a noisy channel from that world beyond.²⁹

(3) Within each cultural system or consensus reality there exist many objects or things called *intentional objects* that are real, but not necessarily objective. Natural languages are full of things that cannot be seen, but that are real.³⁰ They are subject- and culture-dependent things and include things such as marriage, money and theft, but also ghosts, demons, spirits and gods. 'The cultural categories of *marriage*, *money*, and *theft* ... are created solely by adherence to the constitutive rule system that define them. Without these rule systems these objects would not exist.'³¹ The taking of property in a system of communal-property rights is not necessarily theft. Intentional objects can be real without existing objectively. Such *intentional objects* are examples of culturally real items.

(4) Cultural systems do not all follow the same methods of obtaining knowledge about the world. In some reality systems, a variety of experiences, which can be called *alternate states of consciousness* (ASCs),

there are no people who by means of supernatural or mysterious power can capture or manipulate other people.

²⁸) H. Schoeck, 'The Evil Eye: Forms and Dynamics of a Universal Superstition', in A. Dundes (ed.), *The Evil Eye: A Folklore Casebook* (New York: Garland, 1981), pp. 192–200.

²⁹) Shweder, 'Divergent Rationalities', p. 183.

³⁰) Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2006), pp. 210–17.

³¹) Roy G. D'Andrade, 'Cultural Meaning Systems', in Richard A. Shweder and R.A. LeVine (eds.), *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 88–117 (91).

provide knowledge of what people take to be reliable information about the world. Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili identified what they call *monophasic* and *polyphasic* patterns. A pattern of monophasic consciousness refers to the enculturation of people in Western cultures that give dominance to ego consciousness. Within such a culture 'the only "real world" experienced is that unfolding in the sensorium during the "normal" waking phase ... and is thus the only phase appropriate to the accrual of information about self and world'.³² Most people accept and experience what is called polyphasic consciousness: many more states of consciousness (such as dreams or visions) are taken as real, and are often experienced. Such cultures also provide the rituals and prescriptions for the how, when and who of these experiences. Different cultures, therefore, offer particular frameworks within which these phenomena are experienced as *real*.

(5) Within each cultural system, beliefs and experiences confirm and support each other. Within a *cycle of meaning* people experience the entities they believe in, and believe in the entities that they experience.³³ Put differently, people believe in belief, and what is taken as real and true within their cultural system operates as consensus reality where intentional objects exist.

Historiography in the Context of Historical Consciousness

This view of the world or philosophical position, if you like, has far-reaching implications for anthropologists, and by extension for historians.³⁴ One implication is that it is no longer possible to assume that everyone else is talking from, and about, the same consensus

³² Charles D. Laughlin, John McManus and Eugene G. d'Aquili, *Brain, Symbol and Experience: Towards a Neurophenomenology of Human Consciousness* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1990), p. 155.

³³ Charles D. Laughlin, 'The Cycle of Meaning: Some Methodological Implications of Biogenetic Structural Theory', in S.D. Glazier (ed.), *Anthropology of Religion: A Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), pp. 471–88.

³⁴ One implication already mentioned is that not every version of reality is livable. The many examples of culturally constructed reality are in fact examples of worlds occupied by some people. They are livable, but are not necessarily valuable or livable for all of us. Engagement with otherness in this approach, therefore, inevitably includes cross-cultural dialogue and criticism. One of the discussion partners of these

reality.³⁵ Therefore some anthropologists adopted a position beyond the objectively *there* or the subjectively *primitive* position.

(1) First of all it means an avoidance of the *myth of realism*³⁶—that is the belief that accounts or texts refer to realities in *the* or *our* world. The interpreter's deepest convictions and consensus reality can no longer be applied directly to all other people.³⁷

(2) It also acknowledges the past as not only a distant, but also an alien world. It is this position that recognizes that other people's world-view and beliefs are different, that societies are different, that historical figures are different, and that the past is not only a distant, but also a foreign world where people do things differently and those differences are respected.

culturally constructed entities is modern science, which can also be seen as a cultural system. A cultural-sensitive approach requires cross-cultural evaluation and criticism. Demons, ghosts, spirits, witches, souls, ancestors, gods and soul flights may be real, but are they all good and useful? For cross-cultural interpretation also demands, as Bernstein (*The New Constellation*, p. 313) argues, 'the need to make critical discriminations and judgments' because not 'all forms of otherness and difference are to be celebrated'. Elsewhere I argued as follows: 'We can be passionately committed to the beliefs that regulate our actions when they are based on the strongest possible historically-contingent justifications. This is different from declaring our vocabulary final, immune to criticism, or the norm for evaluating others' (Pieter F. Craffert, 'On New Testament Interpretation and Ethnocentrism', in Mark C. Brett [ed.], *Ethnicity and the Bible* [Leiden: Brill, 1996], p. 464). Some cultural practices and beliefs are just not real options for us—at least not without self-deception or paranoia (see Richard Rorty, 'Solidarity or Objectivity', in J. Rajchman and C. West [eds.], *Post-Analytic Philosophy* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1985], pp. 3–19 [18 n. 13]).

³⁵ Processing of these insights is well underway in the development of thinking in historical studies and historiography (see Pieter F. Craffert, 'Multiple Realities and Historiography: Rethinking Historical Jesus Research', in Cilliers Breytenbach et al. [eds.], *The New Testament Interpreted: Essays in Honour of Bernard C. Latagan* [Leiden: Brill, 2006], pp. 87–116 [91–102]).

³⁶ Elizabeth Tonkin, 'History and the Myth of Realism', in R. Samuel and P. Thompson (eds.), *The Myths we Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 25–35 (25).

³⁷ It normally takes years of learning for a child to acquire the representational function of a cultural-meaning system (see D'Andrade, 'Cultural Meaning Systems', p. 100), to learn how to live with demons or ancestors, marriage and money. For outsiders it is like learning a second new language.

(3) The alien, the strange and the other can no longer be treated as the known, the common or the self as in the viewpoint of ontological monism.³⁸ Therefore, the historical method should include a public and conscious investigation of the historian's own ultimate presuppositions as well as those of the subjects. Therefore, when evaluating documentary sources, 'before anything else can be achieved, the historian must try to enter the mental world of those who created the sources'.³⁹ Grasping their ultimate presuppositions implies a temporary moratorium on those of the interpreter.⁴⁰

The activity of doing history is an activity designed to answer questions about a past that is construed in terms of its pastness, and hence in terms of its difference from the present: historians wish to tell their audience about something other than themselves.⁴¹ Historians of the brand sensitized by historical consciousness and multiple cultural realities face the challenge of a culturally alien past that they try to bring to light in a modern world. The challenge is to place texts, artifacts, events and persons in a world that is different from the world of the (Western) present. Therefore, as far as methodological assumptions are

³⁸ As Jörn Rüsen (*Studies in Metahistory* [Pretoria: Human Science Research Council, 1993], pp. 178–79) says: 'Historical studies looks [sic] at cultures which do not belong to the tradition of western self-understanding and deliberately adopts [sic] its methods to accommodate these cultures, thereby even alienating itself from the western historical tradition in order to release the sparks of the alternative from its own history.'

³⁹ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London: Longman, 1984), p. 116.

⁴⁰ As Thomas Nipperdey ('Can History be Objective?' *Historia* 23 [1978], pp. 2–14 [12]) suggests: 'It is part of the procedure of historians that they skillfully and critically distance themselves from their own presuppositions and perspectives' because '[a]ncient, medieval or pre-modern man behaved in a way that was completely different to what we are inclined to think on the basis of our own experience'. Another cornerstone of historiography in this paradigm is that historians must grasp the absolute presuppositions, the unspoken assumptions, of the society under review, in order to understand what has occurred (see Michael Stanford, *The Nature of Historical Knowledge* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986], p. 93).

⁴¹ See Martyn P. Thompson, 'Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning', *History and Theory* 32 (1993), pp. 248–72 (262); Brian Fay, 'The Linguistic Turn and Beyond in Contemporary Theory of History', in Brian Fay et al. (eds.), *History and Theory: Contemporary Readings* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 1–12 (7).

concerned, at least three insights characterize the description of what has been called *anthropological historiography*.⁴² These are as follows:

(1) The alien, strange and exotic can no longer be dismissed, but should receive serious attention. An acknowledgement of other forms of life and practices as real means that the ‘dark, contrasting, strange, even exotic events, manners and forms of life are drawn into the attention of history’.⁴³ Historians can no longer either dismiss or absorb them but, if their sources permit, have to account for them.

(2) It is no longer obvious what the alien, strange and exotic are all about. In fact, the historicity of alien and strange events and phenomena, Rüsen says, ‘lies in their marring the common sense criteria of historical interpretation’.⁴⁴ These insights have shattered the *myth of realism* that maintains the natural veracity of historical documents. Historians have realized that the ‘multiplicity and heterogeneity of the cultural creations of the human spirit allowed only for an incomplete historical interpretation from the perspective of a quasi-natural faculty of reason’.⁴⁵

Therefore, historians who use the recollections of others cannot ‘just scan them for useful facts to pick out, like currants from a cake’.⁴⁶ It is no longer merely a matter of identifying authentic sayings in multiple independent sources. In anthropological historiography it is realized that the unique can be understood only in a social context, and that it requires an understanding of that context by means of theoretical constructs and comparative methods. One should not only know what the sources say, but also understand what they mean and assume; it is necessary to do justice to the meaning, significance and context of the people involved.⁴⁷ In other words, it is necessary to understand the conventions of discourse, the cultural dynamics, the social processes and the cultural assumptions that the subjects took for granted.

(3) If not only the past is there, but also an alien other, it is necessary to reflect on responsible ways and means of encountering that

⁴² Craffert, ‘Multiple Realities and Historiography’, p. 102.

⁴³ Rüsen, *Studies in Metahistory*, p. 210.

⁴⁴ Rüsen, *Studies in Metahistory*, p. 210.

⁴⁵ Rüsen, *Studies in Metahistory*, p. 227.

⁴⁶ Tonkin, ‘History and the Myth of Realism’, p. 27.

⁴⁷ Stanford, *The Nature of Historical Knowledge*, p. 78.

alien other. Historians have learned from anthropologists that people lead meaningful lives, and that those meanings can be discovered only within the context of those lives. Anthropological historiography, as a reaction against historiography trapped in ontological monism, is an attempt to reconstruct the significance of the social expressions that serve as its texts. Therefore, historians consult anthropological literature ‘not for prescriptions, but for suggestions; not for universal rules of human behavior, but for relevant comparisons’.⁴⁸ Anthropological historiography, in the words of Bernard Cohn, acknowledges the interconnectedness of historical and anthropological interests:

Historians and anthropologists have a common subject matter, ‘otherness’; one field constructs and studies ‘otherness’ in space, the other in time. Both fields have a concern with text and context. Both aim, whatever else they do, at explicating the meaning of actions of people rooted in one time and place, to persons in another. Both forms of knowledge entail the act of translation.⁴⁹

The past is not only distant, but also an other, and this other is an alien other that emerges in a dialogue between the historian and the past. Therefore, beyond the re/constructed past lies the dialogical past that emanates in more than one expression. What is expressed as *reality* and *events* by the subjects can often simultaneously be translated into different sets of conceptual terms. The gap between closeness and distance is bridged by a dialogical process containing cultural-specific as well as comparative language. The cultural alien past emerges from the dialogue between cultural-specific and comparative discourses and is presented in more than one version often containing a ‘yes’ and a ‘no’.

I suggest that social-scientific interpretation understood in this way offers an alternative framework for understanding the resurrection accounts themselves as well as a diagnostic tool for analysing the scholarly debate regarding Jesus’ resurrection.

⁴⁸) Natalie Z. Davis, ‘Anthropology and History in the 1980s: The Possibilities of the Past’, in T.K. Rabb and R.I. Rotberg (eds.), *The New History: Studies in Interdisciplinary History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 267–75 (273).

⁴⁹) Bernard S. Cohn, ‘History and Anthropology: The State of Play’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980), pp. 198–221 (198).

Jesus' Resurrection as a Cultural Reality

If Jesus' resurrection is viewed as a cultural reality, by implication all the texts will be taken as reports about a reality culturally conceived and containing entities culturally constructed. That means that the resurrected Jesus consisted of a culturally conceptualized body placed on the spectrum of first-century Israelite afterlife options and based on knowledge-producing faculties that were legitimate to their world. In this view it would be possible to both affirm Jesus' resurrection as a (cultural) reality for first-century Mediterranean Israelite people while knowing perfectly well that the reports do not necessarily refer to events in time and space.

Each of these elements can be explained in more detail, namely:

(1) Whatever first-century people believed about the human body, it never was the kind of body found in *Grey's Anatomy*. Because, as Dale Martin points out, within the conception of New Testament people, like that of their first-century Mediterranean contemporaries, all things, including the variety of forms of life, were seen as various compounds of four basic elements, namely, air (pneuma), earth, water and fire.⁵⁰ Therefore, materiality consisted of a spectrum of more or fewer (or different configurations) of these elements and should not be seen in a dichotomy with nonmatter.⁵¹ Human beings, visible in whichever bodily format as souls, spirits or living beings, were configurations of these components and thus, in their terms, *material* and *real*.⁵² A resurrected body would have been neither a physical material body of the kind found in a *Grey's Anatomy*, nor a mutation of such a body; it means Jesus would have been resurrected in a first-century constituted body composed of the same stuff which made up bodies in their world and would have displayed the features ascribed to such bodies.

⁵⁰ Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 16.

⁵¹ Mary R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 100; Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, p. 14.

⁵² Pieter F. Craffert, 'What on Earth (or in Heaven) is a Resurrected Body? The Outline of a Historical-Anthropological Answer', in P. Chatelion Coumet and U. Berges (eds.), *One Text, a Thousand Methods: Essays in Memory of Sjef Van Tilborg* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 227–52 (237–39).

Within first-century people's cultural cycle of meaning where belief and experiences worked together in constituting, confirming, and creating beliefs about the human body, a whole range of bodily experiences confirm their beliefs about the human body, while such beliefs in turn functioned as the basis for the bodily experiences. Here, a few examples will suffice:

Bodies could become possessed by alien evil spirits or demons (as in the exorcism stories in the gospels), by benign spirits (the spirit of Jesus as in Paul's letters), or by ancestral spirits (as in the question whether Jesus and John the Baptist actually were revived prophets of old). In a number of texts (see, e.g., Mk 8.27–28 par., Jn 1.19–21) both Jesus and John the Baptist are questioned about their identity which suggest to me the belief that ordinary human beings could be possessed by deceased ancestors.⁵³ The bodies of first-century ancestors (like those of many others living in polyphasic cultures), could experience trips into heavenly spheres as referred to by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12. Such heavenly journeys or soul trips are common to shamanic figures.⁵⁴ Furthermore, a host of ancient texts indicate that humans could after death be turned into angels or astral beings. These all belong to the same *astronomical complex*—that is, the physics and physiology of the day that insisted that the stars, souls and angels were of the same substance. The best-known figures in the Israelite tradition that turned into astral beings probably are Moses and Enoch. In some Israelite circles, Moses was seen as a divine being,⁵⁵ while *1 Enoch* (104) assures the righteous that one day they will also shine like the lights of heaven—an idea also expressed in Daniel 12.⁵⁶

Any resurrected body would have belonged to this spectrum of bodily conceptions.

⁵³ P.F. Craffert, *The Life of a Galilean Shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in Anthropological-Historical Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), pp. 228–30.

⁵⁴ Craffert, *The Life of a Galilean Shaman*, pp. 157–58.

⁵⁵ Pieter W. Van der Horst, 'Moses' Throne Vision in Ezekiel the Dramatist', *JJS* 34 (1983), pp. 21–29; B. Lang, *The Hebrew God: Portrait of an Ancient Deity* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 21.

⁵⁶ John J. Collins, 'Eschatologies of Late Antiquity', in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 330–37 (335).

(2) Besides the ingredients provided by first-century Mediterranean people's culture, images of Jesus' resurrected body would have been constituted by means of the culturally recognized faculties of the day, such as visions and visionary appearances. These people lived in a polyphasic world where dreams, visions, revelations and other bodily experiences such as heavenly-travel experiences were fairly common and were taken as knowledge-providing experiences.⁵⁷ Such experiences, while today often described as altered states of consciousness (ASCs), were for them *normal* or *ordinary*, though often exceptional, states of consciousness.⁵⁸

Consciousness or the 'normal state of consciousness' in any given culture is a cultural construct and not a given,⁵⁹ and therefore in any society 'a finite set of possible phases of consciousness is declared normal'.⁶⁰ Cultural forces are apt to select and prescribe from the broad spectrum of human potentialities those elements which are to be described as 'normal' or 'ordinary'. As Tart puts it:

Each of us is, however, born into a particular culture, and the culture may be viewed as a group of people who recognise the existence of only some of these potentials and have decided that some of those they recognize are 'good' and thus to be developed, while others are 'bad' and thus to be discouraged.

The result is that what is experienced as normal or ordinary consciousness 'is a *construction*, not a given, and a *specialized* construction that in many ways is quite arbitrary'.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Pieter F. Craffert, "Seeing" a Body into Being: Reflections on Scholarly Interpretations of the Nature and Reality of Jesus' Resurrected Body' *Religion & Theology*, 9.1-2 (2002), pp. 89-107 (98-100).

⁵⁸ For a detailed discussion, see Craffert, *The Life of a Galilean Shaman*, pp. 146-50, 174-77.

⁵⁹ Norman E. Zinberg, 'The Study of Consciousness States: Problems and Progress', in N.E. Zinberg (ed.), *Alternate States of Consciousness* (New York: Free Press, 1977), p. 21.

⁶⁰ Laughlin et al., *Brain, Symbol and Experience*, p. 142.

⁶¹ Charles T. Tart, 'A Systems Approach to Altered States of Consciousness', in J.M. Davidson and R.J. Davidson (eds.), *The Psychobiology of Consciousness* (New York: Plenum, 1980), pp. 243-69 (245).

The gospels' death and resurrection narratives are full of visionary experiences and figures (angels?) encountered in these visions which seem to perfectly fit the logic in Paul's answer about the reality of Jesus' resurrection: for him and his audience visionary appearances arguably constituted legitimate and sufficient evidence for Jesus' resurrection. In these texts at least twelve people or groups of people are credited with 'having seen Jesus', or of 'having had visions of Jesus' (1 Cor. 15). Group sightings are not uncommon in the realm of UFO or Marian apparitions,⁶² and therefore there is no reason to doubt that 500 brothers at a time could have seen Jesus. Paul's visionary experience is discussed extensively in Acts (9, 14 and 22) and is confirmed by his own testimony (Gal. 1.12), while both reports about the women clearly refer to visionary encounters (Jn 20.11 and Mt. 28.2). In fact, in both cases the women are reported to also have seen angels in these visions. There is no reason to think that *seeing* Jesus was any different from *seeing* the angels. Jesus' appearance to Cleopas in the Emmaus story also demonstrates remarkable aspects of the *seeing* because apart from the fact that Jesus suddenly appears, he was not immediately recognized (Lk. 24.13-35). The three other reports are about various appearances to the eleven disciples, the last one being the appearance in Galilee, and in John (21.1) it is explicitly stated that Jesus *revealed* himself, while Matthew mentions that it was on a mountain—a setting conducive to visionary experiences. In the other two reports about the visionary appearance in Jerusalem the disciples were *seeing* him but again did not recognize him (Lk. 24.36).⁶³ It may be added that in Matthew's account of Jesus' death a number of saints (in a vision?) emerged from their tombs (27.52-53). In these people's world, visions were legitimate ways of obtaining knowledge: they were neither objective seeing nor hallucinatory in nature but were culturally real.⁶⁴

Despite opposing conclusions about the resurrection sightings, scholars on both sides of the debate take visions as merely psychological phenomena or hallucinations. It is widely acknowledged that visions, in

⁶² Goulder, 'The Baseless Fabric of a Vision', p. 53.

⁶³ For a detailed discussion of the data, see Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, pp. 841-57.

⁶⁴ J.J. Pilch, *Visions and Healing in the Acts of the Apostles: How the Early Believers Experienced God* (Collegeville, PA: Liturgical Press, 2004), pp. 1-8.

particular in the context of grief and guilt, are experienced by people of many cultures, and that the content of visions is dictated by culture.⁶⁵ Also, there is a remarkable consensus that such visions are merely psychological processes, and are most often referred to as hallucinations. Some critical scholars argue that the historicity of the resurrection cannot simply depend on hallucinations⁶⁶ while conservative scholars are of the same opinion—namely, that visions are merely hallucinations.⁶⁷ Wright,⁶⁸ for example, argues that visions or such sightings ‘were well enough known in the ancient world’ but would have been classified as hallucinations (thus, delusions) for he maintains that ‘the ancient world as well as the modern knew the difference between visions and things that happen in the “real” world’.⁶⁹

John Pilch⁷⁰ quite correctly points out that support for the vision-as-delusion view is culturally insensitive (ethnocentric) and ‘entirely inappropriate for the ancient Mediterranean world’, because it does not ‘present the modern, Western reader with information about reality as the “natives” knew and experienced it’.⁷¹ This view departs from the Western medicocentric construction of such phenomena as merely hallucinations and pathological delusions⁷²—a position no longer tenable in the world of historical consciousness. Unfortunately, Pilch’s own suggestion that they were experiences of alternate reality is ethnocentric in a reverse sense, as he qualifies the above argument in the

⁶⁵ See, for example, Crossley, ‘Against the Plausibility of the Empty Tomb Story’, pp. 174–75; Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, pp. 270–85.

⁶⁶ Goulder, ‘The Baseless Fabric of a Vision’, p. 54.

⁶⁷ Stephen T. Davis, “Seeing” the Risen Jesus’, in S.T. Davis et al. (eds.), *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 126–47 (127).

⁶⁸ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 686.

⁶⁹ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 690.

⁷⁰ John J. Pilch, ‘Appearances of the Risen Jesus in Cultural Context: Experiences of Alternate Reality’, *BTB* 28.2 (1998), pp. 52–60 (53).

⁷¹ John J. Pilch, ‘Alternate State of Consciousness in the Synoptics’, in W. Stegemann et al. (eds.), *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), pp. 103–15 (111).

⁷² Stanley Krippner, ‘Dissociation in Many Times and Places’, in S. Krippner and S.M. Powers (eds.), *Broken Images, Broken Selves: Dissociative Narratives in Clinical Practice* (Washington DC: Brunner/Mazel, 1997), p. 6.

following way: ‘These altered states allow a person to glimpse dimensions of alternate reality either not usually available in ordinary consciousness, or in the case of Western cultures deliberately blocked from the total potential of human consciousness.’⁷³ While the vision-as-delusion view considers the ancients to be psychologically challenged (they were fully convinced of the reality of the visions without knowing that they were hallucinations),⁷⁴ this view maintains that Western interpreters are culturally challenged (they are deprived of parts of human consciousness or excluded from sections of reality).

However, if both *reality* and *consciousness* are culturally constructed entities as argued above, neither of them is *alternate* but both are culturally real for the subjects. In other words, visions as one possible state of consciousness are not alternative in nature and do not give access to any alternate reality but are culturally approved states of *normal* consciousness within the framework of the consensus reality of the subjects. Within polyphasic cultures *reality* and *consciousness* are constructed differently from monophasic cultures and although distinctions are still made between visions and hallucinations, it is not the same distinction.

Modern neurological and cognitive research explains why the above could be the case, because brain scans show that visual and visionary perceptions register in exactly the same way in the human brain.⁷⁵ It is culture that teaches some people that visionary, dream and revelatory experiences are or are not to be trusted as knowledge-creating experiences and allowed to contribute to knowledge about the world.

⁷³) Pilch, ‘Appearances of the Risen Jesus in Cultural Context’, p. 53.

⁷⁴) See, for example, Crossley, ‘Against the Plausibility of the Empty Tomb Story’, p. 175.

⁷⁵) Visions probably arise in the same visual-association area of the brain as normal seeing. This we know because electrical stimulation of this area results in various types of visual experiences (see Andrew Newberg et al., *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* [New York: Ballantine, 2001], p. 27). Likewise auditory hallucinations originate in the same areas of the brain where sounds from outside are experienced (see Michael R. Nash, ‘The Truth and the Hype of Hypnosis’, *Scientific American* 285.1 [2001], pp. 37–43 [39]). In other words, unlike imagining a sound, hearing a sound and having an auditory hallucination register in the brain at the same spot and in a similar manner.

Therefore, for subjects in polyphasic cultures such experiences could very well have served as a basis for a firm belief that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead.⁷⁶ These accounts are linked not only to their spectrum of beliefs about the human body and their visionary ways of knowing about it, but also to their spectrum of afterlife beliefs and the way in which such beliefs were parasitic on ASC experiences. It is perhaps no coincidence that ever since the idea of bodily resurrection was expressed in Israelite religious documents in Daniel 12, two components of their cultural system (visionary or revelatory experiences supplemented by a cultural notion about the human body) were in alliance in producing and maintaining the idea.⁷⁷

From a social-scientific perspective it is suggested that afterlife beliefs connected to cultural notions about the human body came together in certain experiences that resulted in the origin of belief in Jesus' resurrection. People in that world did not need historical or scientific evidence that Jesus could have been resurrected, because visionary experiences coupled with the potentialities of the human body were sufficient. In this perspective, there are not some cultural and some *real* elements in the resurrection accounts. Everything belongs together within the same consensus reality. For example, eating fish in a visionary encounter (Jn 21.9-14) therefore constitutes no evidence that it must have been either a *real* breakfast on the beach or that Jesus' body was anything other than a culturally constituted body. And in a world where visionary perceptions are as real as other sensory perceptions, there is no doubt that what is seen, heard and felt in the visions are as real as what is experienced in

⁷⁶ This viewpoint is diametrically opposed to the one found in conservative New Testament circles. Wright (*The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 690) maintains that while visions were reasonably well-known, 'they *could not possibly*, by themselves, have given rise to the belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead'. It is only in the absence of anthropological data on polyphasic cultures and a disregard for cultural-sensitive anthropological studies on the *alien* and *strange* phenomena encountered in the anthropological record that such ethnocentric claims can still be maintained.

⁷⁷ Alan F. Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), pp. 262-65.

waking consciousness. Therefore, touching the resurrected Jesus provides only evidence of a first-century material body being touched, because the touching takes place either in visionary experiences, or of a body that could appear and disappear, move through closed doors or a sealed tomb. Also, as confirmed by data in the New Testament (see Mt. 27.64; 28.13), an empty tomb is not necessarily evidence of resurrection, because a body could have been stolen or removed. But the experience of a resurrected Jesus is evidence that the tomb must have been empty. If Jesus did appear to so many people and continued a *material bodily existence* (in their sense of the words) after death as reported by the visions, it was obvious to them that the tomb must have been empty. Again, an empty tomb for them was merely a confirmation that the resurrected Jesus had resumed life in a first-century conceptualized material body and not in a body found in a *Grey's Anatomy* handbook.

(3) Culturally constituted data do not necessarily provide evidence for universally valid claims about the world out there. Although people firmly believed that what they experienced was in fact happening in the world out there, a cultural-sensitive approach allows us to place such claims in a comparative perspective. People living in a differently constructed cultural reality need no longer accept such reports as *objective* reality. Just as witches, demons or spirits can be real but not objective, that is also the case here. In this interpretation of the data it is perfectly correct to say that when understood as a cultural reality the angels appeared as physical beings and Jesus indeed rose bodily from the dead as constituted by first-century people. At the same time, when confronted with a claim about events in the world that arguably comes from culturally shaped data and reports, it is necessary to also adopt a dialogical and critical perspective. From such a viewpoint, it was not necessarily an objective event in time and space.

Two answers could thus be given regarding whether Jesus rose bodily from the dead: 'yes' and 'no'. Yes, these were real cultural events and realities; yes, Jesus' resurrection was a genuine cultural experience for his first followers and yes, he was resurrected, as the texts indicate, in a first-century conceptualized material body. Since these people lived by a different logic and consensus reality it was neither mere delusion nor objectively real, but culturally real. In this view, Jesus was not resurrected

in a body of ‘transformed physicality’,⁷⁸ in a ‘glorious body’⁷⁹ or in ‘an immortal, powerful, glorious, Spirit-directed body’⁸⁰ but in a culturally conceptualized body. No, culturally constructed intentional objects and phenomena are not necessarily objectively real. Jesus’ resurrection as a first-century culturally experienced event was in this view not an event in time and space.

Taking the Scholarly Debate beyond the Ethnocentric Dualisms

The social-scientific perspective offers not only an alternative framework for understanding the resurrection accounts but also diagnostic tools for analyzing the scholarly debate. From this perspective the most remarkable feature about this debate is that because ontological monism and the myth of realism’s pervading the current debate, the nuances needed to deal with multiple cultural realities are missing. Just as anthropologists had to revise their picture of the nature of the world, New Testament scholars are challenged to come to grips with multiple cultural realities and divergent rationalities. Therefore, a social-scientific interpretation perceived in this way requires a suspension of the rationalist approach which appropriates the texts as if people were talking about events in our world, about our consensus reality, or even about alternate reality—they were talking about their consensus reality, that is, about what they thought and experienced as real. Three more implications for the current debate may be mentioned:

(1) The ongoing dispute in historical Jesus research as to whether the resurrection accounts should be taken literally (or metaphorically)

⁷⁸ N.T. Wright, ‘The Transforming Reality of the Bodily Resurrection’, in M.J. Borg and N.T. Wright (eds.), *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSan Francisco, 1999), pp. 111–27 (120).

⁷⁹ Gerald O’Collins, *What Are They Saying About the Resurrection?* (New York: Paulist, 1978), p. 49.

⁸⁰ William L. Craig, ‘Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?’ in M.J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (eds.), *Jesus Under Fire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 141–76 (157).

should be abandoned. For example, for Crossan there is a spectrum from 100 per cent literal to 100 per cent metaphorical—which is the case for us and for the ancients.⁸¹ While muddling the debate with the denial that literal should be equated with real, he⁸² nevertheless affirms the notion of a single common reality for literal and metaphorical understandings. While not sure how many ancients took Jesus' resurrection or claims about Caesar's divine status literally or metaphorically,⁸³ he maintains that there is a single spectrum of literal and metaphorical: 'Ancients knew just as well as moderns the distinction between, say, myth and history, fable and parable, or literal and metaphorical language. In the abstract, all was clear, then and now.'⁸⁴ It is no different with Wright,⁸⁵ who maintains that 'they all really did believe that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead'. In this view cultural realities are universally true.

Both the claims that statements about Jesus' resurrection can no longer be taken 'literally' or that they have 'lost their literal meaning',⁸⁶ as well as apologies that the first followers of Jesus all took resurrection language as being literal, concrete and real, have lost their meaning in the world of multiple cultural realities. If the ideas of a *common reality* or a *universal human consciousness* are problematic, it goes without saying that any claim of a *literal* understanding based on such assumptions would become nonsensical. As indicated above, most people or cultures make a distinction between what is *real* and what is *unreal* and consequently would have distinct ideas about what is literal (and metaphorical) because what is literal depends on what is taken as *real*: cultures do make a distinction between literal and metaphorical, but not the same distinction.

⁸¹) John Dominic Crossan, 'Bodily-Resurrection Faith', in Robert B. Stewart (ed.), *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), pp. 171–86 (183).

⁸²) Crossan, 'Bodily-Resurrection Faith', p. 183.

⁸³) Wright and Crossan, 'The Resurrection', p. 29; Crossan, 'Bodily-Resurrection Faith', p. 182.

⁸⁴) Crossan, 'Bodily-Resurrection Faith', p. 180.

⁸⁵) Wright and Crossan, 'The Resurrection', pp. 30–32.

⁸⁶) Lüdemann, *What Really Happened to Jesus*, pp. 134–35.

(2) A social-scientific perspective places world-view back in the center of historical interpretation. Allison concludes his analysis of studies on Jesus' resurrection with the remark that 'people's arguments regarding the origins of Christianity are unavoidably driven by large assumptions about the nature of the world' that did not grow out of the study of the material but come as articles of faith that inform their research from the beginning. Consequently, he maintains, historians cannot say anything definitively about the resurrection, one way or the other. He is, however, mistaken when concluding that such assumptions 'cannot often if ever be the upshot of historical investigation'.⁸⁷

Historical consciousness as a filter in anthropological and historical research forms part of the fundamental assumptions about the nature of the world, and consequently explicitly or implicitly part of every anthropological or historical investigation. Historical investigation does not take place in the absence of world-view but in terms of world-view. The view of the world consisting of many different world-views suggests that world-views are always present in historical interpretation and historiography. The acknowledgement of multiple cultural realities demands a cross-cultural and comparative dialogical process in which differences can be negotiated. A culturally sensitive reading of the New Testament data suggests that visionary encounters were (for them) adequate and sufficient for claiming Jesus' resurrection from the dead—and such a claim can only be made in view of multiple cultural realities.

(3) Finally, a social-scientific interpretation does not embrace 'alternatives to the New Testament report that Jesus was raised from the dead' as maintained by some scholars with regard to critical scholarship.⁸⁸ Social-scientific interpretation claims to be a culturally sensitive reading of the data that, parallel to the ethnocentric readings of modern scholarship, offers an alternative interpretation of the very same texts. In other words, like any other interpretation it is claiming to say what the New Testament reports are about and is not an alternative to those

⁸⁷) Allison, 'Explaining the Resurrection', p. 133.

⁸⁸) Habermas, 'Mapping the Recent Trend', pp. 82–83.

reports. From this point of view it is the current (ethnocentric) scholarly debate which stands in the dock of critical scrutiny: has justice been done to the reports about Jesus' resurrection? While acknowledging the New Testament claims regarding the cultural reality of Jesus' resurrection a whole new debate is waiting to be explored.⁸⁹

⁸⁹) In another publication (see Pieter F. Craffert, 'Did Jesus Rise Bodily from the Dead? Yes and No!' *Religion & Theology*, 15.1-2 [2008], pp. 133-53) the implications of this line of reasoning are applied to both the understanding of Jesus' resurrection in New Testament texts and the subsequent Christian belief in his resurrection. Claims about the (cultural) reality of Jesus' resurrection by his first followers are based on visionary encounters while subsequent generations of believers (also reported about in the New Testament) believed the belief of the resurrection. In both cases people were fully convinced about the reality of Jesus' resurrection but based on different cultural assumptions. These are contrasted with modern scholarly attempts to establish historical or scientific verification for the resurrection but without taking the cultural realities of the subjects into account. Unlike the cultural claims of subjects encountered in the New Testament documents, modern scholarship, as seen in this study, struggles to maintain the resurrection as an event in time and space.