

PAUL AND THE MATERIAL SPIRIT

LIFE TOGETHER • 7/3, 24, 31/2022 • DOUGLAS OLENA

PAUL'S COSMOLOGY

A PHILOSOPHIC VIEW

Paul's training, and the Scriptures

**1 Corinthians 15 — Bodily
Resurrection**

Paul and the Stoics

Physics and Faith



PAUL'S TRAINING AND THE SCRIPTURES

PAUL'S TRAINING

WHAT WERE THE SCRIPTURES TO PAUL?

The Pharisaic tradition in which Paul was trained, as we learned from Lois, was not a literalist tradition, but one that relied heavily on a conversation between proposed interpretations leading to an Orthodox (accepted) tradition within the coterie of traditions within Judaism. Layers of training and tradition providing a constraint on possible interpretations....

Despite differing conclusions between the wide variety of theological schools, their unified interest was in providing a theological context for worship and life in the world by interpreting their history and their present.

PAUL AND THE SCRIPTURES

WHAT CAN WE REASONABLY THINK OF PAUL'S RELATION TO THE SCRIPTURES?

We will attempt to arrive at Paul's orbit around the scriptures, but deny the fixed and calcified posture held by a simplistic reader-response mode as being far too simple to describe reality.

To start, I don't think it an anachronism to assume that the variety of postures toward the Scriptures in the ancient world reflects ordinary human differences that we find today, not that today's particular variety of theological difference is reflective of theirs.

There is a rule of proof in logic that leads to the conclusion that something is true, if, when you propose its opposite a contradiction ensues.

PAUL AND THE SCRIPTURES

WHAT CAN WE REASONABLY THINK OF PAUL'S RELATION TO THE SCRIPTURES?

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is worthless, and so is your faith.

In that case, we are also exposed as false witnesses about God.

For we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead, but He did not raise Him if in fact the dead are not raised.

1 Corinthians 15:12-15

PAUL AND THE SCRIPTURES

WHAT CAN WE REASONABLY THINK OF PAUL'S RELATION TO THE SCRIPTURES?

We can use the same proof by contradiction about the first person witnesses. This takes Paul's logical tool one step back to the question of witness testimony on which his remarks rely.

If witness testimony is unreliable, then nothing the apostles have said is of any value whatsoever, and all the work done in the name of Christ is a sham cooked up by unholy liars and charlatans.

But we don't think this! (Though some, dishonestly do)

THIS BRINGS US TO A HOLY MOMENT

... a moment defined by its unusual transparency between this world and the realms of spirit experienced by all humans in one way or another.

***“HOW FINE IS THE MESH OF
DEATH. YOU CAN ALMOST
SEE THROUGH IT.”***

—JANE HIRSHFIELD

WAKING LIFE THEATRE

A Film by Richard Linklater
Featuring Caveh Zahedi



WHAT DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT CAVEH'S HOLY MOMENT?

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS SEEM RIGHT, WHICH SEEM ODD OR OUT OF PLACE?

THE HOLY MOMENT...

WHAT IS PECULIAR IN CAVEH'S HOLY MOMENT?

Intentionality! Placing ourselves before God in prayer has the same sort of intentionality.

**Secularity, or not limited to "Holy" people, common translatable ground...
(It may be a common enough experience among any people)**

Layers of meaning and intention, behavior and serendipity, a complex matrix that makes up a unique moment.

A Holy Moment is a participatory experience.

THE HOLY MOMENT...

WHAT IS PECULIAR IN CAVEH'S HOLY MOMENT?

Experience is data, and perhaps good-enough data for true eye-witness testimony, irrespective of the intentionality of the individuals in that moment. That is, one can't reject the testimony of people who had a hand in creating the moment, even though the part they played may have affected the outcome of the event.

It is a mistake to take biblical reports as if they were from a God's-eye view.

EXCUSE MY DIGRESSION

WHAT CAN WE REASONABLY THINK OF PAUL'S RELATION TO THE SCRIPTURES?

Paul's interpretative matrix is both wider than the Scriptures culturally and vertically within a set of traditions whose purpose was the preservation of God's intention in creation itself and in the textual tradition.

But as we have often seen, Paul makes no effort to transcribe the Scriptures through his letters. He **uses** the Scriptures to establish his sense about the Gospel.

Paul is doing a new thing with new data and new experiences. It is more than trivially difficult to find a prior tradition of being in God like that of Paul, though there are literary and philosophical traditions one can point to as well as Pharisaical traditions serving as road signs.

PAUL AND THE MATERIAL SPIRIT

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1 CORINTHIANS 15

1 CORINTHIANS 15

HOW ARE WE TO INTERPRET THIS?

In the Old Testament there are very few readings of what happens in the afterlife.

We see the Daniel passage 12:2 “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”

We have Jesus’ story about the rich man and Lazarus, a development on the concept of the grave as being an all-encompassing location. Some say this is an innovation of the inter-testamental period.*

The righteous dead go to a place of comfort, the evil dead to sheol. There is little talk of any resurrected body.

LET'S READ IT...

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-49
VOLUNTEER?



WHAT IS THE PNEUMATIC BODY?

WHAT IS THE PNEUMA IN THIS CASE?

In 1905 we recognized an equivalence, the conservation of matter and energy, a material transformation.

So we have a hint of the kind of universal transformation we find in 1 Corinthians 15, an analogy between the the mortal and immortal, perishable and imperishable, earthly and heavenly.

Within the mortal lies the seed of immortality, but not the fact of it.

Sown in dishonor and raised in glory; Sown in weakness and raised in power.

Natural and spiritual, living and life-giving

1 CORINTHIANS 15

HOW ARE WE TO INTERPRET THIS?

But Paul makes a break from the Scriptural traditions, though they reside in the background. They remain unexplained in his theology. Paul puts a new face on the resurrected body.

Paul gives us a view of the pneumatic body on the example we have of Christ in the Gospels.

Descriptors:

Our resurrection will be like that of Christ's at his second coming; He will destroy death; Seed metaphor: sown a natural body raised a spiritual (pneumatic) body; perishable clothed with imperishable; mortal with immortality.

WHAT IS THE PNEUMATIC BODY?

WHAT IS THE PNEUMA IN THIS CASE?

It is not, as some would say, a non-material entity, even as Jesus pneumatic body was material, though not material as ordinary perishable matter is material.*

But from Aristotle and every ancient society, we have the descriptors of elementary substances such as Earth, Water, Fire, and Air, (and for the Chinese, Wood,) etc. what Paul would call perishable substances, or in nineteenth-century parlance, material.

But even those, as we know well enough today, are not composed of material such as the ancients thought. There is no such thing as matter, strictly speaking, except as a description of a certain level of experience. They are composed, as is all ordinary stuff, of fields and forces in a matrix of information.

*THEY KNEW NOTHING ABOUT THE CONSERVATION OF MATTER AND ENERGY. THAT IS A MODERN DISCOVERY FROM 1905 WITH EINSTEIN.

WHAT IS THE PNEUMATIC BODY?

WHAT IS THE PNEUMA IN THIS CASE?

We have lots of examples in Scripture of bodies that are not flesh and blood, and lots of in-between creatures.

Angels and demons, pre-incarnate versions of Christ who came to Abraham and the prophets, etc.

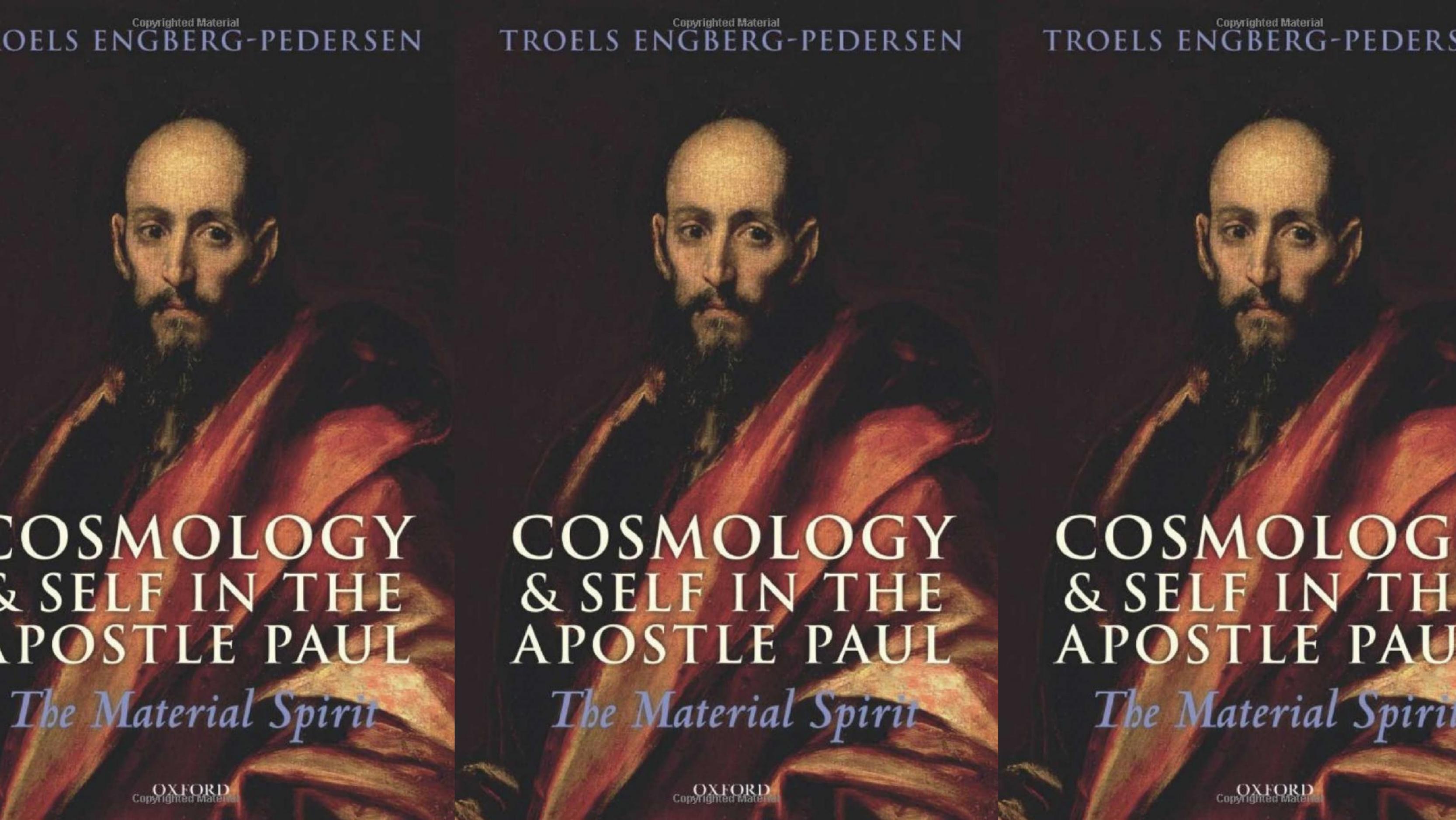
Why, must we be frightened of a physical manifestation that is not flesh and blood, since flesh and blood is not itself based in material substances?

STOIC IDEAS

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A classical portrait of the Apostle Paul, depicted with a full, dark beard and balding head, wearing a red and gold robe. The background is dark and textured.

COSMOLOGY
& SELF IN THE
APOSTLE PAUL

The Material Spirit

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STOIC IDEAS

WHERE DID PAUL GET HIS IDEAS ABOUT THE PNEUMATIC BODY?

It is difficult to give anything like a definitive version of Stoicism because of lack of documentation, but Troels Engberg-Pedersen gives us some clues.*

The cosmology of Paul's day in Stoic theory described the heavenly bodies as Pneumatic bodies, the original source of which is *everlasting fire*, the *light of reason*. In this they're not far off from some interesting modern cosmology.

Everlasting fire is the source of the Sun and all the other heavenly and earthly bodies. The heavenly bodies are made up of pneuma, spirit, the earthly bodies, matter. But that spirit (pneuma) is also, like Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians 15, physical in a Stoic estimation.

CLARIFICATION ON THE USE OF WORDS

TO AVOID EQUIVOCATION

Matter, following 19th century physics is what we commonly refer to as physical things. Stars, moons, tables and planets, living bodies are matter or material at the level of ordinary human consciousness.

By spirit in biblical terms we mean non-material in the 19th century definition, but we must also includes pneumatic bodies in Paul's sense of understanding the resurrected Christ. There is no equivocation in stating that pneumatic bodies are also physical, but not in the sense of planets and tables, something more, at a higher or different level of being.

CLARIFICATION ON THE USE OF WORDS

TO AVOID EQUIVOCATION

Physics in principle should apply to anything found in the universe, the creation, including pneumatic bodies and material bodies even though physics is incapable at this time of managing to encapsulate all of reality outside of God himself. We also don't know how to make the distinction in our theories between God and the universe. And we can't comprehend much in the way of physics either.

CLOSER TO TRUTH THEATRE

With Robert Lawrence Kuhn

What is the Theory of Everything?

Featuring Leonard Susskind

<https://youtu.be/fKHMxvnaeSg>

STOIC IDEAS

WHERE DID PAUL GET HIS IDEAS ABOUT THE PNEUMATIC BODY?

v. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies...

We know now, that bodies in space are all material bodies like those of the Earth, but the idea of spiritual (pneumatic) bodies is nonetheless of interest, especially because records of Christ's resurrected body draw our attention to some of its unique properties. (I cannot fathom anything like a comprehension of pneumatic bodies.)

The Stoics were mistaken about bodies in space, but they had the idea that every physical thing, whether material on earth or pneumatic in the heavens, or for Paul pneumatic resurrected bodies, had its origin in reason, something in principle accessible to physics, but not in any sense that we can currently comprehend.

CHRIST ENFLESHED

MIRACLES TRANSCEND MATERIAL LAWS OF NATURE

We don't need to say that miracles break the laws of nature. That would imply inconsistency between God and his creation.

But Jesus clearly had the power in the Spirit to bypass fleshly limitations, implying also that in the Spirit we do as well. "If you have faith..."

Translocation, resurrection, healing, transfiguration, transmutation, food production/multiplication, etc.

These things imply both that Jesus had access through the Spirit to tools that are not available to natural persons, and that in Christ we do as well.

CHRIST RESURRECTED

VARIETY OF PROOFS OF HIS RESURRECTION TO MANY PEOPLE

We have the biblical record of Jesus in resurrected physical form, the “first fruits” of God’s plan of salvation.

Before Mary and women at the tomb (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:10...; Matt 28:10-12), to Peter (Luke 24:34), to the disciples later that day (Luke 24:36...; John 20:19...), on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13...), eight days later Jesus appears to Thomas and the other disciples (John 20:26...), by the Sea of Tiberias (John 21), a variety of times between the resurrection and 40 days later at the ascension (Acts 1).

Though not a complete list, this is sufficient to note that he proved his resurrection and *pneumatic* physical life before he left us with the Spirit on Pentecost.

STOIC IDEAS

WAS PAUL ON TO SOMETHING?

The moderns have suggested a variety of ways in which we can comprehend aspects of reality consistent with the Stoic view, and Paul's reading of that.

Some have suggested that the universe is made up of *information* (Seth Lloyd). Others have suggested that our universe is a *hologram* a la Star Trek's Holodeck (Brian Greene, et al).

Both of these views have a non-material → material connection. That is, what we perceive as material comes from something that is not material.

In the Scriptures, the word of God, the Logos, created the universe. This is an instance of an explanation where the material universe comes from something that is not material in our sense, words or language, in the bare sense, information.

LET'S TALK ABOUT PHYSICS

WHAT ABOUT PHYSICS?

WHAT IN THE REAL WORLD CAN BE DESCRIBED BY PHYSICS?

First, any description of physics needs to be seen as a perspective.

Perspectives, like that of chemistry, do not contradict biology. Each has something to say about its own level, but neither can be the explainer of the other. Biology relies on chemistry but not the other way around. Yet biology has an effect on chemistry. It organizes chemistry from the top down.

Understanding the connections between levels of description is still the topic of major debate and the frontier of scientific discovery.

WHAT ABOUT PHYSICS?

WHAT IN THE REAL WORLD CAN BE DESCRIBED BY PHYSICS?

Each feature of the real world is included in what we roughly call physics, those things which can be described in terms of the laws of nature. Let's not be parochial. We must, if Paul's intuition and understanding in 1 Corinthians 15 are substantial, consider pneumatic or spiritual beings as having bodies, at least some of the time, and may in principle be available as objects of study. Hence "physical" or, part of physics.

Some have suggested that all of the universe with its wide range of phenomena are "physical" in this manner.

What are some phenomena that have been considered by physicists as outside of physics?

WHAT ABOUT PHYSICS?

WHAT IN THE REAL WORLD CAN BE DESCRIBED BY PHYSICS?

Second, the material/spiritual divide as found in Plato and 19th century physics is a red herring, a cul de sac if we are to interpret the accounts of the risen Christ as substantially physical.

Almost every modern critique of spirituality comes as a critique of non-material being. But if pneumatic being is physical, that assessment is incorrect.

The delineation between what is seen and what is invisible is not so straightforward today. The “spooky action at a distance” (Einstein rejected) is not so easily eliminated from discussion today as it was even a generation ago.

WHAT ABOUT PHYSICS?

OUR DILEMMA

This leaves us with a problem.

If pneumatological being is not a contradiction to material being, then our physics needs to be expanded to include it.

The modern shakeups in physics, philosophy, psychology, etc. mark the beginnings of explorations into phenomena that have up till now only qualified as “religious”, or “spiritual”, and “metaphysics”.

WHAT IS THE END OF THIS EXPLORATION?

**WILL WE FIND GOD AT THE END OF IT, OR MORE OF THE
MYSTERY WE HAVE BEEN CONFRONTED WITH FROM THE
VERY BEGINNING?**

WHAT PART DOES FAITH PLAY IN THIS MYSTERY?

**WHAT SHOULD OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WORD OF
GOD, AND GOD HIMSELF BE?**