

# Review of: "After-Death Communications and the Resurrection of Jesus: An Engagement with Ken Vincent and Gary Habermas"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Smith makes a convincing argument that the apostles' post-resurrection visions were of the bereavement type, attested in the parapsychological/psychological literature, thereby refuting what he calls the "transcendentalist" commitments of Habermas, Vincent, and Wiebe (not mentioned in the title). In short, it is a materialist argument against idealism, philosophically speaking. Such reductionism, however, is not fully explained or justified; visions of Jesus turn out to be merely psychological without further explication of how such a conclusion may be theologically important, aside from the obvious deflation of traditional interpretations.

Smith mentions Craffert's "monophasic" terminology but does not provide enough context from Craffert's work and distinctions between monophasic and polyphasic cultures. More engagement with Craffert would help the writer avoid two missteps. First, the author wants to maintain a sharp distinction between subjective and objective reality and then retcon the distinction back onto the apostles' experience. Such a move is anachronistic and somewhat colonizing. Secondly, the author suggests that later Docetic and Gnostic issues pressed the Gospels toward a more physicalist position, leading to a privileging of the Pauline material for his argument. Again, I find it doubtful that such a radical shift as one from a polyphasic culture to a monophasic one would occur within a few decades-- especially when Hellenistic culture was just as polyphasic as Judean.

The author would do well to look at more recent dating of Mark-- especially in terms of its oral performance prior to its written form. See Boomershine 2015 and 2022 as well as Iverson 2021. Performance theory undercuts the above "move to physicalist" argument due to later Christological issues argument.

The author would do well to consider the kenotic hymn in Phil. 2 for further 1st century language about the nature of the Christ-event (and its seeming separation from resurrection/post-resurrection appearances).

I think the author would also do well to sidestep the "Gospels are late and therefore largely irrelevant" assumption and look more closely at 1) the appearance of angels, 2) the Emmaus Road 3) the appearance to the women and 4) Jesus' appearance on the beach as well as Paul's own testimony that over 500 people also saw Jesus.

It seems to me that the physicalist depictions of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances are more in-line with a retrenched Jewish, 2nd Temple understanding of the afterlife (of the Pharisaical kind) than some late 2nd/3rd century revisionism.

The author may also want to explore other extant apocryphal texts such as the Acts of Thomas for how other Christian communities thought of Jesus' ongoing appearances (e.g., in the Acts, Jesus sells his brother, Thomas Judas, into slavery-- a very physical transaction). Although perhaps dated later than the other material, one could hardly say that they are trying to be orthodox in terms of Gnostic/Docetic heresies (see Stang 2016).

It is also a bit odd to evoke psychical research that was undertaken largely by immaterialists such as James to support a materialist reading of the appearances, viz that Jesus' appearances are largely reducible to brain processes. James and Myers inferred from their evidence the opposite of what Smith does here.

The author might want to see, too, how process theologians and other theologians handle worldview issues in regard to paranormal events. See James K.A. Smith, "Is the Universe Open for Surprise?" *Zygon*, 2008, John Cobb *Jesus' Abba* (2016) *et passim*, and David Ray Griffin, *Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Spirituality* (1997). Ultimately, I don't think the argument Smith makes is strong enough without addressing ontological issues.