

The Cosmology of the Raising of Lazarus (John 11–12)

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Abstract:

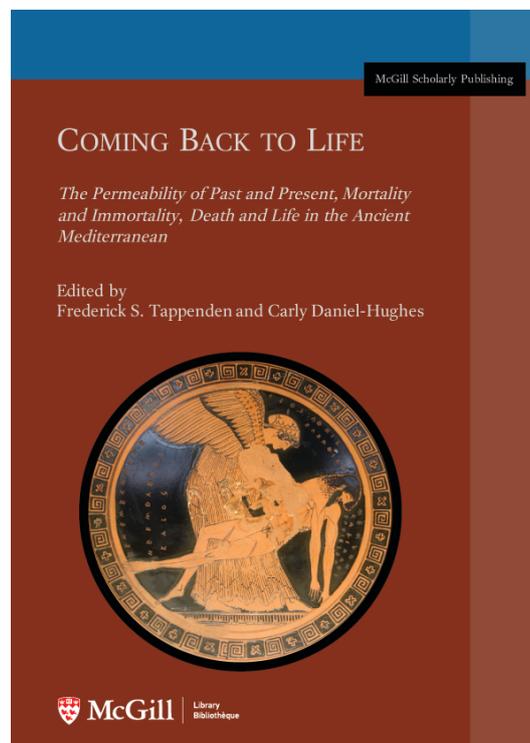
The aim of this essay is to bring out the function of chapters 11–12 within the overall structure of the Fourth Gospel in order to elucidate the precise manner in which this text imagines the “porosity” between death and life, of which Jesus’ raising of Lazarus is a striking example. The theses will be (i) that the two chapters are so closely connected in strictly literary terms that they constitute a single, coherent tract within the Gospel, (ii) that they have a single theme, which is that the raising of Lazarus points directly forward to, and is to be understood and explained in the same way as, not only Jesus’ own resurrection but also that of all Christ believers, (iii) that the text half-presupposes and half-articulates a cosmological framework along the lines to be found in contemporary Stoicism that explains the very possibility of raising and resurrection and hence the apparent “porosity” of death and life that the text is pointedly addressing, and finally (iv) that these ideas are brought together in a claim that constitutes a climax of the whole Book of Signs: that in order to “believe in Jesus” in the full, proper way one must understand him not just as somebody who has come from God, but also as somebody who will now literally return to God when he is resurrected from death. That—and only that—belief will lead to the resurrection of believers, too. In arguing for these theses, the essay addresses the conceptual relationship between “believing” (πιστεύειν), “hearing” (ἀκούειν), “speech” or “words” (ῥήματα), “reasoning” (λόγος) and “spirit” (πνεῦμα) in John, using a Stoic, philosophical framework for elucidating the inner connection between these notions in John. Here the essay argues that there is an intrinsic connection in both John and Stoicism between matters of understanding (cognition, epistemology) and matters of event (fact, ontology). This is the reason why the overarching theme of the text is not just the connection between the events of the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus and believers (thesis [ii] above), but also the understanding of that connection (thesis [iv] above). While the essay aims to lay bare an underlying cosmological framework that accounts for the apparent “porosity” of death and life, it also emphasizes that this possibility of “radical transformation” transcends the normal framework of human life, both in John and in Stoicism. Here the role of πνεῦμα in both John and Stoicism is emphasized. A possible difference remains. In John more than in Stoicism, while the “porosity”—the very possibility of transcending death—is there, its actualization appears to require direct divine intervention from above.

Bibliography:

Engberg-Pedersen, Troels. 2017. “The Cosmology of the Raising of Lazarus (John 11–12).” Pages 153–179 in *Coming Back to Life: The Permeability of Past and Present, Mortality and Immortality, Death and Life in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Edited by Frederick S. Tappenden and Carly Daniel-Hughes, with the assistance of Bradley N. Rice. Montreal, QC: McGill University Library. Online: <http://comingbacktolife.mcgill.ca>.

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I. METHOD AND QUESTIONS

The aim of this essay is to bring out the function of chapters 11–12 within the overall structure of the Fourth Gospel in order to elucidate the precise manner in which this text imagines the “porosity” between death and life, of which Jesus’s raising of Lazarus is a striking example. With such an agenda and relatively few pages at our disposal, we need to be brisk in presenting and arguing for the essential claims. The method of what follows has two sides to it, the practice of which calls for the reader’s anterior appreciation. There is first a literary approach which considers the text from the usual perspective of agents, time, place and events and their connections or the opposite.¹ Here the question is whether John chapters 11–12 should be taken to form a single unit or not. And the answer is that they should. Then there is a philosophical approach which delves below the narrative level to a more conceptual level and asks for broader explanations for the actions and events described at the narrative level. Here the question is whether—corresponding to the supposed unity at the literary level—there is a unifying theme or point of substance that the text is intended to bring across to its readers. And the answer is that there is. It is a premise of this essay that John is consciously working on both the literary and the philosophical level and that the collocation of narrative elements is meant to point to the broader philosophical motifs that together articulate the point of the text.

¹ The classical account of John’s various techniques in this field is Culpepper 1983.

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The reader should be warned, however. What I offer below is an intense, that is, detailed, analysis of various sections in John 11–12 that may easily lead the reader off track. It is necessary to proceed in this manner in order to bring out the precise way in which certain texts in chapter 12, not least, the concluding section of [12:44–50](#), serve to explain in philosophical and cosmological terms how the story of the raising of Lazarus that is narrated in chapter 11 is to be understood. If one is after exactly how the “porosity” of life and death shown in the Lazarus story should be understood, then one has to bring in chapter 12 (so I argue and aim to show against most other interpreters).

The reader should also be warned that the reading I am offering here reflects a much broader understanding of the Fourth Gospel that employs Stoic cosmology and epistemology as a heuristic reading lens.² Essential features of this reading that are directly relevant to understanding the raising of Lazarus are these:

(i) The *λόγος* of the [Prologue](#) and the *πνεῦμα* of John the Baptist’s witness about Jesus’s baptism ([1:32–34](#)) are two sides of the same phenomenon (one cognitive and the other physically active) that is present in Jesus during his lifetime, governing both what he says and what he does, including his raising of Lazarus from death to life.

(ii) By contrast, neither the *πνεῦμα* nor the full *λόγος* is present among any of Jesus’s followers during his lifetime, and this explains why although they may well come to “believe in” him in some less than fully adequate form, they will never during his lifetime obtain a full understanding of who he was and is. An example of this is Martha in the Lazarus story.

² I develop this approach in a forthcoming book, provisionally entitled *John and Philosophy: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). The practice of employing Stoicism to throw light on New Testament texts has a certain pedigree by now (not to speak of all its predecessors, e.g., Bultmann 1910). See in general Rasimus, Engberg-Pedersen, and Dunderberg 2010 and Thorsteinsson 2010. For Paul, see Engberg-Pedersen 2000, 2010, and—behind it all—the collected works of Abraham J. Malherbe (2014). For John in particular, see Buch-Hansen 2010.

(iii) However, the *πνεῦμα* and the full *λόγος* do become available to Jesus's followers after his death and resurrection, itself engineered by the *πνεῦμα*. Then Jesus both blows the *πνεῦμα* into the disciples ([20:22](#)) and sends it to them in the form of the 'Paraclete' (cf. chapters 13–16). From then on they will both fully understand who Jesus is and will also themselves become able to “enter the kingdom of God” ([3:5](#)), that is, be resurrected into eternal life in heaven, and again as engineered by the *πνεῦμα* ([3:8](#)). It is this final event that is prefigured—even prematurely so: already during Jesus's lifetime—in the raising of Lazarus.

In all this it is the unity of the cognitive side (the *λόγος*) and the concretely physical side (the *πνεῦμα*) as reflected in Jesus's sayings and doings during his lifetime and even after his death and resurrection (chapter 20) that explains the “porosity” between death and life that is narratively shown in the story of Lazarus. For this unity suggests that the overall cosmological framework within which John sees the story of Lazarus (and indeed the whole story of Jesus Christ) is one that may be further elucidated in terms of Stoicism. And then one may actually come to see how the “porosity” of life and death may be understood in the case of Lazarus.

II. ARGUMENTS FOR LITERARY UNITY

The first argument for literary unity of the two chapters focuses on the roles of Mary, Martha, Lazarus, the high priests and Pharisees and the crowd in 11:1–12:19.³ (i) The three major narrative figures

³ Few scholars see John 11–12 as a single unit. Dodd (1953) took [chapter 11](#) as a “sixth episode” called “The victory of Life over Death” (1953, 363) and [12:1–36](#) as a “seventh episode” called “Life through Death. The Meaning of the Cross” (1953, 368), while [12:37–50](#) constitutes an “Epilogue to the Book of Signs” (1953, 379). Barrett (1978) just divided the two chapters up into six separate sections ([11:1–44](#); [11:45–54](#); [11:55–12:11](#); [12:12–19](#); [12:20–36](#); [12:37–50](#)). Theobald (2009) found three sections in them ([10:40–11:54](#); [11:55–12:36](#); [12:37–50](#)). Brown (1966–1970) is better. He argues (1966–1970, 1:427–30) for seeing the two chapters as “an editorial addition to the original gospel outline” (1966–1970, 1:414), a claim that at least holds them together. Still, his “Part Four” (“Jesus Moves Toward the Hour of Death and Glory”) only comprises

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of chapter 11, Mary, Martha and Lazarus, are of course not forgotten in chapter 12. On the contrary, their roles are very distinctly carried over into that chapter when the occasion on which Jesus is anointed ([12:3-8](#)) is said to be a dinner party given by the three relatives at Bethany ([12:1-2](#)). Moreover, the literary equality of the two sisters that is strikingly spelled out in [11:21](#) (Martha: “if you had been here, my brother would not have died,” NRSV) and [11:32](#) (Mary: “if you had been here, my brother would not have died,” NRSV) is maintained by the anointing in [12:3-8](#): whereas Martha had a major role to play in chapter 11 in dialogues with Jesus ([11:20-28](#), [39-40](#)), Mary makes up for that in chapter 12 ([12:3-8](#)).⁴

(ii) The role of Jesus’s raising of Lazarus as triggering the decision of the high priests and Pharisees to have him killed ([11:45-46](#) plus [11:47-53](#), [57](#)) is spelled out even more clearly in chapter 12 when it is connected with their decision to put Lazarus to death as well, and for the same reason ([12:9-11](#)).

(iii) The role of the crowd of “the Jews” behind the decision of the high priests and the Pharisees ([11:45-46](#); [12:9-11](#)) is spelled out further in chapter 12 when it is explicitly connected ([12:12](#), [17-19](#)) with the traditional motif of Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem ([12:13-15](#)).

[11:1-12:36](#), while [12:37-50](#) constitutes a wholly independent “Conclusion to the Book of Signs” (1966–70, 1:xii), with [12:37-43](#) being “An Evaluation of Jesus’s Ministry to His Own People” and [12:44-50](#) “An *Unattached* Discourse of Jesus Used as a Summary Proclamation” (1966–70, 1:xii, my italics). Better, though with little explicit argument, is Dietzfelbinger (2004, 7–8), who divides the text up a bit like Barrett ([11:1-54](#); [11:55-12:11](#); [12:12-19](#); [12:20-36](#); [12:37-43](#); [12:44-50](#)), but at least brings the whole text together under the title “Teil C: Der Weg zur Passion” (2004, 7). Lincoln (2005) both sees the whole of chapters 11–12 as a “Conclusion: move toward the hour of death and glory” (2005, 4, cf. 9) and also includes [12:36b-50](#) as the last subsection, called “Summary statement about the response to Jesus’s signs and words” (2005, 5, cf. 9). But he also argues for seeing [12:16b-50](#)—relatively independently, that is—as corresponding with [1:19-51](#) (2005, 7).

⁴ This was well seen by Lincoln (2005, 316–17) when he asks whether the Lazarus episode goes as far as [12:19](#) (which he ends up denying, settling instead for [11:53](#)).

In fact, it is highly noteworthy how skillfully John has woven the two traditional motifs of the anointing ([12:3–8](#)) and the entry ([12:13–15](#)) into a knot of narrative threads that hold chapters 11 and 12 tightly together.⁵

(iv) With [12:20](#) begins a new stage of the story line.⁶ But it is closely connected with what precedes. The mention in [12:20](#) of “some Greeks” who were “among those who went up” (NRSV) to Jerusalem refers back both to [12:19](#) (“Look, the world [*ὁ κόσμος*] has gone after him!”, NRSV) and also to [11:55](#) (“many went up . . . to Jerusalem,” NRSV). Much more importantly, the motif of Jesus’s “glorification”—meaning his death on the cross *and* subsequent resurrection ([12:32–33](#))—is now brought in with full force, first when Jesus declares that “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” ([12:23](#) NRSV), and secondly when a voice from heaven responds to Jesus’s prayer that God should now glorify his own name: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” ([12:28](#) NRSV). But the same motif had already been voiced at [11:4](#) when Jesus first heard of Lazarus’s illness and then declared: “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (NRSV). Even more importantly, in [12:35–36](#) and [12:46](#) Jesus explicitly identifies himself with the “light” (*φῶς*) that has come into the world. But that idea was already adumbrated (if only more implicitly) in [11:9–10](#). In this way, not only is chapter 11 tied closely together with everything in chapter 12 up until [12:19](#), but the whole section of [12:20–50](#) belongs within the same literary unit.⁷

⁵ This observation may be extended to include also the traditional motif rehearsed in [12:37–40](#) of the lack of understanding of Jesus as having been generated by God.

⁶ Brown (1966–1970, 1:469) is quite right in stating this: “From the viewpoint of thought sequence, the scene [of [12:20–36](#)] is an ideal conclusion to chs. xi–xii.” As we shall see, however, he should have included [12:37–50](#) in this.

⁷ The point about the reference to *φῶς* across the supposed divide between [12:36](#) and [12:37–50](#) is particularly important. Bultmann (1941, 260–72) at least saw the connection when he excised both [12:44–50](#) and [12:34–36](#) from their

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We should conclude that there are very good reasons for reading John 11–12 as a single literary unit. As we shall see, it makes good sense *also* to take [12:37–50](#) to conclude the whole of the Book of Signs.⁸ But the primary task should be to see whether, and if so how, the various narrative elements of the literary unit together point to a unity of the two chapters also at the conceptual level.

III. A UNITY OF THEME

Literary unity is one thing; thematic unity is something else. Here the focus should be on Martha’s dialogue with Jesus in chapter 11 ([11:20–27](#), [39–40](#)) and on the latter half of chapter 12 ([12:20–50](#)).

The overall theme is the proper understanding (cognition) of who and what Jesus is as shown by two actual events (fact): the raising from death to life of Lazarus and Jesus’s own death and resurrection into eternal life. And the idea behind John’s making this the theme is that if—and only if—Jesus’s *followers* have that understanding (cognition), will they themselves obtain resurrection into eternal life (fact). In this—admittedly, quite complex—single theme, there is a tight interconnection between understanding (epistemology) and event (cosmology). As already noted, this reflects an intimate connection in John—reflecting the same in Stoicism—between *λόγος* and *πνεῦμα*.

The theme itself and its implication for believers are spelled out with all clarity in Jesus’s dialogue with Martha when during their discussion of Lazarus’s fate Jesus declares this ([11:25–26](#)): “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even though he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (my translation). In other words, the fates of Lazarus, Jesus himself and all believers are the very same: overcoming death.

present position and placed them together with material from chapter 8 ([8:12](#) and [8:21–29](#)) as remnants from an earlier “Lichtrede” (“Speech of Light”). However, 75 years later Bultmann’s daring in his handling of the transmitted text seems altogether baffling.

⁸ Cf. Dodd (1953), Brown (1966–1970), and Lincoln (2005) as quoted above in n. 3.

At the same time, the two verses also show the intimate connection that we need somehow to explain between “believing in Jesus” (cognition), and hence understanding who and what Jesus is, and oneself overcoming death (fact). We shall see that the two verses constitute the core of John 11–12 as a whole.⁹

Jesus immediately continues: “Do you believe this?” (11:26 NRSV), and Martha obligingly replies: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (11:27 NRSV). However, as the later exchange between Martha and Jesus shows (11:39–40), the point of 11:25–27 is that Martha precisely does *not* understand what Jesus has just told her.¹⁰ This theme of not fully understanding is then spelled out in 12:20–50.

⁹ I take the meaning of the two verses in the most literal sense, precisely as exemplified in the Lazarus story: “even though he dies,” namely, literally and concretely, he “will live,” again literally and concretely (though presumably in heaven). Similarly, “everyone who lives,” namely, at present and quite literally and concretely, “will never die”; that is, *if* he dies—literally and concretely—then he will immediately come to live again—literally and concretely—though presumably again in heaven. For a characteristic German reading of the two verses that (in the wake of Bultmann) has John radically reinterpret in a present-oriented direction what is understood as “the whole future-oriented, dramatic eschatology” of “pharisaic-rabbinic expectations of the end time,” see Theobald 2009, 734–36, esp. 734. Theobald himself cites another German, Jörg Frey (1997–1999, 3:452), for “inserting into the text the notion of a future *bodily* resurrection of believers” (2009, 735, his italics). To my mind, the identity of meaning in ζήσεται in 11:25 and ζῶν in 11:26 and the clarity and simplicity of such a reading point decidedly in Frey’s favour. By contrast, the exegeses of Brown (1966–1970, 1:425) and Lincoln (2005, 324) seem marred by the fact that they operate with something called “spiritual life” (which is not explained). The general understanding of eschatology in John is treated exhaustively—and to my mind wholly convincingly—in Frey 1997–1999. Frey’s primary target was the whole tradition going back to Bultmann.

¹⁰ The reading of 11:27 is a famous *crux interpretum*. Bultmann (1941, 308) found it “impossible to understand how many exegetes could say that Martha did not understand Jesus correctly.” Theobald (2009, 736) defends Bultmann’s reading by the wholly apposite reference to 20:31, where the first two of Martha’s epithets are again mentioned as constituting the proper content of πιστεύειν. He does not, however, note that 20:31 adds this: “that

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In this section, Jesus partly describes his own upcoming fate of death and resurrection ([12:23](#), [27–33](#)). Like Martha, however, the crowd does not understand: “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can *you* (then) say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who *is* this Son of Man (anyway)?” ([12:34](#) NRSV, with added italics and words in parenthesis). Here it is quite clearly implied that there are two elements in the crowd’s expectations that are mistaken. They think that if Jesus were the Messiah, then he should “remain forever.” And they do not at all understand Jesus’s talk of the Son of Man’s being lifted up. By implication, if one believes in Jesus in the proper way, one will understand him not just as the Messiah, but as the Messiah who is going to be lifted up (on the cross and into heaven).

The theme of not understanding is spelled out further in [12:37–43](#), which states that in spite of all Jesus’s signs (not least, of course, the greatest one of Lazarus’s revival) “they did not believe in him” ([12:37](#)). Well, many did, even among the authorities, but not enough to confess it ([12:42](#)). The reason given for this ([12:43](#)) is that “they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God” (NRSV). This is of crucial importance since it brings in the notion of “glory” (δόξα), which John has also introduced immediately before when he states that Isaiah had seen Christ’s “glory” ([12:41](#)). What the authorities who “believed in him” ([12:42](#)) should have seen—and already in all Jesus’s signs since they were precisely signs—was Jesus’s “glory,” which was also God’s “glory.” In fact, they should have seen the intimate relationship between Jesus and God to which God himself has just referred when he claimed that he had

through believing you may have *life* in his name” (NRSV). What one must believe is that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God *as* giving (resurrection and) life. *Then* one will also *get* it. Lincoln (2005, 324–25), who also refers to [20:31](#), is on the right track when he notes that it is “striking . . . that, complete as Martha’s Christological confession is, it makes no explicit reference to what Jesus has said about resurrection and life” (2005, 325). His further reflection points in exactly the correct direction, also by invoking Martha’s lack of understanding at [11:39–40](#).

“glorified” his name, namely, in Jesus, and is about to “glorify it again” (12:28). Moreover, this is precisely the “glory” that will become wholly clear when Jesus is “lifted up” and resurrected. Once again we see that what is called for in “believing in Jesus” is believing in him as having a quite special identity which is about to be revealed in his resurrection.

In both 12:34 and 12:37–43, then, the theme is that of either not believing in Jesus at all or believing in him as the Messiah within a more or less traditional Jewish frame of thinking. What the text aims to show is that whether one believes in that way or not will in any case not be enough. Jesus is *more* than that.

This comes out in the whole section when Jesus also describes both those who follow him (for the term, see 12:26) in the proper way (12:24–26, 35–36) and also who and what he himself is (again 12:35–36 and then 12:44–50). His followers must die, for example, by hating their souls (12:25). Then they will keep their souls “for eternal life” (12:25 NRSV) and God will “honour” them (τιμήσειν, 12:26 NRSV), which probably equals “glorify” them (δοξάζειν). Also, while they have “the light,” they must “walk” accordingly (12:35) and “believe in *the light*” (12:36). Then they will “*become* children of light” (12:36).

It should be immediately clear that this kind of “believing in Jesus” differs quite drastically from the kind of “believing in Jesus” reached—or not reached—by the crowd or the Jewish authorities. It is a cognitive attitude to Jesus which results in people’s obtaining “eternal life”—a notion we should no doubt take completely literally in the way it has just been prefigured by the raising of Lazarus—and in that sense becoming “sons of (the) light,” that is, of Jesus himself. *The whole purpose of the concluding section of the text, 12:44–50, is to spell out what “believing in the properly understood Jesus” (cf. 12:35–36) will then mean.* And the answer is: their own resurrection to eternal life.¹¹

¹¹ Note in this reading how 12:35–36 and 12:44–50 come out as spelling out the “extra” content of “believing in Jesus” *in relation to 12:34 and 12:37–43*, respectively. This is further—and I think quite strong—confirmation that

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IV. LIGHT, REASONING, SPIRIT, AND AFTERLIFE IN STOICISM

[John 12:35–50](#) takes up three crucial concepts from the [Prologue](#): light (φῶς), reasoning (λόγος) and life (ζωή). In addition, as we shall see, it presupposes one more concept—that of spirit (πνεῦμα)—which is also implicitly present in the Prologue ([1:13](#)), but which comes to the fore later in chapter 1 ([1:32–33](#))—and also makes an initially enigmatic appearance in connection with the raising of Lazarus ([11:33](#), cf. [38](#)). To see what is implied in John’s use of these four concepts, we must now make a detour over the way they were connected in Stoic cosmology and epistemology.¹²

Cosmogony and Cosmology

In the Stoic monistic and materialistic cosmology, the whole world is kept together by πνεῦμα, which is an especially fine form of the two uppermost (fire and air) out of four material elements (fire, air, water, earth) that together constitute the world. Πνεῦμα extends throughout the world—in inanimate substances in the form of ἔξις (“tenor”), in plants in the form of φύσις (“physique”) and in animate beings in the form of ψυχή (“soul”)—but is found in its most refined and powerful form in heaven (e.g., in the stars). At the famous Stoic “conflagration,” when the whole world as it were returns into God, the lowest worldly elements are gradually transformed and refined into their upper neighbours and the whole process comes to an end when everything has become πνεῦμα in a single flash of light, which is also God. Out of this flash—variously called αὐγή and φλόξ by the

across various supposed divisions, [12:34–50](#) constitutes a single, coherent text. Just as [12:35–36](#) goes with [12:34](#), so [12:44–50](#) goes with [12:37–43](#). In the latter case we might bring out the inner connection (in the form of an explicit *contrast*) of [12:44–50](#) with [12:37–43](#) by translating the transition at [12:44](#) as “Jesus, however [δὲ, marking the contrast], cried aloud, saying”

¹² The following account is intended to be standard. I will give references where matters may be controversial. An extremely helpful presentation of central texts with brief and lucid discussion is to be found in the relevant parts of Long and Sedley 1983.

Stoics—the world is then created anew, only to undergo the same transformation back into God at a later stage.¹³

Cognition

This materialistic account of the world also has a cognitive side to it. God is not only materially creative: he also knows (in fact, everything). God is knowledge. To the material entity of the *πνεῦμα* corresponds the *λόγος*, which is God’s cognitive reasoning as expressing his knowledge.¹⁴ The reason why one should understand the *λόγος* here as (active) reasoning instead of (passive) knowledge is that the Stoics understood everything in the world in fundamentally dynamic terms. It is all a matter of change and transformation.¹⁵

Human Knowledge

With the *πνεῦμα* as the bearer of God’s *λόγος* in shaping and transforming the world in all its corners, the conceptual duality of *πνεῦμα* and *λόγος* also has a special role to play in relation to human beings. Here the *λόγος*—and a correspondingly powerful, “high-tension” *πνεῦμα*—is what distinguishes human beings from all other beings in the world, apart from God himself.¹⁶ In fact, the

¹³ For *φλόξ* (Cleanthes) and *ἀύγή* (Chrysippus), see Philo in [SVF 2.611](#). For texts and discussion of the cosmology I have summarized, see Long and Sedley 1983, §44 (“Principles”), §45 (“Body”), §46 (“God, fire, cosmic cycle”) and §47 (“Elements, breath, tenor, tension”). For the possible relevance of the Stoic notion of conflagration to early Christianity, see van der Horst 1998.

¹⁴ For the intimate connection of *πνεῦμα* and *λόγος* in Stoicism, see a quotation from Origen in [SVF 2.1051](#): “God’s *λόγος*, which descends to human beings, even the lowest ones, is nothing other than bodily *πνεῦμα*.”

¹⁵ This basic feature is developed very well in Christensen 2012, which remains “the most philosophically sophisticated short introduction [to Stoicism]” (as noted by Anthony Long 1974, 254). Christensen contrasts the dynamic character of the Stoic worldview with the much more static character of the world in Plato and Aristotle. Compare also Long and Sedley (1983, 1:321), who speak of the Stoics’ “dynamic materialism.”

¹⁶ For “high tension” of the *πνεῦμα* in *νοῦς* (“reason”) and *λόγος* (“reasoning”), see Philo in [SVF 2.458–59](#).

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possession of λόγος connects human beings so closely with God that the Stoics operated with an ideal human being—the Sage—who was in the last resort identical with God.¹⁷ He was also as rare as the Bird Phoenix and hence no threat to the universal fallibility of human beings.¹⁸ Still, ordinary human beings were able—from time to time and only partially—to reach an understanding that could be aligned with that of the Sage and God. When that happened, they had knowledge.¹⁹

Speech

Such knowledge was to be found in the “governing part” of the human soul, which the Stoics placed in the heart. It took the form of what they called the “*logos* of the mind” (ἐνδιάθετος λόγος) or thought as opposed to the “*logos* of expression” (προφορικὸς λόγος), which consisted in speech. The Stoics developed a detailed theory about the way in which the λόγος of the mind was materially transported by πνεῦμα from the heart into the throat and was there articulated by the tongue, etc., into intelligible speech.²⁰

Survival After Death

The central role of the πνεῦμα and the Sage in Stoicism also comes out in what they had to say about human survival after death.²¹ Of the human soul they said this: “that is why it is a body (σῶμα) and remains after death (μετὰ τὸν θάνατον ἐπιμένειν). But it is destructible

¹⁷ Compare Christensen 2012, 20: “only God has indubitable knowledge, or perhaps someone structurally identified with God, which will turn out to be the Stoic Sage.” See also Diogenes Laertius and Cicero in [SVF 3.606–07](#).

¹⁸ See Sextus Empiricus in [SVF 3 Diogenes of Babylon 32](#): “since their Sage has not been found until now.”

¹⁹ Importantly in connection with John, the Stoics held that full or genuine “knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) was only to be found in the Sages,” see Sextus Empiricus in [SVF 2.90](#).

²⁰ See [SVF 2.144](#), [836](#), [880](#), and [894](#); also Long and Sedley 1983, §53 (“Soul”).

²¹ For this see, in particular, Hoven 1971; also Long 1982.

(φθαρτή).”²² There is a difference, however, in the length of their survival: “Cleanthes, on his side, (said that) all (souls) remain (ἐπιδιαμένειν) until the conflagration; Chrysippus, by contrast, (said that) only those of the Sages (did so).”²³ Another fragment makes the same point:

(1) They [the Stoics] say that the soul is subject to generation and destruction. When separated from the body, however, it does not perish at once but survives on its own for certain times, the soul of the virtuous up to the dissolution of everything into fire, that of fools only for certain definite times. (2) By the survival of souls they mean that we ourselves survive as souls separated from bodies and, while the souls of non-rational animals perish along with their bodies.²⁴

The difference is probably to be explained by the fact that the souls of ordinary human beings consist of πνεῦμα that is less refined, whereas that of the Sage is so refined that it belongs cosmologically at the level of the stars and will therefore not be transformed until the conflagration.²⁵

What happens at death, then, is that the fine πνεῦμα which makes up the human soul in the living person is detached from the body of flesh and bones, which was held together and made fit for being the body of a human being by another, less refined portion of πνεῦμα.²⁶ In the words of Anthony Long (1982, 53), it rises “balloon-like” from the body that is now left behind as a corpse.

Strange as the theory may seem to us, what we find in Stoicism is a coherent account of the creation and destruction of the world

²² Diogenes Laertius in [SVF 2.774](#). See also [SVF 2.809–22](#).

²³ Diogenes Laertius in [SVF 2.811](#).

²⁴ Eusebius in [SVF 2.809](#), see Long and Sedley 1983, §53W, whose translation I have quoted.

²⁵ Compare Galen in [SVF 2.788](#), who says that “the wisest soul is a dry flash (αὐγὴ ξηρή),” which is appropriate since “the stars (ἀστέρας) are flashy (αὐγοειδεῖς) and, being dry (ξηρούς), have the sharpest understanding.”

²⁶ For this interpretation, which operates with two types of ‘soul’ in the living human being, see, in particular, Long 1982.

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pivoting around God: God creates the world and the world returns to God. Within this cosmological—and indeed, cosmogonic—picture of the world, the Stoics also situated human beings by positing that they in principle had a chance to enter into the return to God, a chance that would however only be fulfilled by the proverbial Sage, who would survive after death until the conflagration.²⁷ The key to all this lies in the material *πνεῦμα*, which also had a cognitive side to it.

V. THE UNITY OF THEME CONTINUED

If we read [John 12:35–36](#) and [44–50](#) in the light of various features of this Stoic theory—and also, as we shall see, in the light of John’s [Prologue](#) and chapter 1 as a whole—what we get is the following.

Jesus, so he claims, is “the light” ([12:46](#) and [35–36](#)). He is also, as we know from the Prologue, the *λόγος* that was with God at the creation ([1:1](#)). In that *λόγος* was “life,” “and the life was the light of human beings” ([1:4](#)). Elsewhere, I have argued that Jesus came to be these things when—as witnessed by John the Baptist—the fourth relevant entity, the *πνεῦμα*, descended upon him from heaven and remained there (Engberg-Pedersen 2012; for more detail, see also Engberg-Pedersen forthcoming). Quite literally and cosmologically, the physical *πνεῦμα* that came from God’s heavenly, life-spending light and was a carrier of God’s *λόγος* came to be present at a single place in the world: in Jesus of Nazareth. That is how the *λόγος* “became flesh” ([1:14](#)). From then on, Jesus—and he alone until the end of the Gospel when he blows it into his disciples ([20:22](#))—carried around in him the *πνεῦμα*, which enabled him to do and say what he did.

Seen in this light, Jesus’s injunction in [12:36](#)—“While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may *become children of light*” (NRSV)—obtains its full meaning. The hearers must believe in him not just as what they have (half-)understood him at [12:34](#) to claim to be: the Messiah. Instead, they must understand him to be

²⁷ In a way, *everything* in the world returns to God. Only in the Sage, however, will the ascent be perfect.

God's own, heavenly, life-spending light in the full cosmological sense of this.²⁸ Then they will themselves become "sons of that light." What this alludes to is their own resurrection. They only have "the light" among themselves for a little while (12:35). Then Jesus himself (12:32) as the Son of Man (12:34) will be "lifted up" (12:32, 34), that is, both crucified and resurrected. If they believe in that light (cognition), then they will also themselves be resurrected (fact).

This is one of the places where one should begin to see the inner unity of theme of chapters 11–12 taken together: from the raising of Lazarus by Jesus, who is himself "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), via Jesus's own death and resurrection, which is prefigured by the raising of Lazarus, to that of those who believe *fully* in him: "the one who believes in me, even though he dies, will live" (11:25). But exactly how are these events understood to take place—the raising, the resurrection, the belief and the consequent resurrection of believers? And how are they connected?

Let us consider the raising of Lazarus. When Jesus saw Mary and the Jews weeping, "he snorted in (his) spirit and stirred (or shook?) himself" (ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτόν, 11:33). This sounds far more physical than what one finds, for instance, in the rendering of a distinguished Johannine scholar, Raymond Brown (1966–1970, 1:421): "he shuddered, moved with the deepest emotions."²⁹ Later when he came to the tomb itself, Jesus "again

²⁸ Note that cosmology was introduced in John already at 1:3: "All things *came into being* through it (the λόγος), and without it not one thing *came into being*." (NRSV with a repeated change of "him" to "it" and parenthesis added).

²⁹ Similarly, Theobald (2009, 738), in a good discussion, argues for finding a reference to an *inner* agitation, both in ἐμβριμᾶσθαι and in ταρασσεῖν ἑαυτόν. This might be supported, in the case of ἐμβριμᾶσθαι, by the addition in 11:38 of ἐν ἑαυτῷ ("in himself"). The reference for ταρασσεῖν to four other places in John where the same term is used (12:27; 13:21; 14:1, 27) is of little help, however, since there the verb appears in middle and passive forms and in two cases with an explicit reference to the "heart." By contrast, in 11:33 Jesus "agitates himself." Bultmann (1941, 310 n. 4) took this—rightly, I think—to refer to a "pneumatic agitation" ("pneumatische Erregung") and emphasized

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snorted in himself” (ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ, [11:38](#)). He then tells people to remove the stone in front of the tomb ([11:38–39](#)) and after a brief conversation with Martha that shows her utter lack of understanding ([11:39–40](#)), when the stone has been removed ([11:41](#)), Jesus does something very odd: “Jesus looked upwards and said, ‘Father, I thank you for *having heard* me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me” ([11:41–42](#)). Then he proceeds to “cry out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’” ([11:43](#))—and so he did ([11:44](#)).

When is Lazarus “raised,” that is, brought back from death to life? And how did it happen? The clear implication of [11:41](#) is that even if we decide—as we no doubt should—that it happens when Jesus calls to Lazarus to come out of the tomb, the precondition for its happening must have occurred *prior* to Jesus’s prayer to God, in fact, on the two occasions when he “snorts.”³⁰ And the meaning of that must be that Jesus here actualizes the πνεῦμα, which in itself always links him with God (by [11:42](#)), so that it will produce the revival of Lazarus for which he has come. Lazarus was raised by means of the πνεῦμα which Jesus had received from God in the way described by John the Baptist in chapter 1 of the Gospel. This physical power from above, which Jesus is constantly carrying around, was able to perform a radical transformation of Lazarus’s corpse into a living human being.

that the expression identifies the affect as being “self-generated” (“selbsterzeugt”). I suspect that whatever Jesus did, it was both “inner” and “outer.” Theobald (2009, 738) is on the right track when he comments on a suggestion of Bultmann’s: “Erwähnenswert ist die These, dass *embrimasthai* ursprünglich ein thaumaturgischer Terminus ist, der die pneumatische Erregung des Wundertäters vor seiner Tat bezeichnet (»er schnaubte auf«, seine ganze göttliche Kraft zusammennehmend . . .).” However, both he and Bultmann found this meaning only in John’s supposed source, not in the evangelist himself.

³⁰ The aorist ἤκουσας in [11:41](#) clearly means “you heard me” on an earlier occasion (which I rendered as perfect above).

Let us consider in this light the conclusion of the whole piece: [12:44–50](#). This text is far more carefully constructed than immediately appears.³¹ It both draws explicitly on the [Prologue](#) and also constitutes a distinct conclusion to chapters 11–12, in particular to the underlying question in these two chapters of what it is that one must believe in believing in Jesus. As the conclusion to chapters 11–12, it also constitutes a kind of summary of the whole Book of Signs, articulating—in a way that reaches back to the [Prologue](#)—the ultimate understanding of Jesus that the whole Book of Signs is pointing towards. Obviously, the text merits our close attention.³²

[John 12:44–45](#) gives a first answer to the question of who and what Jesus is. Believing in ([12:44](#)) and “seeing” ([12:45](#)) Jesus—presumably for what he in fact is—are believing in and seeing “the one who has sent me,” that is, God. We know in what way God has “sent Jesus,” namely, by sending his *πνεῦμα* over him. It is by having God’s *πνεῦμα* in him that Jesus has the kind of direct access to God himself that he actualized in raising Lazarus. The point of [12:44–45](#) is, then, that believers “in Jesus” should see *that*. They should see *God* in Jesus. And they should see Jesus as *sent by* God when he sent his *πνεῦμα* over him.

³¹ Barrett (1978, 433) rightly notes that “it is important to note the points that are selected and the way in which they are combined.” I am not convinced, however, that he himself quite succeeds in this. Ashton (2007, 518) rightly states that the passage “is a carefully constructed piece, belonging . . . to the last stage of the composition of the Gospel.” His own suggested “chiastic” analysis (2007, 518–19 n. 42) is neither very convincing nor very helpful and leads him to this slightly baffling comment: “In my view, detailed literary analyses of this kind have only a limited value, since the most they can prove is that the passage in question *can* be read as a tightly structured whole. It is idle to pretend that this method is more objective than any other. None the less it does serve to direct attention to certain features of the text which might otherwise be disregarded” (2007, 519 n. 42 his italics). Theobald (2009, 837) ascribes the passage to a “Redaktor” who intended “ein kleines johanneisches Glaubenskompodium zu schaffen.” As the conclusion to chapters 11–12—prefigured in [12:35–36](#)—it is much more than that.

³² I have found no commentator to voice the reading given below of [12:47–48](#), in particular.

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With [12:46](#) the text explicitly recalls the [Prologue](#) and states the ultimate purpose of God’s activity in Jesus. The “I” (ἐγώ) that is Jesus is also the light (φῶς) of the [Prologue](#) that has come into the world, sent by God in order that “everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness” (NRSV), that is, in order that all who believe in Jesus as the full figure of the [Prologue](#) and the present passage may *themselves* move into the light or (in the words of [12:36](#)) “become sons of the light.” Here the focus is very clearly on God’s purpose in having “sent” Jesus ([12:44–45](#)) and Jesus’s in having “come” ([12:46](#)). That purpose lies in removing believers from the “darkness” of the world. What this concretely means becomes clear at the end of the text: that they will obtain “eternal life” ([12:50](#)). How it will be achieved is stated in the next two verses ([12:47–48](#)).

In [12:47–48](#) Jesus makes clear a number of points about his mission that are all concerned with the proper way of believing in him. He does it in negative terms by focusing on the person who “hears my words (ῥήματα) and does *not* keep them” ([12:47](#) NRSV, italics added) or “rejects me and does not receive my word[s] (ῥήματα)” ([12:48](#) NRSV, with additions at the end).³³ Such people will be judged. At this point of summarizing the whole of the Book of Signs John obviously aims to have Jesus repeat the point that he has made many times before: that this is a time of “judgement”—compare [3:17–19](#), but also within our text itself [12:31](#): “Now is the judgement of this world” (NRSV).

Just as important, however, are the positive points that Jesus makes. First, Jesus “has come not to judge the world, but to save the world” ([12:47](#)). So, the positive point already stated in [12:46](#) of

³³ In the light of the mistranslation that NRSV unfortunately shares with so many others of λόγος in John as the “word” ([12:48](#)), or even the “Word” ([1:1](#), [14](#)), it is particularly baffling that they translate ῥήματα here in the singular as “word”—in a verse where they also go immediately on to translate λόγος as “word.” Have they not seen at all John’s play on the relationship between Jesus’s spoken utterances (the ῥήματα) and the λόγος that lies behind them? (More on this below). Or is it just a misprint?

removing believers from the darkness is about “salvation.” Secondly, the precondition for this is both “hearing” Jesus’s “words” (ῥήματα), “keeping” them and “receiving” them. This is clearly important. For Jesus has been speaking ῥήματα all through the Gospel. But it also remains somewhat unspecific: what ῥήματα, in particular? The answer is twofold: both everything Jesus has said throughout the Gospel and now says in this final speech in the Book of Signs from [12:23](#) onwards and also much more specifically his ῥήματα, that is, his individual spoken words, as reflecting and being an expression of the λόγος that lies behind them all. This comes out, thirdly, in Jesus’s play in the two verses on who or what it is that will judge those to be judged “on the last day” ([12:48](#)): “the λόγος that I have spoken, *that* (ἐκεῖνος) will judge” the unfortunate person on the last day, not Jesus himself.³⁴ What Jesus does here is clearly to invoke the divine λόγος as lying behind his own individual ῥήματα. And that is also how the text proceeds ([12:49](#)). What matters to us at present, however, is the relationship John presupposes here between Jesus’s ῥήματα and the λόγος. In the light of the Stoic theory of speech alluded to above, we may take it that John saw the divine λόγος, which also lies behind God’s having “sent” Jesus and his own having “come,” as being present within Jesus as an ἐνδιάθετος λόγος (a *logos* in the mind), carried there by the πνεῦμα he received from heaven and then being expressed in the spoken, articulated “words” (ῥήματα) that stream out of his mouth, that is, in his προφορικὸς λόγος (a *logos* of expression). Or to be wholly explicit: Jesus’s ῥήματα express the λόγος *together with* the πνεῦμα which wholly literally carries the underlying, inner λόγος into Jesus’s mouth to be articulated there in the form of individual ῥήματα. Or as John has it elsewhere, “He whom God has sent speaks the words (ῥήματα) of God, for he [God]

³⁴ I propose that we understand ὁ λόγος ὃν ἐλάλησα as follows: “the reasoning (or plan, see below) that I have spoken,” that is, *expressed* and *articulated* in speech. (See more below). Incidentally, it is highly noteworthy that where in the Gospel of Mark ([3:28–30](#)) Jesus draws a somewhat similar distinction between “blaspheming” against himself (implied) and against something else (which is what matters), the other thing is “the holy πνεῦμα.”

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gives the Spirit (πνεῦμα) without measure” (3:34 NRSV).³⁵ We begin to see here that one may discover a whole theory of Jesus’s relationship with God that has a striking—and wholly concrete—simplicity to it (once one has seen it). When Jesus received God’s πνεῦμα from above, he also received God’s divine λόγος within him. *Both* entities lie behind what Jesus says throughout the Gospel (at the level of cognition and speech). And *both* also lie behind what he does (at the level of action and event, as in his raising of Lazarus).

With such an understanding of the relationship between Jesus’s ῥήματα and the divine λόγος, how, more precisely, should we understand the latter? How should the term be translated? Earlier in this essay I have hinted at the translation “reasoning.” This may be supplemented with a close neighbour: “plan.” What will judge nonbelievers on the last day is God’s own plan for saving human beings from the “darkness” of the world, the plan that was put into practice when God “sent” Jesus and so forth. That plan is, of course, all that the [Prologue](#) speaks about—as does, precisely, [12:44–50](#) at the end of the Book of Signs. Jesus himself—as sent by God to save the world—is the plan (the λόγος carried in him by the πνεῦμα).

With [12:49–50](#) the text reaches its conclusion. Jesus now explicitly states that it is God who lies directly behind everything he has said. In this way he refers back both to [12:44–45](#), which spoke of God’s having *sent* Jesus as does [12:49](#), and to [12:46–47](#), which spoke, as we have just seen, of the relationship between God’s divine λόγος and Jesus’s concrete ῥήματα. It is noteworthy in this connection that Jesus now speaks twice of God’s “injunction or ordinance” (ἐντολή) given to Jesus about what he should say and speak. The content of that injunction will clearly be everything Jesus has in fact said throughout the Gospel, which has all been directed at making clear the central truth about himself. Equally clearly the content will be

³⁵ Let it be noted here that a full analysis of John 11–12 would bring in the whole of the programmatic chapter 3, too, which is focused on the πνεῦμα, together with 5:17–47, which among other things speaks of “the dead (οἱ νεκροὶ)” “hearing (ἀκούσουσιν) the voice of the Son of God” and coming to “live (ζήσουσιν)” as a result ([5:25](#), [28–29](#)).

what Jesus has just said in [12:23–48](#) since that section has precisely articulated that central truth. Then it is particularly striking that the text ends by explicitly stating what God’s injunction is, means or implies: “eternal life” ([12:50](#)). With this we are again back in the Prologue (cf. [1:4](#)). But even more importantly, the reader is now made to see exactly what is meant by “eternal life” and how it will be brought about. “Eternal life” is resurrected life, and it will be brought about when the *πνεῦμα* and *λόγος* that lie behind Jesus’s *ῥήματα* operate in those who come to believe in Jesus as the *φῶς* and the carrier of the *λόγος* and *πνεῦμα*. That happens when they do not merely “listen to” Jesus’s *ῥήματα*, but have themselves come into possession of the *λόγος* and *πνεῦμα* that *underlie* those *ῥήματα* and so “hear” them properly (cf. [12:47](#)). Then they will come to believe in Jesus in the full sense: as one who has been sent by God and carries around God’s *λόγος* and *πνεῦμα*, and as one who died, but whose death only had the form of a “lifting up,” which means that he has returned to God borne there in some transformed form by the *πνεῦμα* which he had received to begin with. When human beings come to “believe in the light” (cf. [12:36](#)) in *that* sense, then they will also eventually themselves be transformed by the *πνεῦμα* into “becoming sons of the light” (again [12:36](#)) and obtaining “eternal life” ([12:50](#)). Just as Jesus has risen to heaven (“balloon-like” like the Stoic Sage and by means of the *πνεῦμα* that God has given him), so his followers will rise to heaven in the same way once they have obtained the *πνεῦμα*.

Summarizing on [12:44–50](#), I am claiming that two features of [12:44–50](#) bring in the *πνεῦμα* even though it is not explicitly mentioned. The first is the concatenation of notions which this text shares with the [Prologue](#), namely, light, *λόγος* and life. These three notions are connected in the [Prologue](#)—so I have argued elsewhere and also described here—as part of a wholly concrete cosmology with affinities with Stoicism, the fourth entity of which is the *πνεῦμα* that is brought in at [1:32–33](#). The second feature of [12:44–50](#) is the theory of Jesus’s speech (the relationship between *ῥήματα* and *λόγος*) that is articulated in [12:47–48](#), which also presupposes the *πνεῦμα* as

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the physical side of the *λόγος*. The further claim is, then, that the text almost explicitly connects two things about believers: how they come to believe, at the cognitive and epistemological level, in Jesus in the full sense that entails a proper understanding of his relationship with God and his role in God's plan (the *λόγος*), and how alongside obtaining such a belief they will also come to obtain eternal life on an ontological and cosmological level. In both cases, the responsible agent is the *πνεῦμα* that Jesus possesses since he has and is the *λόγος*. And in both cases, too, the result comes about through the way the *πνεῦμα* acts on those human beings who have received it and thereby have become full believers.³⁶

VI. CONCLUSION ON JOHN 11–12

John 11–12 is held tightly together in literary terms not just across the chapter division but also across the divides at [12:19/12:20](#) and [12:36/12:37](#), where scholars have almost universally found strongly marked divisions. This unity is further substantiated by a unity of theme at the conceptual level. The latter has two sides to it. It first consists in bringing out the inner connection between the raising of Lazarus, the eventual resurrection of Jesus himself and then, as the ultimate goal, the resurrection of believers away from the “darkness” of the present world. Secondly, it consists in human beings’ coming to believe in Jesus as representing just that set of events, namely, that “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even though he dies, will live” ([11:25](#)), as said by Jesus just before he proceeds to raise Lazarus from the dead. Not only must people understand him to be the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming

³⁶ I should make it explicit here (see also below) that as I understand John's account, none among Jesus's followers during his lifetime on earth managed to obtain the understanding of who Jesus is that goes into “believing in him” in the fullest sense. For such “believing” they needed the *πνεῦμα*, and during Jesus's time on earth only he was in possession of that (cf. [7:37–39](#)). The *πνεῦμα* was only made available to Jesus's followers after his death (cf. [20:22](#) and chapters 13–16 on the ‘Paraclete’) when they would also obtain it through baptism ([3:3–8](#)) and in the Eucharist ([6:51–63](#)).

into the world or someone who has been sent *from* God: they must also understand that having been sent by God, he will now return *to* God through his resurrection.

The two sides of the unifying theme are more closely connected than might initially appear. Human beings will only come to believe in Jesus in the proper way once they have themselves come to possess the whole λόγος that lies behind those individual ῥήματα of his that stream out of his mouth. That happens after Jesus's own death and resurrection when he blows the πνεῦμα into them (20:28) and gives them the 'Paraclete' (chapters 13–17). During Jesus's lifetime on earth, by contrast, "there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (7:39 NRSV). When they have received the λόγος through the πνεῦμα, the πνεῦμα, which lies directly behind the raising of Lazarus and is also operative—one must suppose—in the resurrection of Jesus himself, will also bring about the resurrection of his followers so that they may at long last "enter the kingdom of God" (3:5). In this way the λόγος-πνεῦμα duality has both an epistemological and cognitive role—of making people fully understand Jesus—and also an ontological and cosmological role—of eventually resurrecting them into eternal, heavenly life.

VII. RADICAL TRANSFORMATION AND POROSITY BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

The Fourth Gospel understands the resurrection of human beings (Jesus included) into eternal life concretely as a radical transformation that will leave the present world of "flesh" (σάρξ) completely behind.³⁷ Everything points in the direction of taking John to have seen the (physical) πνεῦμα as the power that would operate this transformation, as it is almost explicitly said to have done in the case of Lazarus. This whole, superficially quite strongly dualistic

³⁷ This is the clear implication of a text like 3:3–21, with its strong emphasis on the need for the πνεῦμα "from above" (3:3–13) in opposition to σάρξ (3:6) below (3:12) as a precondition for "seeing" (3:3) and "entering" (3:5) the kingdom of God.

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conception does not appear to leave much room for a notion of a form of “porosity” between life and death.

In fact, however, the precise cosmological, almost Stoic way in which John appears to have understood his notion of resurrection opens up for a more differentiated view. If the present argument has been on the right track, there is a cosmological story (already adumbrated in [John 1:3](#)) underlying the idea of resurrection to the effect that it is God’s *πνεῦμα* that may literally and physically penetrate the world (in the first instance, Jesus) from above—that is, from its (cosmological) abode in heaven—and perform the (still quite radical) transformation on and of human beings that Jesus is striving through its means to achieve. In the Stoic picture on which we have been drawing, the *πνεῦμα* belongs both above and below (though with different degrees of refinement) and so overcomes any dualism. But here too there is an especially refined form of *πνεῦμα* that belongs above and probably accounts for the particularly long-term survival of the human Sage when at his death it rises balloon-like from his dead body to stay in heaven like a star. In John the *πνεῦμα* is much more exclusive since it is very specifically divine as belonging above. Still, here too it may come down into the world (in Jesus) and also become operative in human beings at large, thereby turning them into full believers who will eventually themselves be literally resurrected through its means. Thus in both Stoicism and John the supposed radical transformation of resurrection from death to life is generated by a power that is physical and directly active in the world, though perhaps more as *part* of the world in Stoicism than in John. To that extent—that is, if we understand the Johannine notion of radical transformation and resurrection from death to life within a unified cosmological framework along Stoic lines—there is in fact a kind of porosity between death and life, even in the Johannine case. The Johannine idea of resurrection is not just “mysterious” or “spiritual” in a more modern sense, but well situated within an ancient cosmological way of thinking that allows for even radical changes of human beings within a unified cosmology.

At the same time, however, it has to be recognized that the Fourth Gospel thrives upon a sense of a dualism between the divine and the human. It was only when the πνεῦμα had been literally *sent* from above—marked by God with an explicit voice from heaven (1:33)—that Jesus became the carrier of this new power. Similarly at the end, when Jesus was about to be “glorified” (11:4) through Lazarus’s illness and “lifted up” (12:32, 34) as a result of it, the operative power would presumably once again be the πνεῦμα, and here too distinctly marked by God with an explicit voice from heaven: “I have glorified, and I will glorify again” (12:28). The same sense of a divine-human dualism obviously lies behind the highly dramatic force of the story of the raising of Lazarus, even though we may now claim to understand its cosmological, pneumatic mechanics. Nobody expected anything other than that Lazarus was dead and a stinking corpse. But based on the divine power of the πνεῦμα, Jesus was able to call: “Lazarus, come out!” (11:43). In the last resort, this story speaks, not so much to a sense of porosity between death and life—even through a radical transformation—as to the presence of the divine on earth in the shape of the divine πνεῦμα.

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