

A Critical Review of the Physical Embodiment of Resurrection from the Perspective of Ayatollah Sobhani

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ABSTRACT

The Problem of Resurrection has always been a central concern for scholars of religion, and a wide range of interpretations has been offered in this regard. Among these, the doctrine of bodily resurrection has attracted both staunch supporters and strong critics. Ṣubḥānī is regarded as one of the prominent contemporary defenders of this position. The central question of the present study is: What are Ṣubḥānī's arguments in favor of bodily resurrection, and to what extent are they open to critique? The aim of this research is to provide a precise account of the arguments for the corporeality of resurrection as articulated by Ṣubḥānī. To achieve this aim, the study adopts a theoretical, problem-oriented approach that builds upon prior data. The necessary information has been gathered through library-based research, particularly from scriptural sources and the works of Ṣubḥānī, and evaluated by means of both rational analysis and transmitted evidence. Accordingly, after an examination of Ṣubḥānī's perspective, his arguments for bodily resurrection are subjected to close scrutiny. These arguments, analyzed under two categories—affirmative (ījābī) and negative (salbī)—seek to establish both the possibility and actuality of the return of the elemental body (al-badan al-'unsurī) in the Hereafter, while simultaneously rejecting competing theories. The findings of the study indicate that Ṣubḥānī's arguments for bodily resurrection remain inconclusive and suffer from a variety of ambiguities.

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Introduction

The doctrine of *ma'ād* (resurrection) has long constituted a foundational pillar of Islamic theology (*ilm al-kalām*), occupying the sustained attention of eminent scholars throughout history. One of the most fundamental challenges in eschatology lies in explaining the precise nature of resurrection and the form it assumes. This theological debate has given rise to divergent interpretations, ranging from purely bodily (*ma'ād jismānī*), purely spiritual, to integrated models combining both dimensions. Some theologians, by adhering to the literal sense of Qur'ānic verses, argue for an elemental resurrection (*ma'ād 'unṣurī*), whereas others, employing rationalist reasoning and innovative hermeneutics, advocate for more nuanced conceptions that transcend a strictly material framework. Among contemporary scholars, Āyat Allāh Ja'far Ṣubḥānī holds a prominent place due to his extensive contributions to *kalām* and Qur'ānic studies. While rejecting both the reduction of resurrection to a merely material event and the denial of its corporeal dimension, Ṣubḥānī advances a theory of dual resurrection, consisting of both the bodily (*badan 'unṣurī*) and the spiritual (*nafs mujarrad*). The present study critically examines Ṣubḥānī's arguments in defense of bodily resurrection, with the aim of identifying their strengths, limitations, and unresolved ambiguities.

Methodology

This research adopts a theoretical and problem-oriented approach, relying primarily on library-based study of Ṣubḥānī's works and relevant theological sources. The analysis combines rational (*'aqlī*) and transmitted (*naqlī*) modes of argumentation, applying a critical-analytical framework to evaluate both affirmative and negative proofs offered by Ṣubḥānī in support of bodily resurrection.

Findings

Ṣubḥānī argues for a combined bodily–spiritual resurrection, maintaining that human beings consist of both material body and immaterial soul, each of which must participate in the eschatological event. While reason alone would suffice to establish the immortality of the soul, the explicit textual emphasis of the Qur'ān, he contends, necessitates recognition of the elemental body's return in the Hereafter. To substantiate this view, Ṣubḥānī presents two categories of arguments:

1. **Affirmative proofs (*adilla ijtibāyya*)** – These include six Qur'ānic-based lines of reasoning: (a) narratives of past peoples as evidence for bodily resurrection; (b) the cycle of human creation and its link to resurrection; (c) resurrection from the graves; (d) corporeality of resurrection inferred from the testimony of bodily organs; (e) bodily transformations in the Hereafter; and (f) responses to objections raised by skeptics of bodily resurrection. Although these verses reject the

reduction of resurrection to a purely spiritual reality, their evidentiary force for affirming an elemental resurrection is less decisive than Şubhānī maintains. The plurality of ontological modes across different realms of existence leaves open the possibility of alternative corporeal models, such as the imaginal resurrection (*ma'ād mithālī*), thereby complicating a strict reading in favor of *ma'ād 'unşurī*.

2. **Negative proofs (*adilla salbiyya*)** – Şubhānī critiques competing theories by rejecting both exclusive corporealist and exclusive spiritualist interpretations. He regards any reduction of resurrection to a single dimension as theologically flawed. Nevertheless, his criticisms of the imaginal-body model remain inconclusive, since the objections he raises do not adequately undermine this particular theory.

Overall, the findings indicate that while Şubhānī's negative arguments succeed in challenging one-dimensional accounts of resurrection, his affirmative proofs lack the comprehensiveness required to establish the necessity of elemental bodily resurrection.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Şubhānī's dualist conception of resurrection reflects a serious effort to reconcile scriptural literalism with rational theological commitments. His insistence on the corporeal dimension of resurrection draws its main support from Qur'ānic exegesis, supplemented by a critique of rival interpretations. However, a closer critical analysis reveals that the affirmative proofs he adduces are neither decisive nor exhaustive, as the Qur'ānic evidence does not unequivocally affirm *ma'ād 'unşurī*. Moreover, his negative arguments, though effective against purely corporealist or purely spiritualist views, fall short when applied to the theory of imaginal resurrection (*ma'ād mithālī*). The study thus concludes that Şubhānī's reasoning, while significant within contemporary *kalām*, remains incomplete and subject to unresolved ambiguities, particularly in relation to alternative corporeal models of resurrection.

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