Existence is a Spectrum: Rethinking Resurrection in the *Treatise on the Resurrection*

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Abstract. This article reexamines the concept of resurrection in the Valentinian "*Treatise on the Resurrection"* (or "*Letter to Rheginos"*, NHC I,4) by employing the framework of 'modes of being', a hermeneutical tool adapted from Platonic and Gnostic thought. Rather than viewing reality in terms of strict binaries, the article argues that Valentinian cosmology is best understood as a continuum: beginning with absolute non-existence, progressing through the material world, then to the state of the believer who has received gnosis, and culminating in the transcendent realm of the Father. Within this spectrum, resurrection emerges not as a singular or discontinuous event, but as a graded and continuous process that unfolds across different levels of existence. By drawing on both the "*Treatise on the Resurrection"* and related Valentinian texts, the study demonstrates how this spectrum of being provides a new interpretive key for understanding Valentinian soteriology and the ontological grounding of resurrection.
Keywords: Early Christianity, Nag Hammadi, Treatise on the Resurrection, resurrection, apocrypha.

Būtis kaip spektras: prisikėlimo sampratos permąstymas *Traktate apie prisikėlimą*

Santrauka. Straipsnyje, pasitelkiant „būties lygmenų" sampratą – hermeneutinį įrankį, perimtą iš platoniškos ir gnostinės minties, nagrinėjama *prisikėlimo* sąvoka valentinizmui priskiriamame tekste *Traktatas apie prisikėlimą* (arba *Laiškas Reginui*, NHC I,4). Užuot apibūdinus tikrovę per griežtas prieštaras, teigiama, kad valentiniškoji kosmologija geriausiai suprantama kaip kontinuumas. Viename šio kontinuumo ekstremume yra absoliuti nebūtis, einanti per materialųjį pasaulį; toliau seka tikinčiojo, įgijusio pažinimą, būsena. Kitoje kontinuumo pusėje pasiekiamas transcendentinis lygmuo. Šiame kontinuume prisikėlimas atsiskleidžia ne kaip vienkartinis įvykis, o kaip laipsniškas ir tęstinis procesas, išsisskleidžiantis per skirtingus būties lygmenis. Remiantis tiek *Traktatu apie prisikėlimą*, tiek giminingais valentininiais tekstais, straipsnyje parodoma, kaip šis būties kontinuumas naujai paaiškina valentininę soteriologiją ir prisikėlimo ontologiją.
Reikšminiai žodžiai: Ankstyvoji krikščionybė, Nag Hammadi, *Traktatas apie prisikėlimą*, prisikėlimas, apokrifai.

1. Introduction. The 'Modes of Being'

This article examines the concept of resurrection in the Valentinian "Treatise on the Resurrection" (also known as the "Letter to Rheginos", NHC I,4) through the interpretive framework of 'modes of being', a hermeneutical tool proposed by Emmel (2017). I begin by revisiting Plato's treatment of being and non-being, which provides the conceptual foundation for understanding the framework. I then turn to Valentinian sources to show how reality is conceived not as a set of binary oppositions but as a continuum: from absolute non-existence, through the material world, to the believer's life in gnosis, and, ultimately, to the transcendent realm. Finally, I argue that resurrection in the "Treatise on the Resurrection" should be understood as a continuous process unfolding across these different levels of existence. This approach, I suggest, offers a fresh perspective on Valentinian cosmology and soteriology.

Plato touched upon the problems of being, non-being and their relation to knowledge in many of his dialogues, such as the *Republic*, the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Parmenides*. The *Parmenides* presents a series of ontological hypotheses whose radical logical reversals generate a complex picture of existence and non-existence. The dialogue seems to challenge not only the coherence of the Forms but also the very language and logic used to describe being. It is within this dialectical framework that one may attempt to articulate four modes of being, derived from the interweaving of existential affirmation, negation, and paradox. In the Platonic studies, the *Sophist* is usually regarded as the dialogue that summarises Plato's notion of 'what is not' most systematically (Kahn, 2009, 186; Greenstine, 2020, 39). For my purposes, I will be relying both on the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides.* According to Kohnke (1957, 39), the discussion in the *Parmenides* (162a) concerning the understanding of being can be reduced to four distinct 'modes of being':

1. εἶναι ὄν (to be existent);
2. μὴ εἶναι ὄν (to not be existent);
3. μὴ εἶναι μὴ ὄν (to not be non-existent);
4. εἶναι μὴ ὄν (to be non-existent).

I will shortly recount each of these positions, because it will be relevant for the argument.

The first position εἶναι ὄν (to be existent) is the most straightforward and traditionally stable category. It denotes positive existence, a state of full ontological actuality. In the context of the *Parmenides*' 'first hypothesis' (137c–142a), where the One is posited as absolutely one, *being* is implicitly denied of the One – yet in the second hypothesis (142b–155e), the One is said to *be*, thus participating in εἶναι. The second position, μὴ εἶναι ὄν – to not be existent – denotes a form of *non-being* – something that could have been, or might have been thought to be, but definitively is not. This is distinct from complete *nothingness*, since it still makes grammatical sense to predicate *non-being* of a hypothetical subject.[1] Still, things falling into this category exist 'less' than things belonging to the first position εἶναι ὄν.

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[1]   In the *Parmenides*, particularly in the later hypotheses (esp. 155e–157b), Plato explores the possibility of the One not being, while still somehow participating in motion, change, or perception. Scholars like Wedin (2014,

The third formulation μὴ εἶναι μὴ ὄν – to not be non-existent – introduces double negation, effectively suggesting that something does not fall into the category of non-being. It corresponds to a liminal or potential state of being – that which is not yet fully actualised but is not entirely absent or void (162a).[2] Things in this category exist even 'less' than in the category μὴ εἶναι ὄν.

The fourth mode of being εἶναι μὴ ὄν – to be non-existent – is a paradoxical construction that asserts the being of non-being – that something *is*, but what it *is* is precisely *non-being* (163b–166c). This position defines total non being[3] as it is implying a complete absence of οὐσία, cf. Meinwald (1991, p. 148).

This four-fold framework for interpreting 'modes of being' and non-being was later adopted in various later Platonisms and Platonism-influenced traditions (Emmel, 2017, p. 40). For example, Kohnke in his article investigates how Neoplatonists reinterpreted this way of articulating 'modes of being' and non-being, suggested by Plato's texts (Kohnke 1957, pp. 32–40). In turn, Stephen Emmel, though criticising some aspects of Kohnke's approach,[4] applies this framework to investigate a passage from Coptic Gnostic text *Zostrianos* (Nag Hammadi Codex VIII, 1; 117,11–15). The passage Emmel investigates is damaged; hence, several interpretations are available. Emmel argues with another scholar, John D. Turner, who recreates the damaged lacunas differently or translates them dubiously, according to Emmel. Relying on research into Coptic grammar, Emmel comes to a conclusion that the selected passage (VIII, 1; 117,11–15) offers a fourfold scheme of 'modes of being', similar to that of Plato and most likely depending on it (Emmel 2017, p. 41):

(1) that which exists really (as opposed to things that only exist, in the sense of mode 2);
(2) that which exists, but not really (*i.e.*, things that exist, but not in the sense of mode 1);
(3) that which does not really not exist (*i.e.*, things that do not not exist in the sense of mode 4, but also do not exist in the sense of either mode 2 or mode 1);
(4) that which really does not exist (as opposed to things that are only 'relatively unreal', in the sense of mode 3).

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pp. 254–255) argue that these sections allow for modal distinctions, where *being* and *not-being* operate not as binary but as aspects of relational frameworks. Though in his book Wedin argues with propositions given on the same theme (being and non-being) in the *Sophist*, not in the *Parmenides*.

[2] cf. *Parm*. 162a: δεῖ ἄρα αὐτὸ δεσμὸν ἔχειν τοῦ μὴ εἶναι τὸ εἶναι μὴ ὄν, εἰ μέλλει μὴ εἶναι, ὁμοίως ὥσπερ τὸ ὂν τὸ μὴ ὂν ἔχειν μὴ εἶναι, ἵνα τελέως αὖ εἶναι ᾖ (*Then if it does not exist and is to continue to be non-existent, it must have the existence of not-being as a bond, just as being has the non-existence of not-being, in order to attain its perfect existence*). This shows how Plato connects '**not being'** (μὴ εἶναι) with '**being non-existent'** (εἶναι μὴ ὄν). While subtle, the passage indicates that an entity asserted *not to exist* nonetheless 'partakes' in a kind of **being –** not as a phantom, but as a logical necessity. This statement affirms existence (through denying non-existence), albeit in a mediated way.

[3] This is conceptually related to the *Sophist* (esp. 236d–259e), where Plato attempts to rehabilitate *non-being* by distinguishing between absolute nothingness and the relative *otherness* that allows for meaningful negation. In 257b–259e, he comes to a conclusion that non-being **is** in some way, namely, as *difference* (διαφορά).

[4] Emmel criticizes Kohnke's interpretation of the *Parmenides*, by writing that the passage (162b3–4) which Kohnke was interpreting does not talk about ontology *per se*, but rather about linguistic problems. Also, Emmel finds Kohnke's interpretation anachronistic, because he uses a much later Neoplatonic scheme to interpret Plato's views (Emmel, 2017, 38n11).

The really existing (mode 1) in the *Zostrianos* is 'Aeon of Kalyptos' (the highest aeon of the Barbelo aeon), and then, in a descending order, the text suggests modes 2, 3, 4. The aeon of Kalyptos is also identified with 'Existence', forming the first philosophical triad from Neoplatonic thought (with others being Protophanes (Mind or Blessedness), and Autogones (Life)) (Sieber, 1981, p. 789).

In my investigation, I will be building on Emmel's research. The text I am investigating, "Treatise on the Resurrection", is not related to the *Zostrianos*, except for the fact that, broadly speaking, they both belong to the so-called category of Gnosticism. As I mentioned before, Gnosticism borrowed heavily from Platonism, including the idea of 'modes of being', as Emmel showed. I will also borrow the conceptual framework of 'modes of being' without suggesting that there is a relationship between these texts. Moreover, I am not proposing that 'modes of being' are explicitly mentioned in the Valentinian texts as they are in the *Zostrianos*. 'Modes of being' might be applied to Valentinian texts insofar as these texts share in the similar cultural background, in this case, Platonism, cf. Lyman 1993, pp. 2–3. The concept of 'modes of being' will be employed here as a hermeneutical tool for interpreting resurrection in the "Treatise on the Resurrection", with other Valentinian texts serving as a comparative background. This approach offers an alternative hermeneutical framework for conceptualising how resurrection is visualised in the text.

2. The Problem of Resurrection of the Flesh

In the "Treatise on the Resurrection" (also called "Epistle/Letter to Rheginos") (NHC I, 4)*,* a short Valentinian text in a form of a letter from master to his pupil Rheginos, the writer inquires about the true nature of the resurrection, a debated topic in the Early Christianity, cf. Lehtipuu, 2015, pp. 3–4. Debates on resurrection typically focus on two central questions: the nature of the resurrected body – specifically, the substance of which it is constituted – and the timing of resurrection, namely, whether it takes place immediately or only after a certain interval following death. Scholars researching "Treatise on the Resurrection" propose three main interpretations of resurrection in this text:

1. The text supports mainstream Christianity's ('orthodox') doctrine of bodily resurrection (Ménard, 1983);
2. The text denies any form of bodily resurrection altogether, advocating instead a purely spiritual resurrection of the mind (νοῦς) (Layton, 1979, pp. 91–92).
3. The text envisions a transformed, spiritualised flesh (Craig, 2012, p. 495; Lehtipuu, 2015, p. 99; Petrey, 2016, pp. 48–49; Lundhaug, 2017, pp. 203–205).[5]

I will begin by examining the text's understanding of fleshly resurrection, while also clarifying a broader context along the way:

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[5]   Petrey claims that his treatment of the problem offers "another alternative, that the "Treatise on the Resurrection" envisions a spiritual resurrection of the bodily parts, including the genitals, as the guarantor of individual identity" (Petrey, 2016, p. 36). However, in my opinion, the author claims a very similar idea as the previous scholars – i.e., that the flesh is still transformed and spiritualised.

> *For when you did not exist in the flesh* (ϩⲛ ⲥⲁⲣⲝ)*, you received flesh* (ⲁⲕϫⲓ ⲥⲁⲣⲝ) *once you entered into this world. Why will you not receive flesh* (ⲥⲁⲣⲝ) *when you ascend into the eternity* (ⲡⲁⲓⲱⲛ)? *(47.4–8).*[6]

The text suggests that the person existed in some manner before he received fleshly body in this material world.[7] The believer existed in a divine realm before entering the world, where he received flesh. The author suggests that the believer upon his ascension will receive flesh again. This might imply that this new flesh will be of a different quality, though this is not sufficiently explained in the text. The material of future resurrection body was an important topic in the discussion on resurrection in Early Christianity. Our passage (47.4–8) uses the Greek word σάρξ, which means 'material', 'earthly flesh'. Taken out of context, it might appear that the author proposes resurrection in material flesh, which would not be out of context in contemporary debate. In general, a variety of opinions existed among 'orthodox' authors – e.g., Tertullian claimed that, after resurrection, body will be mostly the same as an earthly one and made of flesh ("On the Resurrection" 35.10–13).[8] Others suggested that the resurrected body will be transformed (though it will retain its identity), for example, Origen (Deconick, 2011, pp. 88–89). For him, the resurrected believer will possess a spiritual body (cf. "On Prayer" 31.3; *De princ.* 2.10.3).[9] Hence, there existed a spectrum of opinions on the matter, ranging from resurrection in flesh to resurrection in a transformed spiritual body.

Patristic writers depicted their opponents as deviating from the canonical texts in their interpretations on resurrection (e.g., Tertullian, who mocks Marcion, Basilides, Apelles, and Valentinus, in his "On the Resurrection" 2.3), even though, as is in our case, their views were very similar and they used the same proof texts (e.g., Paul's 1 Corinthians). Apostle Paul's writings were ambiguous enough to use them for justifying differing beliefs in resurrection – both resurrection in flesh and resurrection in spiritual flesh, cf. Tappenden, 2016, p. 87. The author of the "Treatise on the Resurrection" uses 1 Corinthians as a proof text to speak about spiritual resurrection:

> *[...] and we are embraced by him until our setting, that is to say, our death in this life. We are drawn to heaven by him* (ⲉⲩⲥⲱⲕ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲛ ⲁⲧⲡⲉ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧϥ̄)*, like beams by the sun, not being restrained by anything. This is the spiritual resurrection which swallows up the psychic in the same way as the fleshly* (ⲡⲛⲉⲩⲙⲁⲧⲓⲕⲏ ⲉⲥⲱⲙⲛ̄ⲕ ⲛ̄ⲧⲯⲩⲭⲓⲕⲏ ϩⲟⲙⲟⲓⲱⲥ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲧⲕⲉⲥⲁⲣⲕⲓⲕⲏ) *(45.33–46.2).*

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[6]   Hereafter translations of Valentinian texts by Geoffrey S. Smith are used (*Valentinian Christianity. Texts and Translations*, Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020).

[7]   The idea of pre-existence occurs in many non-canonical texts (e.g., *Gos. Truth* 27.34–28.10), but it is not particular only to them. Such thinkers as Origen also wrote extensively about pre-existence (e.g., *De princ.* 1.2.3).

[8]   Tertullian grounds his claim in scripture, by writing that body is needed to sit in the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matt 8: 11), "the hairs of our head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:30), etc. – all this speaks for bodily presence in the kingdom.

[9]   Rankin interprets Origen's position differently, by arguing that Origen did not advocate for completely spiritual resurrection (Rankin, 2018, pp. 111–119), though he agrees that, for Origen, there is a change for materials of resurrected body (Rankin, 2018, p. 116).

This passage answers us what kind of understanding of resurrection the author offers. Referring to Apostle Paul (1 Cor 15: 42–46), he writes about resurrection after death. Edwards thinks that the Treatise's language is mostly consistent with Paul's view on resurrection (Edwards, 1995, p. 79). It seems that the author advocates for the spiritual resurrection which destroys the hierarchically lower kinds of resurrection[10] – the psychic and fleshly. Edwards considers the verb 'to swallow' to mean 'to annihilate, destroy' (Edwards, 1995, p. 80). However, he does not think that this eliminates probability of rising in the flesh. Another author, Rankin, objects to some of Edwards's ideas, but, in general, agrees that the text also supports resurrection in the body (Rankin, 2018, pp. 120–122). However, as Lehtipuu noted, "for him [the author] it means something other than the resurrection of the physical, earthly flesh" (Lehtipuu, 2015, p. 99). Rankin admits that "the precise meanings of seemingly significant parts of the *Letter to Rheginos* are notoriously unclear" (Rankin, 2018, p. 120). Lundhaug assents to such a description, but he tries to elucidate the author's idea in different terms from the previous scholars, by writing: "The Treatise on the Resurrection does not so much distinguish between flesh and spirit as between the internal and the external, the visible and the invisible, the perishable and the imperishable […] Both of these bodies have flesh, but different kinds of flesh – one associated with this present world, and another associated with the next" (Lundhaug, 2017, p. 224). I believe that Lundhaug's interpretation is the best answer that can be given concerning the type of flesh that the believer will rise in.[11] Further more precise explanations are hard to reach at this point.

Here we explained the context for the resurrection theme in the "Treatise on the Resurrection" without trying to give a definitive solution to the problem of the substance of the resurrected body. The reference to the spiritual resurrection shows that some kind of transformation is needed in order to "ascend to the Aeon" (47.8). The text does not give an explicit explanation how this happens, and scholars, too, do not reach a definitive conclusion on this matter. However, one interpretation that everyone agrees on is that this passage (45.33–46.2) argues for the immediate resurrection after death, without waiting for the Second Coming (Edwards, 1995, p. 80; Lehtipuu, 2015, p. 101; Rankin, 2018, p. 121). This precise theme can be called the second problem surrounding the debates around resurrection in the Early Christianity. It might be spelled with a question – when will resurrection happen? The 'orthodox' position involves the Second Coming of Christ, while "Treatise on the Resurrection" affirms resurrection's immediacy (45.33–46.2). Most of the research, conducted on this text, focuses on explaining the nature of the resurrected body in the text, leaving out the understanding of the timing of resurrection. Therefore, further, we will address this problem.

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[10] Peel notes here that "the two attributive adjectives, 'psychic' and 'fleshly', both appear without the substantive they modify, but they obviously have reference to 'resurrection'"(ⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ) (Peel, 1969, p. 79).

[11] Taylor gives a very similar account to Lundhaug's, by emphasising that, in the "*Treatise on the Resurrection*", the fundamental distinction is not framed in terms of flesh versus spirit, but rather as a contrast between the visible and the invisible (Petrey, 2016, pp. 41–42).

3. The Resurrection as an Immediate Event

Now I will begin the treatment of the problem of the timing of resurrection which is the main objective of this article. As was mentioned, the "Treatise on the Resurrection" also acknowledges the resurrection in the present:

> *For if he who will die knows about himself that he will die – even if he spends many years in this life, he is brought to this – why not consider yourself as risen and (already) brought to this? If you have the resurrection but continue as if you are to die – and yet that one knows that he has died […]* (*Treat. Res.* 49. 16–28).

> *What then is the resurrection* (ⲧⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ)*? It is the revelation on every occasion of those who have risen* (ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓϣ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲧⲁⲣⲧⲱⲟⲩⲛ)*. For if you remember reading in the Gospel that Elijah appeared along with Moses, do not consider the resurrection to be an illusion* (ⲟⲩⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ)*. It is not an illusion; it is true* (ⲟⲩⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ ⲉⲛ ⲧⲉ, ⲁⲗⲗⲁ [ⲟ]ⲩⲙⲏⲉ)*. It is more suitable to say that the world is an illusion rather than the resurrection* (ⲡⲉⲧⲉⲥϣⲉ ⲡⲉ ⲁ̄ϫⲟⲟⲥ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲩⲟ ⲁⲧⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ)*, which has come about through our Lord, the Savior, Jesus Christ. What am I telling you now? Those alive will die. How do they live in an illusion?* (ⲡⲱⲥ ⲉⲩⲁⲛϩ̄ ϩ̄ⲛ ⲟⲩⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ)*. The rich have become poor, and the kings have been dethroned. Everything is transformed. The world is an illusion* (ⲟⲩⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ) *— lest, indeed, I pontificate about matters too much* (*Treat. Res.* 48.4–30).

The first passage (49. 16–28) speaks about resurrection in this life, in this material world. The character of resurrection can be perceived as something that has already occurred is made possible only by the fact that Christ has incarnated, died and has risen.[12] To accept this truth is to already possess resurrection. So similarly like the Saviour, the believer has in some sense died in this life, however (unlike Jesus') his physical death has not yet occurred[13].

In the second passage (48.4–30), resurrection (ⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ) in the text is affirmed as a true reality, whereas the material world is called an illusion (ⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ).[14] The material world is regarded negatively, while resurrection is understood as superior. Resurrection is also equated to revelation (ϭⲱⲗⲡ̄) of the people (48.3–6), who have risen, presumably

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[12] cf. *Treat. Res.* 44.13–37: "How did the Lord proclaim things while in the flesh and after he revealed himself as Son of God? He walked about in this place where you reside, speaking about the law of nature – but I call it 'death'. Moreover, the Son of God, Rheginos, was Son of Man. He possessed them both, having humanity and divinity so that he might conquer death by being Son of God, and by being the Son of Man the restoration might occur into the realm of fullness, since initially he was from above as a seed of truth before his ordering had come to be".

[13] The "Gospel of Philip" (Gosp. Phil.) speaks about the resurrection in very similar terms: *73.1–4: "Those who say that they will die first and (then) rise are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection while they are alive, when they die they will not receive anything"*.

[14] The Coptic ⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ, transliteration of Greek φαντασία here means 'illusion'. The primary meaning of the word is 'appearance' (Liddell et al., 1996, s.v. φαντασία: "*appearance, presentation* to consciousness, whether immediate or in memory, whether true or illusory). In later times, φαντασία also comes to mean an 'illusion'. In "A Patristic Greek Lexicon", φαντασία is described as an unreal appearance, illusion., esp. ref. docetic Christologies […]" (Lampe, 1961, s.v. φαντασία). Most of the examples from Lampe's dictionary are chronologically later than the "Treatise on the Resurrection", with the possible exception of Origen's works. Nevertheless, the meaning of the cited passage from "Treatise on the Resurrection" is clear – the author wishes to emphasise the opposition between resurrection that is a true reality and material world that is a lesser reality.

the pneumatics, superior, spiritual people. This resurrection is taking place 'on every occasion' (ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲱ ⲛⲓⲙ). Another possible translation of this phrase is 'always' or even 'continual'. Peel, commenting on this phrase suggests that "the resurrection entails making manifest the resurrected form or 'body' of the believer, presumably in the heavenly Aeon to which he ascends" (Peel, 1969, p. 89). Peel disagrees with Zandee, who proposes that the text refers to resurrection of the pneumatic in the present.[15] The text also speaks about resurrection as a future event (45.33–46.2), demonstrating the tension between resurrection as a future event and a present reality. The New Testament texts also address this issue; however, the solution is different.[16]

Our text does not show explicit condemnation of the material world that is a common feature of the Valentinian texts; however, it is very adamant on repeating this world to be an illusion (ⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ). If one presupposes a Valentinian origin for the text (as many scholars do, cf. Peel, 1969; Dunderberg, 2008, p. 10; Thomassen, 2008, p. 83; Craig, 2012), the notion of resurrection within the material world becomes problematic, since matter is regarded negatively. The central issue, then, is how the existence of an awakened or resurrected believer can be conceptualised within such a negatively construed material realm. Only a limited number of scholars have addressed this particular issue, and their responses converge on broadly similar conclusions. The two most relevant texts to us are those by Einar Thomassen and Thomas D. McGlothlin.

Einar Thomassen (2009, pp. 169–186) suggests that in "Treatise on the Resurrection", similarly as in "Gospel of Truth", we can "think that there is no transformation at all, only the manifestation of what already exists as an immutable reality. In both cases, the solution is to regard the empirical world as irreality, an illusion – only the oneness of the divine truly exists. Becoming totally transformed and understanding that one already possesses eternal being are two parallel ways of articulating the soteriological implication of the realization that the world is actually nothing" (2009, pp. 184–185). Although Thomassen's ideas do not directly address the problem of resurrection, his conception of the ontological structure of reality can nevertheless inform its interpretation in our text. In this framework, the material world is understood as illusion or unreality, while resurrection represents the true reality.

Thomas D. McGlothlin (2018, pp. 135–160) turns his research in a similar direction as Thomassen and also talks about the questionable status of reality. He claims that the relationship between two types of resurrection can be explained through the motif of revelation of true reality. He writes that true reality in the text is understood to be the Pleroma, from which, the world broke loose (44.33–36, 46.35–38). This divine reality is opposed to this

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[15] Peel argues is that Zandee's translation of the phrase ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲱ ⲛⲓⲙ is faulty. It cannot be translated as 'in the present' (Peel, 1969, p. 89)

[16] These views are very close to the eschatological tensions seen in the letters of Paul and the Gospel of John. However, there are some differences, too. For example, the Treatise on the Resurrection sees 'the not yet' of resurrection to coincide with the future death and resurrection as ascension of the believer. While, in John, this 'not yet' character coincides with the expectation of the last day when the Son of Man will raise the dead (cf. 6:39–40). In Paul, resurrection is connected with παρουσία (cf. 1 Tess. 4:12–15). In Treatise on the Resurrection, parousia is not mentioned at all, and instead is replaced by the ἀποκατάστασις (the restoration) to the Pleroma.

illusory material world (48.14–16). The human being is tempted to see the material world as the true reality, but it is actually under the dominion of death and decay. The status of the true reality (the Pleroma) was not known, so our text, according to McGlothlin, puts strong emphasis on its revelation. Thus, the purpose of the Saviour was "the destruction of evil on the one hand, the revelation of the elect on the other" (45.6–11). The revelatory character of resurrection and its status as a thing of the true reality is highlighted in the text more than once, e.g., "the resurrection does not have this aforesaid character, for it is the truth that stands firm. It is the revelation of what is, and the transformation of things, and a transition into newness" (48.31–38). As McGlothlin writes, "what appears to be the transformation of one thing into another kind of thing can also be described as the manifestation of true reality in the dissipation of illusions […]. The text's overall emphasis on the transformational revelation of true reality, and its integration of resurrection into that framework, can help to illuminate its claim that the resurrection can be possessed in this life (2018, pp. 145–146)". To sum up, the author suggests that the material reality is not exactly real, it is only an illusion. If it is so, then, the uninterrupted continuity of the resurrection is possible. Believer only needs to understand the illusory nature of reality, and then his resurrection begins. Such a perspective, as suggested by McGlothlin, helps to see resurrection in our text more as an unitary event than as something incongruous.

Building on the insights of these two scholars, and employing the conception of reality as a hermeneutical key for interpreting resurrection in the text, I propose understanding resurrection as a continuum within the broader spectrum of reality. This approach immediately raises the further question of what other elements constitute this framework, and how the resurrection event, along with its stages ('modes of being') is situated within it.

4. "Non-existences" in Valentinian Texts

The "Treatise on the Resurrection" offers little explicit reflection on the nature of reality, apart from its assertion that the empirical world is to be regarded as an illusion (ⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ). If we understand this text as belonging to the Valentinian tradition, its context may be illuminated by comparison with other Valentinian writings.

I will begin with a description of total non-being, corresponding to position no. 4 outlined in Chapter 1, where I discussed the 'modes of being'. To illustrate the Valentinian conception of non-being, several examples will be considered, with particular attention to a passage from the "Tripartite Tractate":

> This one, then, is of such a sort and image and great size that no one dwells with him from the beginning, nor is there a place within which he dwells or from which he has come or for which he will separate himself. Nor is there an ancient form that he consults as a model while he works. Nor is there for him any difficulty that follows him in what he makes. Nor for him is there any matter (ⲟⲩϩⲩⲗⲏ) that exists with which <he> creates the things he creates. Nor is there a substance (ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ) within him from which he begets the things he begets (53.21–37).

The author of the text emphasizes that the Father created the world out of nothing, which is a theme that also appears against the background of contemporary philosophical traditions in which matter was often regarded as pre-existent (May, 1994, p. 4). The author seeks to distance himself from the philosophical position that posits matter (ὕλη) as pre-existent to creation, a stance shared with other Christian writers (Thomassen, 1982, pp. 230–231). He underscores this point with considerable insistence, reiterating it from multiple perspectives. Some scholars claim that idea of *creatio ex nihilo* was foreign to the Valentinian cosmology (cf. Ménard, 1972, p. 134; May, 1994, p. 110), however, such passages as those quoted above prove otherwise. The motif of creation out of nothing is significant for my argument, as it indicates that the concept of total non-existence was already established within the Valentinian thought. Other Valentinian texts, such as the "Gospel of Truth", likewise refer to the notion of non-existence, confirming its significance within the Valentinian tradition. For example:

> *I have not said, therefore, that those who have not yet come into being are nothing. Rather, they exist in the one who shall will that they come into being when he wills, like the time that is coming. Before everything comes into being, he knows what he will make. (But) his fruit that has not yet come into being does not know anything, nor does it do anything. Moreover, every space that also exists within the Father is from the one that exists, the one who established it out of that which does not exist* (ϩⲛ ⲡⲉⲧϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲉⲛ)*. The one who does not have a root also has no fruit, but although he thinks about himself "I have come to be", he will be destroyed by his own means. For this reason, the one who did not exist at all will not come to be. What, then, is it that he desired to lead him to believe about himself? That "I have come to be like the shadows and phantasms of the night* (ⲛⲓϩⲁⲉⲓⲃⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲓⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲩϣⲏ)*". When the light shines on the fear that that person has endured, he knows that it is nothing* (ⲉϥϣⲁϥⲙ̄ⲙⲉ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲗⲁⲩⲉ ⲡⲉ) (*Gosp. Truth* 27.34–28.32).

The context of the passage is as follows: the author reflects on the divine realm – the *Pleroma* – and draws an analogy between it and the condition of the spiritual person. The divine entities, typically referred to as *aeons* (also described using spatial terms such as τόποι, or 'places'; here, a Coptic word is used ⲙⲁ (ⲙⲁⲉⲓⲧ) – 'places' or 'spaces'), are portrayed as existing potentially within the Father prior to their manifestation. In other words, divine reality is latent within the divine source before being actualised, cf. Attridge and MacRae, 1985, p. 82.

The author then draws a direct parallel between this structure and the inner condition of the believer. He poses the question: what should the believer believe about himself? The answer given is striking – the believer once dwelled in shadows and *phantasms* or *illusions* (ⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ), which means that the empirical, material world was experienced as deceptive and illusory. In contrast, light – here, symbolic of *gnosis* – functions as the means of awakening, or spiritual resurrection, akin to the conception we saw earlier in "Treatise on the Resurrection". In his commentary on the "Gospel of Truth", Attridge emphasises that gospel's passages on non-existence being closely parallel with the way the concept is articulated in the "Tripartite Tractate"*, e.g., *Tri. Tra.* 53.21–37 (Attridge & MacRae, 1985, pp. 82–83), i.e., the passage that we quoted above. This suggests a notable degree of

consistency in the conceptualisation of non-existence across these two texts. A conceptual distinction, however, emerges between the 'modes of existence' described in the passage from the "Gospel of Truth" (27.34–28.32). The first corresponds to what is articulated in the "Tripartite Tractate" – namely, total non-existence ("*the one who established it out of that which does not exist*") – position No. 4. The second, by contrast, refers to a form of existence characterised by deficiency, yet distinct from total non-existence (position No. 3). The following section will examine this latter mode of existence in greater detail.

In the above-quoted passage from the *Gospel of Truth*, we encounter the following sentence: "*For this reason, the one who did not exist at all will not come to be*".[17] On the surface, this appears paradoxical. The statement seems to suggest that any being – whether an aeon or a human – who does not know the Father or has not received *gnosis*, effectively "*did not exist*" and "*will not come to be*". This raises an important question: what does the author mean by 'non-existence' in this context?

The paradox intensifies when we consider the surrounding passage: "*The one who does not have a root also has no fruit, but although he thinks about himself, 'I have come to be'* (ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲉϥⲙⲉⲩⲉ ⲛⲉϥ ϫⲉ «ⲁϩⲓ̈ϣⲱⲡⲉ»)*, he will be destroyed by his own means*". The subject here is clearly not inert or passive. This being is capable of self-reflection, of asserting 'I am', or, more literally, 'I have come into being'. He is also subject to destruction – something that presupposes a kind of existence. And yet, he is described as not having truly come to be.

This brings us to the central ontological tension in the "Gospel of Truth":[18] What does it mean to *exist* or *not exist*? The answer lies not in biological or material terms, but in relation to *ontological rootedness* – specifically, rootedness in the Father and Jesus. To 'exist' in this text means to be grounded in divine reality, to participate in the truth of being that flows from the Father through *gnosis* and to accepted incarnated Jesus' revelation through gnosis[19], cf. Kreps, 2022, p. 31. Conversely, those who lack such rootedness may appear to exist, may even think and speak about themselves as existing, but in the deepest theological and ontological sense, they do *not* exist. Their being is ungrounded, illusory, derivative – without substance (ὑπόστασις) or fruit.

This existential condition is thus bound up with epistemology: to lack *gnosis* is not simply to lack knowledge, but to lack being. The one who claims 'I have come into being' without being rooted in the Father is ultimately self-deceived and self-destructive. In this

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[17] cf. Tri. Tra. 78.28–79.4. *The things that had come forth from the arrogant thought resemble the fullnesses, which are their likenesses, images, shadows, and phantasms* (ⲉⲣⲛⲉⲓⲇⲱⲗⲟⲛ `ⲛⲉ´ ⲙⲛ ϩⲛϩⲁⲉⲓⲃⲉⲥⲙⲛ ϩⲛⲫⲁⲛⲧⲁⲥⲓⲁ)*, devoid of reason and light, these that belong to the vein thought, since they are not born of anything. For this reason, their end will be like their beginning: **from what did not exist (they must) return again to what will not be** […]*.

[18] Raoul Mortley, in his article, identifies the primary theme of the "Gospel of Truth|" as the relationship between the act of naming and the being of the object (Mortley, 1992, p. 240). In other words, semantics becomes embodied, and language itself is granted an ontological status (Mortley, 1992, pp. 246–247). Although this remark arises in the context of a discussion on the concept of the 'name', it nonetheless indicates that the "Gospel of Truth" engages with ontological concerns in multiple ways. Also cf. Thomassen, 2008, p. 156.

[19] cf. Gosp. Phil. *This world is a corpse eater. All things that are eaten in it [die] as well. Truth is a life eater. For this reason, none of those nourished by the [truth] will die. Jesus came from that place, and he brought nourishment from there. To those who desired, he gave [life so that] they might not die* (73.20–26).

framework, *gnosis* is not merely cognitive or intellectual – it is the condition not only of knowing truth but of *being real*.

In our passage (Gosp. Truth 27.34–28.32), 'non-existence' is a metaphor for ignorance, being ignorant – it describes a state of a human/divine entity who has not and will not receive gnosis. The tension between 'existence' and 'non-existence' in the "Gospel of Truth" is best understood not as a contradiction, but as a product of (a) layered ontology – an ontology that is closely tied to epistemology, and deeply indebted to Platonic thought. As noted earlier, the text declares: *"The one who did not exist at all will not come to be"*. This statement foregrounds a radical metaphysical claim: true being arises only through knowledge of the Father – *gnosis*. Those who lack this knowledge are not merely ignorant; they are *ontologically deficient* (e.g., *Gosp. Truth* 24.30–36: *Therefore, when the Father comes to be known, the deficiency will cease to exist* (ϥⲛⲁϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲛ) *from that time on. Just as (it is with) a person's ignorance* (ⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ), *when he comes to know, his ignorance vanishes by itself* […]). This idea resonates with Plato's treatment of non-being in the Sophist (especially around 236e–241d), where the Eleatic Stranger wrestles with the paradox of speaking meaningfully about 'what is not'. Plato does not conclude that non-being is absolute nothingness, but rather that non-being is difference – the state of being 'other than' true being (Chiurazzi, 2013, pp. 47–48). In this light, we might understand the Gnostic usage of 'non-existence' as analogous: it does not necessarily refer to utter nothingness, but rather to a mode of existence that is cut off from the source, lacking participation in the fullness of divine being. Numerous passages in Valentinian texts appear to equate non-existence with ignorance, understood in contrast to *gnosis*, suggesting that this may have been a recurring conceptual motif.[20] For Valentinian 'to exist' means to receive gnosis, and 'not to exist' means to live in the state of ignorance. So, 'non-existence' is connected to the world of matter and illusion and is a metaphor for ignorance.

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[20] *Gosp. Phil.*: *Ignorance will lead to [death because] those from [ignorance] neither did they exist nor do they exist nor will they exist* (83.33–35); *Those who say that they will die first and (then) rise are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection while they are alive, when they die, they will not receive anything* (73.1–4); Gosp. Truth.: *Once those who endure all these things awaken, they do not see anything, those who experienced all these disturbances, because these things are nothing. This is the way of those who have cast out ignorance from them like sleep, since they do not consider it to be anything, nor do they consider its other works as established works. Rather they leave them behind like a dream in the night. The knowledge of the Father they crave as though it is the light. This is the way each one has acted, as one sleeping when he was ignorant. And this is the way he has come to know, as though he has awakened, and good it is for the man who will return and awaken, and blessed is the one who has opened the eyes of the blind* (29.28–30.16); *Therefore, when the Father comes to be known, the deficiency will cease to exist from that time on. Just as (it is with) a person's ignorance, when he comes to know, his ignorance vanishes by itself, just as when darkness vanishes once light appears, so also deficiency vanishes in perfection* (24.30–25.3). *Tri. Tra.*: *This is what the prophet termed 'living spirit' and 'the mind of the exalted eternity' and '[the] invisible one', and this is the living soul that has enlivened the power that was dead initially. For what is dead is ignorance* (105.22–28); *This the spirit destined when he first considered that the human should experience the great evil that is death, which is the ignorance of the entire totality, and, moreover, that he should experience all of the evil things that come to be from this, and after the impetuosities and anxieties that accompany these things, he should receive the greatest good, which is eternal life, namely, the sound knowledge of the entireties and the reception of all good things* (107.28–108.4); *They have change and constant renunciation and the cause of those who oppose them as a distinction and excellence of those who are exalted, so that is comes to be apparent that the ignorance of those who will be ignorant of the Father was their being* (127.1–8).

This form of 'non-existence' may thus be correlated with position No. 3 in the 'modes of being', which occupies a hierarchically higher level than position No. 4, corresponding to total non-being. 'Mode of being' No. 3 designates an ontological condition in which an individual remains within the material world without having received *gnosis*. Such existence is characterised by ignorance and defined by deficiency. Resurrection is best understood in relation to these 'modes of being' as it occupies a specific place within the broader ontological framework. The analysis that follows will aim to clarify how resurrection is positioned within this ontological framework.

5. Resurrection within Ontological Continuum

The "Treatise on the Resurrection" opens by framing the discussion of resurrection within an ontological framework:

> *I know that I am offering the answer in terms that are perplexing, but there is nothing perplexing about the Word of truth. But since on account of the answer he (the Word) came into the middle so that nothing else would remain hidden, but he would reveal plainly everything about existence* (ϣⲱⲡⲉ), *both the destruction of evil and the revelation of the elect* (44.39–45.11).

Here, the key term is existence (ϣⲱⲡⲉ),[21] indicating that resurrection is not treated merely as an isolated event, but rather as integral to the unfolding of divine reality. The passage situates resurrection within a broader ontological framework, linking it directly to the revelation of the Word and the ultimate ordering of being. Resurrection in this text unfolds on two levels within its ontological framework: in the material realm, where the believer attains gnosis during life, and beyond death, as the individual enters the transcendent realm of the Father. These two modes of resurrection can be described as position No. 2 and position No. 1 within the framework of 'modes of being'.

The resurrection experienced in this life, when the believer attains gnosis, corresponds to position No. 2. In this sense, the believer becomes 'more real' than one who remains in ignorance and has yet to awaken (position No. 3). In Valentinian texts, acquiring knowledge of one's true nature and the divine plan is typically understood as attaining gnosis (Kelmelytė, 2025, pp. 52–53). Sometimes it is described as revelation as in "Treatise on the Resurrection" (48.3–6: *What then is the resurrection* (ⲧⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ)*? It is the revelation on every occasion of those who have risen* (ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓϣ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲧⲁⲣⲧⲱⲟⲩⲛ)).[22] The *"Gospel of Philip"* integrates these concepts even more closely, further reinforcing the ontological connection between knowledge, truth and resurrection in a famous passage:

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[21] Peel describes a discussion regarding the translation of this word, while noticing that Zandee and Wilson translated this word as 'origin' in reference to Valentinian *terminus technicus* 'προβολή'. He remarks that this is the unlikely translation of the word ϣⲱⲡⲉ, cf. Crum, 580a (Peel, 1969, p. 65).

[22] Also cf. *Tri. Tra*. 118. 28–36. *The spiritual race, since it is like light from light and like spirit from spirit, when its head appeared, it rushed to him immediately. Immediately it became a body of its head. It received the knowledge of the revelation quickly*. On the revelation of the natures and the relationship with knowledge Thomassen, 1982, pp. 543–545.

> *Truth did not come into the world stripped naked. Rather it came in types and images. It (the world) will not receive it any other way. There is a rebirth and an image of a rebirth. It is truly necessary that they be reborn through the image. What is the resurrection? It is necessary for the image to rise through the image. It is necessary for the bridal chamber and the image to come through the image into truth, that is, the restoration* (67.10–18).

This conceptually demanding passage has been the subject of extensive interpretation in a variety of contexts, cf. Buckley, 1980, pp. 572–573; Schmid, 2007, pp. 34–37; Lundhaug, 2010, pp. 307–10. For the present analysis, however, its significance lies in the way it illuminates the Valentinian conception of reality, mediated through types and images. The passage insists that *truth* cannot appear in the world 'stripped naked', but only through *types and images*. This is central to Valentinian epistemology and ontology.[23] Since the material world is not ultimate reality, but a diminished, mediated level of being, divine truth cannot be accessed directly. Instead, it is disclosed symbolically – through sacraments (e.g., baptism, chrism, bridal chamber) and through scriptural and cosmological imagery, cf. DeConick, 2001, p. 244. Thus, images function as a bridge between levels of reality.

According to Berno, this passage addresses the doctrinal core of the "Gospel of Philip": those capable of discerning the images through which truth is disclosed are able to enter the bridal chamber (Berno, 2021, p. 183). In this context, resurrection functions not as the central theme but as a metaphor that elucidates the transition from the material to the transcendent, here symbolised by the bridal chamber. Framed in terms of the hermeneutical categories employed in this study, it might describe the movement from position No. 2 to position No. 1 within the 'modes of being'.

Resurrection, then, is not a one-time future event of fleshly restoration, but a process of moving through images toward the truth they signify. The 'image' (a material or psychic practice or event) participates in the reality it points toward, but must be transcended.[24]

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[23]   *cf.* Gosp. Phil. 84.19–22: *But the hidden things are strong and revered. But the mysteries of truth are revealed, since they are types and images. Now the bridal chamber is hidden.* Exc. (Excerpts of Theodotus) 5.9: *For all of these things being images and symbols, when the truth appeared, they were transformed. With respect to their phenomenal and corporeal (meanings) they were annulled as accomplished, but with respect to their spiritual (meaning) they were restored, the names remaining the same, but the meanings changed.* 5.15: *In a similar way, Paul the apostle makes clear that the Passover and the unleavened bread were images when he says "Our Passover, Christ, has been sacrificed," and "so that you might be," he says, "unleavened bread, not sharing in leaven" – but by leaven he means evil – "but you might be a new dough".* 6.5 *For the images and the symbols standing in for other things were good before the truth had come; but now that the truth has arrived it is necessary to do things of the truth, not things of the image.* 7.7. [...] *The essence of the unbegotten Father brought forward a twofold power, and the Saviour is an image of the greater* one; 15 *"As we have born the earthly image, we will also bear the heavenly image", of the spiritual, as we are perfected in accordance with our progress. Again, he says "image", meaning spiritual bodies.* Heracleon, Fragment 22 (Jn 4:22–23): [...] *But on an intellectual level salvation has come about from the Jews, since they are thought to be images of those in the fullness.* The sheer number of references on this imagery is immense; hence, due to lack of space, here only some examples are given.

[24]   The language of 'type and image' or 'symbol and image' is especially prevalent in texts commonly classified as Gnostic. On the one hand, it is related to the fact that material reality is understood as an image of superior, transcendent reality. Cerioni offers a particularly conceptual account of this relationship: "On the one hand, by acknowledging the correspondence between upper and lower levels of reality, it becomes clearer how historical developments happen in accordance with the celestial and eternal events concerning the divine. On the other hand, the typological resemblance becomes also a way of understanding reality, helping to fill the gap between knower and known" (2021, p. 33).

The "Treatise on the Resurrection" confirms this interpretation with this passage, which is conceptually similar to that of the "Gospel of Philip" cited above:

> The world is an illusion – lest, indeed, I pontificate about matters too much. But the resurrection does not have this kind of nature, because truth is that which is established. It is the revelation of what is, and it is the transformation of things and a migration to something new. For incorruption [pours] down upon corruption, and light pours down upon darkness, swallowing it. The fullness fills the deficiency. These are the symbols and images of the resurrection. It is He (Christ) who makes the good (48.28–49.8).

If the passages from the "Gospel of Philip" and the "Treatise on the Resurrection" are read in light of their conception of reality and the place of resurrection within it, a common thread emerges: 'symbols and images' or 'types and images' reflect the illusory character of the material realm. Ontologically, the believer must first dwell within this realm of images, yet, by recognizing their nature, becomes capable of transcending the corruptible and deficient state they represent. The resurrection is thus marked by a transition – or migration – into a new mode of existence.

Resurrection therefore unfolds as a continuum: beginning in this life with symbolic participation (through sacraments, gnosis, community life), and culminating in the full realization of truth beyond material reality. This passage shows that resurrection, for the Valentinians, is not about reviving corruptible flesh. It is about the transformation from *illusory/material being* into *true existence* (cf. ϣⲱⲡⲉ in the *Treatise on the Resurrection*). Therefore, resurrection in the material realm represents position No. 2, and resurrection in the transcendent world represents position No. 1 in the 'modes of being'.

6. Conclusion

Scholars have approached the topic of resurrection in the "Treatise on the Resurrection" from various perspectives. My suggestion is to resolve the tension not by adjusting the definition of materiality or constituents of the resurrected body, but, instead, to understand these seemingly contradictory states – resurrecting within illusion – as expressions of a graded ontology, a hierarchy of existential states or 'modes of being'. In this framework, the gnostic's condition is neither fully within the material illusion nor fully transcendent, but rather occupies an intermediary position along a continuum of being. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of how gnosis can effect transformation while the subject remains within a domain still marked by ontological deficiency.

If, as certain passages in the "Tripartite Tractate" and the "Gospel of Truth" suggest, the Valentinians acknowledge the notion of absolute non-being – such as in the depiction of divine creation *ex nihilo* – then this represents one extreme of the ontological spectrum: total non-existence, position No. 4. Moving from this absolute pole, we encounter what might be termed 'metaphorical non-existence': the condition of the material world, position No. 3. Though described as illusory (*phantasia*), the material realm nonetheless constitutes a form of existence, albeit a deficient one – its illusoriness reflects not sheer

non-being, but an ontological status lacking in truth and rootedness. A person living in such a state has not yet received gnosis.

Beyond this, we find the state of awakened existence – the condition of one who has received gnosis and undergone spiritual resurrection, yet still remains in the material realm, position No. 2. Finally, at the highest end of the ontological hierarchy stands the divine or transcendent mode of existence, fully actualised and integrated within the Pleroma, position No. 1.

The question that arises, then, is what contribution this analysis makes to our understanding of resurrection and reality in Valentinian thought. First, I have proposed that resurrection and the awakened state of having received *gnosis* can be fruitfully understood within a continuum of existence. This interpretive framework offers an alternative to existing models by integrating and extending previous scholarly insights, while also addressing the internal logic of Valentinian texts such as the "Treatise on the Resurrection" and the "Gospel of Truth". Rather than treating *gnosis* and resurrection only as binary transitions from death to life or ignorance to knowledge, this ontological continuum model allows to see *gnosis* and resurrection as nuanced steps in an ontological transformation.

Second, this framework invites a broader comparative question: how did Gnostic Christians, particularly Valentinians, conceptualise existence differently from their Christian contemporaries? When existence is viewed as a hierarchical continuum – as has been argued – the differences become more pronounced. In the mainstream early Christian thought, the material world is not typically regarded as *illusory* in the same radical sense that we find in Valentinian literature; nor is it viewed with the same degree of ontological negativity. Moreover, the dichotomy between ignorance and awakened *gnosis* has no clear analogue in the mainstream Christian soteriology, which tends to emphasise gradual moral and spiritual development, often mediated through ecclesial and sacramental structures (as in the "Gospel of Philip").

These observations underscore the extent to which early Christian groups developed divergent anthropologies and soteriologies, rooted in different ontological assumptions. By tracing how Valentinian texts position the believer within a graded ontology ('modes of being'), we gain further insight into the distinctive ways in which these communities imagined the self, salvation, and ultimate reality. The "Treatise on the Resurrection" presents resurrection as a graded event that begins in the material realm during the believer's earthly life. At the same time, the text emphasises continuity between the earthly and the celestial dimensions of resurrection, portraying them not as separate occurrences but as stages within a single, continuous process.

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