

Disembodied Minds and the Problem of Identification and Individuation

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Received: 21 November 2006 / Revised version received: 18 March 2007 / Accepted: 19 March 2007 /
Published online: 8 May 2007
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Abstract We consider and reject a variety of attempts to provide a ground for identifying and differentiating disembodied minds. Until such a ground is provided, we must withhold inclusion of disembodied minds from our picture of the world.

Keywords Soul · Disembodied mind · Individuation

Introduction

The question of whether there can be disembodied minds has been a perennial one in the philosophy of mind. A way of formulating this question might be as follows: Is it possible for there to be a mind which is in no way connected or associated with a body? Of course, what makes this an extremely difficult question is that it is not at all clear how exactly minds *are* connected or associated with bodies. Further, there has been much disagreement as to what exactly we are speaking of when we speak of *the mind*, or what we are saying when we say of something that it has a mind. These problems notwithstanding, the philosophical literature is replete with attempts (on the part of both materialists and dualists alike) to demonstrate the possibility of disembodied minds.¹ Such arguments have been quite widely criticized.² In contrast to this body of literature, this paper will present a series of arguments that raise a central question in regard to allowing disembodied minds into our ontology.

¹See, for example, Armstrong (1968), Blose (1981), Dilley (2004), Shaffer (1968), Strawson (1959), Swinburne (1997) in various places, and Yates (1987).

²See, for example, Alston and Smythe (1963), Carruthers (2004; see chapters 2 and 3), Everitt (2000), Gillett (1986), Hocutt (1974), and Tye (1983), for criticisms of arguments for the possibility of disembodied minds.

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With respect to the discussion of whether there can be disembodied minds, it will be useful at the outset to distinguish among several related questions. These are:

1. Can there be disembodied consciousness?
2. Can there be disembodied minds?
3. Can there be disembodied persons?³

The first question has to do with whether it is possible for there to be experiences or mental events occurring apart from anything corporeal; whether, for example, it is possible for there to be a disembodied pain or a disembodied after-image. The second question relates to whether, given that we can make sense of the idea of disembodied experiences, it would be possible to provide a ground for collecting or grouping disembodied experiences so that they could be said to make up a single disembodied mind or several disembodied minds. And we can distinguish from these two questions, the question of whether, given that we can make sense of the notion of a disembodied mind, it could be said that a disembodied mind is a person – that a disembodied mind can be identified with a person.⁴ It should be seen that the question of whether survival of death is possible, where this is meant to refer to a disembodied person formerly embodied, is a more complicated question than that of whether there could be disembodied consciousness or whether there could be disembodied minds, for if a disembodied mind was only thought of as a mere remnant of a person, then, “the news of the immortality of my soul would be of no more concern to me than the news that my appendix would be preserved eternally in a bottle.”⁵

In the discussion that follows, we will consider a variety of attempts to make sense of two intimately related ideas; that of there being a single disembodied mind that endures over time, and that of there being a number of distinct disembodied minds that endure over time. To begin, we will consider a view most notably associated with David Hume, a view in which experiences are to be construed as substances or “distinct existences” that can conceivably occur independently of bodies. Subsequently, we will consider the Cartesian notion that experiences are to be construed as inhering in a mental substance that is distinct from a material body. The issue to be investigated is whether, on either of these views, any principle or ground could be specified for identifying and differentiating disembodied minds.

The specification of criteria for identification and differentiation is essential for inclusion of a type of entity into our ontological framework. Peter Strawson has expressed this general requirement quite cogently.

It is not merely a happy accident that we are often able, as speakers and hearers, to identify the particulars that enter into our discourse. That it should be possible to identify particulars of a given type seems a necessary condition of the inclusion of that type in our ontology. For what could we mean by claiming to acknowledge the existence of a class of particular things and to talk to each other about members of this class, if we qualified the claim by adding that it was in principle impossible for any

³A further (Cartesian) question would be, “Can *I* exist disembodied?”

⁴Gillett (1986) briefly discusses a similar issue and, in effect, concludes that a disembodied mind should be identified with a person.

⁵Flew (1955, 270).

one of us to make any other of us understand which member, or members, of this class he was at any time talking about? The qualification would seem to stultify the claim.⁶

Peter Carruthers, also speaking of criteria for identification and differentiation, has more recently made the same point as follows:

It is these criteria that provide us with our conceptions of what basically distinguishes different things from one another, and of what constitutes the continued existence of those things through time. In the absence of such criteria, the world would be wholly unintelligible to us: we should be unable even to begin ascribing properties to things.⁷

The question of whether we could specify a criterion for determining the identity and distinctness of disembodied minds is not simply an epistemological question. It is not simply a question about whether we could find out how many disembodied there are, as if there might be some number that we just cannot know. If we could not specify a method or ground for finding out, then we could not, in principle, make such a determination. In the absence of such a ground, the idea that one could identify an enduring disembodied mind or distinguish among different disembodied minds is an illusion. Such epistemological considerations do have direct metaphysical import.

To foreshadow, the central argument of this paper relies on the principle that criteria for identification and differentiation are essential for the inclusion of a type of entity into our ontology. Assuming this principle, we consider and reject a variety of purported criteria for individuating and differentiating disembodied minds. We conclude that until such criteria are specified we should withhold inclusion of disembodied minds from our picture of the world.

The Identification and Individuation of Disembodied Minds

A fairly representative definition of disembodiment provided by Hoffman and Rosenkrantz can set the stage for this inquiry.⁸ Their account of a “purely spiritual being,” soul or a disembodied mind is as follows:

- $$x \text{ is a soul} =_{df} \begin{array}{l} (1) \ x \text{ is a substance} \\ (2) \ x \text{ is unlocated, and} \\ (3) \ x \text{ is capable of consciousness.} \end{array}^9$$

On such an account, a world inhabited by disembodied minds would be one in which the individual disembodied minds (if there be such) are not located in space, and thus do not

⁶Strawson (1959, 3).

⁷Carruthers (2004, 82).

⁸Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (1991, 183).

⁹See Tye (1983) and Yates (1987) for similar accounts of disembodiment.

have extension or spatial properties, though it would be possible to assign temporal ones to them.¹⁰

Let us turn first to the Humean conception of experiences as ‘distinct existences’ that can occur independently of bodies. Allowing for the possibility of such disembodied experiences, let us try to imagine a world inhabited by identifiable and distinct disembodied minds. We shall try to imagine mental events occurring through a series of successive moments (t_1 , t_2 and t_3 , respectively), and evaluate a variety of suggestions in regard to a criterion that would allow us to identify an enduring disembodied mind or individuate a number of distinct disembodied minds from one another. Consider the following diagram:

<u>t₁</u>	<u>t₂</u>	<u>t₃</u>
Throbbing Pain	Green After-Image	Tickle
Visual Image	Auditory Experience	Headache

Suppose we ask straight away, “How many disembodied minds are having these experiences?” Are there two disembodied minds, one having the top row of experiences across the three time intervals, and the other having the bottom row? Are there three disembodied minds, each having two experiences at each time? Are there six disembodied minds, each having only one experience? Or, is the diagram of only one disembodied mind having all six experiences? The diagram appears to be compatible with each of these descriptions. Our problem is to investigate whether any principle could be specified for determining which, if any, of these descriptions applies.¹¹

¹⁰It might be questioned whether it follows from the fact that something is not extended that it is not in space. Interestingly, Hume’s (1964, sec. 5, 516–553) response to such a query was that it would then be possible, by the addition of other non-extended things, to situate two, three or four desires, for example, in such a manner as to have a determinate length, breadth and thickness, which he pronounced as evidently absurd. Smart (1971) also considers whether disembodied persons can be said to be spatially located and concludes that they cannot. Also see Kim (1996, 48) for a list of objections to this view. We take the most powerful of these to be the following. Consider a principle like: Distinct objects exclude one another from spatial regions. It seems that we would require an analogous principle involving disembodied minds (e.g., distinct disembodied minds cannot occupy exactly the same point in space or have the same point of view) if we are to make sense of disembodied minds having a position in space. This is because it would be absurd to allow that multiple disembodied minds could occupy the same position in space at the same time. Kim rhetorically wonders, “Why cannot a single point be occupied by all the souls that exist, like the thousand angels dancing on the head of pin?” (2006, 51). In the end, Kim argues that we have no reason for accepting a principle to the effect that is impossible for multiple disembodied minds to occupy the same place. And he adds that, “we must be able to produce independently plausible evidence or give credible argument to show that the principle holds.” We agree with Kim that this is an extremely difficult undertaking.

¹¹It might be thought that the sorts of mental events being considered appear to be mental events that *prima facie* require embodiment. As such, they may be deemed excluded from experiences that could plausibly be attributed to disembodied minds, including for example, to angels or even to God. However, the same problems to be discussed in what follows occur if we substitute experiences that seem less dependent on embodiment, for example: insight into the nature of mathematical entities, anguish over the plight of mortal beings, or reverence for the beauty of creation.

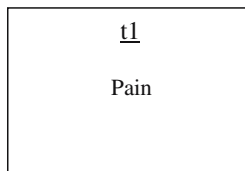
Let us first consider the question of whether a principle could be specified that would allow for a determination of there being more than one disembodied mind in the diagram. If we consider t_1 for a moment, there appears to be no reason why one mind cannot experience a throbbing pain and simultaneously have a visual image. Or consider the other moments: having a green after-image and an auditory experience are also compatible with there being only one mind; and, similarly, so are having a tickle and a headache. That is to say, if all we are given are descriptions of mental states and times at which they occur, it appears that we will not have been provided with a description of a world with more than one disembodied mind.

One way in which the presence of more than one mind could be established in our diagram would be to provide some ground or principle for determining that disembodied experiences themselves are incompatible with one another in such a way that they cannot be had by only one mind. (Let us postpone discussion of the question of whether, given that a set of disembodied experiences may be compatible with there being only one mind, it could nevertheless be urged that there may be some other ground for determining that they are had by identifiable and distinguishable disembodied minds.) So, at this juncture, let us more closely examine the question of whether descriptions of incompatible mental states can be provided that would insure that such mental states comprise more than one disembodied mind, for we can anticipate several suggestions as to how mental states may the thought not to be compatible.

Incompatibility Generated by an Appeal to Contradictory Mental States

To begin with, it might be suggested that the mental state of *being in pain* is incompatible with that of *not being in pain*, so that if at t_1 , t_2 , and t_3 there is an experience of pain and also over these time intervals an experience of not being in pain (an experience of having no pain), there is a ground for determining that there are at least two minds. This attempt rests on the *contradictoriness* of the descriptions *being in pain* and *not being in pain* to yield an incompatibility of mental states. There are two replies that can be made to this suggestion.

On the one hand, it could be argued that *not being in pain* does not specify a mental state. To say that Jones does not have a pain is to deny that he is in a certain mental state and not to attribute a mental state to him. It is to say that a list of mental states had by Jones does not include having a pain. A way to diagram a situation in which there is an experience of pain and, on this understanding of *not being in pain*, an absence of an experience of pain, would be as follows:



In such a case, we have merely described a situation in which a disembodied pain exists. There is nothing in this diagram that could provide a reason for claiming that there is more than one disembodied mind. That is, we have tried to imagine a situation in which we could speak of two distinct disembodied minds, one in pain and the other not. But, on this understanding of *not being in pain*, since no mental state is specified, we have not succeeded in describing anything that would even hint at the presence of a second mind.¹²

On the other hand, if by *not being in pain*, some positive mental state is meant, for example, *feeling serene*, this brings up a different question, namely whether a disembodied mind could feel serene and at the same time have a pain. If this is what is meant, then one can no longer rely on the contradictoriness of the descriptions of the mental states to ensure incompatibility, for *feeling serene* is not the contradictory of *being in pain*.

Incompatible Mental States that are Not Contradictories

Still, one may not be satisfied, as it may appear that the state of *feeling serene*, though not the contradictory of *being in pain*, is still incompatible with it. We can think of two different suggestions that might be made as to why *feeling serene* is incompatible with *being in pain*. First, the two might seem to be incompatible because the behavioral criteria typically employed for the application of each mental state appear to exclude one another. That is, in general when one is serene, one has a serene look on one's face and is of a quiet demeanor. It seems that the criteria for being in pain (and here we consider the severe variety, since slight pains need not ordinarily be taken to be incompatible with being serene) cannot be manifested along with the criteria for feeling serene. A person, it seems, cannot show (i.e., behave as if they are experiencing) both serenity and extreme agony.

However, in the temporal diagram that we are considering, there can be no question of behavioral criteria excluding one another. If one thinks of *feeling serene* and *being in pain* as simply feelings or experiences that can logically exist independently of bodies and behavior (as we are supposing), then no reason like this can be provided to explain why these two experiences cannot be components of the same mind. An appeal to incompatibility that rests on an appeal to the incompatibility of bodily or behavioral

¹²It should be noted that, under usual circumstances, if we know that there is a state of *being in pain* at t_1 and a state of *not being in pain* at t_1 , then we *can* conclude that these cannot be states of one and the same individual. But this is because to say that there are these states implies that there is something that has them. If x is in pain at t_1 and y is not in pain at t_1 , x and y must be different individuals. So, two mental states can only be thought to be incompatible if they are both thought to be *states of a single individual*. So a single person could not both be in pain and not be in pain at the same time. But without postulating some thing of which they are both properties, talking of incompatibility is inappropriate. If then, *being in pain* and *not being in pain* are only incompatible in a situation where we can talk about individuals being in these states, the appeal to the incompatibility of these two states must already presuppose that we can make sense of the idea of there being different, distinguishable individuals. We cannot then rely on the contradictoriness of *being in pain* and *not being in pain* to ensure that there are distinguishable individuals, for that there are distinguishable individuals is just what is presupposed by claiming that they are contradictory.

expressions for mental states cannot provide a ground for distinguishing minds in a disembodied state.¹³

Second, it might still be urged that the subjective experiences of being in *severe pain* and feeling *serene* are phenomenologically incompatible. The point here seems to be that the very feelings of each cannot co-occur, that these experiences somehow detract from one another, or that the qualitative character of each experience precludes the other. Now, of course, as things usually stand, people are not, for example, simultaneously extremely delighted and revolted. However, despite the typicality of such aspects of human experience, there are a variety of examples where two seemingly disparate experiences can be naturally said to co-occur. For example, one might feel both delighted and revolted upon viewing certain paintings, like *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* by Rubens or *Malle Babbe* by Hals. In a similar way, masochism and trichotillomania are familiar cases where people experience both pain and pleasure simultaneously. Based on these types of examples, we would urge that there is nothing intrinsic in the phenomenology of mental states that necessarily precludes them from co-occurring in the same mind.

An Attempt to Attach Being in Pain and Not Being in Pain to Separate Sets

Another attempt at using *being in pain* and *not being in pain* to yield a way of distinguishing between disembodied minds within our diagram could be put as follows. One may try to attach *being in pain* and *not being in pain* to a collections or bundles of mental states in order to make our diagram represent two minds, one in pain and the other not in pain. This could be diagrammed as follows

<u>t1</u>	<u>t2</u>
Hunger	
Green After-Image	Pain
Tickle	
Visual Image	
Auditory Experience	No Pain
Headache	

¹³It might be suggested that the behaviors associated with *feeling serene* and *being in pain* include not just bodily behavior, but a variety of associated mental phenomena. That is, experiencing pain is typically accompanied by a wish to avoid being in pain in the future and dread at the prospect of encountering future pain-inducing situations. On the other hand, feeling serene is typically accompanied by wanting to be in a serene state in the future, and pleasure at the prospect of encountering future serenity-inducing situations. With this in mind, one might suggest that if t_1 includes a pain, dread at the prospect of encountering future pain-inducing situations, feeling serene, and pleasure at the prospect of encountering future serenity-inducing situations, then there is a ground for saying that there must be at least two disembodied minds. The suggestion is that the first pair of mental states is to be included in one mind, and the second pair of mental states in another mind. However, a moment's reflection will reveal that these four mental states are compatible with there being four minds and also mutually compatible within the same mind.

Unhappily, what must be involved here is that a criterion for distinguishing between disembodied minds must already be presupposed, for as yet no ground has been supplied for the formation of two clusters at t_1 . Further, no ground has been supplied in regard to how the *pain* belongs with the top cluster and *not being in pain* belongs with the bottom cluster, and not vice versa. The intended force of attaching *being in pain* to the first set of experiences and *not being in pain* to the second set, the point of doing it, is just to supply a ground for asserting that these rows of experiences make up separate disembodied minds. But this is just what must be presupposed in order to make the attachments. That is, in order to have one set of experiences to which to attach *being in pain*, and another set to which to attach *not being in pain*, it would have to be independently established that there were such independent sets. We conclude that this attempt fails miserably.

Visual Fields

Another attempt at ensuring incompatibility of mental states might be the following. It might be suggested that we could imagine a case in which one mind's entire visual field was green and another's entirely red, in which case it would not be possible for one mind to have both of these. We believe that, although this is a somewhat tempting suggestion, it will not work for the reason that it is perfectly possible for one mind to have two visual fields, one entirely red and the other entirely green.

First, it should be noted that as ordinarily understood, and specifically used in psychology and visual neuroscience, the notion of a visual field refers to the area *in the external world* that is visible to the immobile eye or eyes at a given moment, to the physical objects and light sources within such an area that impinge the retina.¹⁴ Visual fields are measured by perimetry in terms of degrees above and below a vertical and horizontal meridian in which physical objects are detectable by a vision sensor. Thus, attribution of the notion of a 'visual field' logically requires reference to a visual sensor that captures light sources emanating from an area of the physical world. As disembodied minds are not conceived to be in space and therefore as not literally "seeing" physical objects, it would make no sense to apply such a concept to them. At best, appeal to the notion of a 'visual field' would simply reduce to appeal to the notion of a 'visual impression' or 'visual image.' Such a notion would indeed be ascribable to a disembodied mind, and could be understood as something like the experience of a totally green visual impression. However, on this understanding of 'visual field,' there would be no problem about one disembodied mind having two distinct visual fields, for there is no problem about one disembodied mind containing two visual impressions at once (for example, one visual impression totally green, and another totally red). It is important to note that "totally" here refers to the content of the visual impression, and not to the totality of the visual experience of a purported mind. To suggest that it refers to the latter would simply beg the question as to whether such a notion would guarantee distinctness of disembodied minds. This is because describing the visual impression as the totality of the visual experience of a purported disembodied mind would, by definition, preclude the co-occurrence of other visual impressions within that mind. It is obviously unsatisfactory to try to distinguish between disembodied minds simply by stipulating that the totality of the visual experience of disembodied mind A is red, and the totality of the visual experience of disembodied mind B is green.

¹⁴Smythies (1996, 369)

Interestingly, even if one takes the notion of a visual field in its ordinary sense, it can be easily demonstrated that visual fields cannot provide a criterion for distinctness of minds. This involves showing that it is possible for one person to have two visual fields. Consider the following example. Imagine a person who has two sets of eyes, one pair in the typical location and the other pair at the back of the head. In order to establish that this person has two visual fields, we could pass an object around the head and find that it is seen when it is in front and when it is behind, but not when it is on one side of the head or the other. To return to the original suggestion, we could then place this person in a room with opposite walls colored green and red, so that all that is seen in front is green and all that is seen behind is red. This somewhat visually augmented individual will have two visual fields, one entirely green and the other entirely red. This example shows that distinctness of visual fields cannot provide a criterion for the distinctness of minds, for the idea of one mind with two visual fields makes sense.

So far, we have been considering and rejecting a variety of attempts to compel a conclusion that there is more than one disembodied mind in our diagrams by appeal to the idea that certain disembodied experiences themselves can be construed to be incompatible with one another in such a way that they cannot be had by the same mind. Now, let us turn to some other suggestions as to how disembodied minds could be identified and differentiated that do not rely on the incompatibility of disembodied experiences with there being only one mind, for it could be argued that though experiences may be compatible with there being only one mind, there may be other grounds for determining that they make up identifiable and distinguishable disembodied minds.

A Causal Relationship among Experiences

Now let us return to our original diagram and consider another question. Our original diagram was as follows.

<u>t1</u>	<u>t2</u>	<u>t3</u>
Throbbing Pain	Green After Image	Tickle
Visual Image	Auditory Experience	Headache

It might be proposed that by postulating a causal relationship between the various mental states, we could provide a ground for determining that there are, for example, two disembodied minds. So, it might be suggested that if there is one causal relationship holding between the top row and another holding between the bottom row, we could then determine that there were two disembodied minds. To put this more explicitly, the suggestion is that if (a) the throbbing pain caused the green after image, and the green after image caused the tickle, while (b) the visual image caused the auditory experience, and the auditory experience caused the headache, then one could determine that the experiences diagramed in the top row make up one disembodied mind, and that the experiences diagramed in the bottom row make up another disembodied mind.

This is again an interesting suggestion. However there are several replies to be made. On the one hand, the idea that we could introduce a causal connection that would provide a criterion of individuation presupposes that there are already two distinct minds, for if the throbbing pain and the visual image were included in the same disembodied mind, it would not follow, even if the throbbing pain brought about the auditory experience and the visual image brought about the green after image, that the auditory experience and the green after image were had by distinct disembodied minds. Put in another way, even if the top row of experiences were related through some causal chain and the bottom row were related through a different causal chain, it would not follow that there must be two distinct minds, for there is no reason why one mind might not have two different series of causally related experiences.

Moreover, there is grave difficulty with the idea of appealing to the “inter-causality” of mental states to provide a criterion for individuating disembodied minds. An ordinary case of mental states causing one another that comes to mind would be something like this. A person might have a pain in their side that causes them to become depressed. If this is a model of the inter-causality of mental states, then it can easily be seen that mental states occurring in one mind may bring about mental states in another mind. For example, Mary being depressed may cause Jane to become depressed as well. If this type of inter-mental causality is possible, then we may very well make sense of the idea of mental states of one mind bringing about mental states of another mind. These considerations show that a causal relation between two mental states cannot constitute a criterion for those two states belonging to the same mind.

Genuine Memory

It might be suggested that memory is an obvious candidate for supplying a criterion for determining whether mental states are to be included within the same mind. So, it might be suggested that if, for example, at t_3 there is a “genuine memory,” *where if x remembers experiencing y , it follows that x experienced y ,* of a throbbing pain at t_1 and a green after image at t_2 , it follows that the throbbing pain and the green after image are experiences of the same mind. And similarly, if at t_3 there is also a memory of a visual image at t_1 and an auditory experience at t_2 , then it follows that these are experiences of the same mind. This scenario could be diagrammed as follows.

<u>t_1</u>	<u>t_2</u>	<u>t_3</u>
Throbbing Pain	Green After Image	Memory of Throbbing Pain and Green After Image
Visual Image	Auditory Experience	Memory of Visual Image and Auditory Experience

However, as has been widely discussed in the literature on personal identity, this suggestion clearly involves a vicious circularity, since given the stipulation as to how ‘genuine memory’ is to be understood, the condition of the memories at t_3 being ‘genuine

memories' is that the throbbing pain and green after image are had by the same mind that has the memory of the throbbing pain and green after image, and also that the visual image and the auditory experience are had by the same mind that has the memory of the visual image and the auditory experience. Put in another way, in order for the purported memories at t_3 to provide a ground for identification and individuation between the rows of disembodied experiences, we would have to understand the memories as being *real or authentic*, not merely as 'memory impressions' which are inherently fallible. But in this sense of 'memory,' "S remembers experiencing E" logically implies "S did experience E." Alternatively, if the memory criterion is offered as part of the analysis of the throbbing pain at t_1 and the green after image at t_2 being in the same mind as the memory of the throbbing pain and the green after image at t_3 , the analysis of the memory of the throbbing pain at t_1 and the green after image at t_2 will include in the analysans the experiences at t_1 and t_2 being in the same mind as the memory of them at t_3 . Thus, the notion of 'genuine memory' cannot be invoked to provide a ground for collecting experiences into the same mind, as the concept of 'genuine memory' presupposes that sense can already been given to the idea that experiences are included in the same mind. Further, even allowing the introduction of genuine memories at t_3 into our diagram, we would still be faced with having to find a way to ensure that the supposed genuine memories at t_3 are not themselves included in the same mind.

Russell's Relation of Co-personality

Let's consider another interesting and instructive attempt at providing a non-circular ground for determining how many minds there are in our diagram. Some time ago, Russell wrote the following.

... you can collect a whole set of experiences into one string as all belonging to you, and similarly other people's experiences can be collected together as all belonging to them by relations that actually are observable and without assuming the existence of the persistent ego.¹⁵

Russell never says exactly what this observable relation is. In fact he argues that it does not matter what it is. This is because "the mere fact that you can know that two experiences belong to the same person proves that there is such an empirical relation to be ascertained by analysis."¹⁶ For Russell, this relation can provide a criterion for clustering mental events into minds. However, on Russell's view, if what makes a mental event that I experience *mine* is that it is related by an empirical relation *R* to a series of other mental events, then it would be logically possible that a mental event that I experience is not a mental event of mine, which is absurd.¹⁷ This is because if *R* is an empirical relation, it would be a contingent fact that a mental event which I experience bears relation *R* to a set of other experiences of mine (which bear relation *R* to one another). It would therefore be possible that a mental event that I experience does not bear relation *R* to a set of other experiences of mine, and is therefore not mine.

¹⁵Russell (1956, 277).

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷This point is used against Russell and others in Shoemaker (1963).

Direct Awareness

Another tempting candidate for providing a ground to identify and differentiate disembodied minds involves appeal to the notion of “direct awareness.” The rationale for such an appeal stems from the well-worn platitude that if a subject *S* is directly aware of mental state *M*, then mental state *M* must belong to (be an experience of) subject *S*.¹⁸ Such a suggestion might be diagrammed as follows.

<u>t₁</u>	<u>t₂</u>
Throbbing Pain (Direct Awareness of Throbbing Pain)	Green After Image (Direct Awareness of Green After Image)
Visual Image (Direct Awareness of Visual Image)	Auditory Experience (Direct Awareness of Auditory Experience)

Here, the idea is that the experiences occurring at *t*₁ (the throbbing pain and the visual image) are each simultaneously accompanied respectively by an experience of being directly aware of a throbbing pain and being directly aware of a visual image. Similarly, the experiences at *t*₂ (the green after image and the auditory experience) are each simultaneously accompanied respectively by an experience of being directly aware of a green after image and being directly aware of an auditory experience. But what do these additional experiences guarantee? Are we really any better off with this addition to our diagram in regard to identifying and individuating disembodied minds?

The first thing to notice is that it is not exactly clear how the added “direct awareness experiences” are to be conceived. There appear to be two alternative interpretations. Either the “direct awareness experiences” are to be thought of as:

1. Logically separate experiences that occur independently and co-temporally with each experience, or
2. Integral constituents of each experience, where this implies that they are necessarily included in the same mind.

On the first interpretation, where the “direct awareness experiences” are conceived of as simply co-temporal experiences that are not necessarily included in the same mind, we would again be faced with our usual dilemma – in this case of having a diagram of eight disembodied experiences, four occurring at each time interval, with no way to individuate a particular disembodied mind and no way to assort these experiences into different disembodied minds. As in the preceding attempts at providing a ground for individuating and differentiating disembodied minds, nothing has been introduced into the diagram that could serve as a ground for doing so. On this interpretation, there could be no compelling

¹⁸Sosa (1987, 163) considers such a suggestion. He says, “It might be suggested that no soul *x* could directly experience the mental states of another soul *y* and that this provides us with the desired relation to accompany with necessity every case of diversity among souls.” However, he rejects it for somewhat different reasons than are presented here.

reason why the direct awareness of throbbing pain must be included in the same mind with the throbbing pain.¹⁹ Further, there would be no reason why the direct awareness of throbbing pain must be included in the same mind with the other two experiences at t_1 or the other four experiences at t_2 .

On the other hand, conceiving the “direct awareness experiences” as integral constituents or necessary components of the target experiences will also not work. Such an understanding of direct awareness captures a pervasive philosophical intuition that if, for example, S is in pain, then S must be directly aware of being in pain, and vice versa. On this understanding, if we assume that direct awareness of a throbbing pain is part and parcel of the throbbing pain such that it is logically necessary that if S experiences a throbbing pain at t_1 , then S is directly aware of experiencing a throbbing pain at t_1 , then of course the throbbing pain and the direct awareness of the throbbing pain would be included in the same mind. But notice that, on this interpretation, there are *not two logically separate experiences* occurring at these time intervals, (the throbbing pain and the direct awareness of the throbbing pain), the latter of which can be relied on to insure the identity and diversity of minds. And, like the case of invoking the notion of ‘genuine memory,’ it will simply be circular to urge that direct awareness of an experience insures that the experience that is the object of the direct awareness is included in the same mind as that containing the direct awareness experience. Further, as we have seen before, we would again be faced with the problem of providing a ground for maintaining that any of the experiences at t_1 and t_2 are included in separate minds.

An Appeal to Cartesian Souls to Guarantee Distinctness of Disembodied Minds

Turning now to the Cartesian notion of a mental or spiritual substance, it could be urged that appeal to the idea of a Cartesian soul might provide just the basis for identifying and differentiating disembodied minds that we have yet been unable to discover. More explicitly, the suggestion is that mental events necessarily inhere in (occur to) a mental substance or soul, and it is this necessary connection to souls that ultimately provides a ground for identifying and distinguishing among disembodied minds. Such a suggestion, which would include reference to specific mental substances or souls in which these experiences inhere, can be diagrammed as follows:

<u>t_1</u>	<u>t_2</u>
Throbbing Pain (Inhering in Cartesian Soul A)	Green After Image (Inhering in Cartesian Soul A)
Visual Image (Inhering in Cartesian Soul B)	Auditory Experience (Inhering in Cartesian Soul B)

¹⁹Interestingly, on this interpretation it would be possible that a throbbing pain might occur without an awareness of throbbing pain and vice versa. This has been a highly debated issue that need not be further debated here, as coming down on either side of the debate will not yield a principle of identification or differentiation for disembodied minds.

This diagram purportedly depicts a situation in which there are two distinct disembodied minds, one mind (Mind A) experiencing a pain at t_1 and an after image at t_2 , and the other mind (Mind B) experiencing a visual image at t_1 and an auditory experience at t_2 . Clearly, this attempt relies on an appeal to the identity and difference among mental substances or souls to guarantee that the mental events depicted cluster into two enduring and distinct disembodied minds. There are a number of responses that can be made to this suggestion.

First, the simple introduction of the notion of a *unique* mental substance or soul to generate individuality and diversity of disembodied minds would constitute an ad hoc solution to the question of whether the depicted experiences are to be included in the same or different mind. Even if we were to allow that mental events inhering in the same soul are necessarily included in the same mind, we should still require independent criteria for the identification and differentiation of souls. Such criteria cannot rely on bodily criteria; nor, as we have extensively argued, can such criteria appeal to the contents of the mental states presumably had by each soul. With no independent criterion provided for “same soul,” we have not progressed in our search for a principle for the identification and individuation of disembodied minds.

Former Embodiment

It might be suggested that disembodied minds could be identified and individuated by reference to their former bodies. This maneuver would apparently only be available for proposed disembodied minds that *became* disembodied, and consequently would appear not allow for the existence disembodied minds that lacked prior embodiment. From a Humean perspective, such a suggestion might be diagrammed as follows:

<u>t_1</u>	<u>t_2</u>
Throbbing Pain (Formerly Embodied in Body A)	Auditory Experience (Formerly Embodied in Body A)
Green After Image (Formerly Embodied in Body B)	Visual Experience (Formerly Embodied in Body B)

As depicted in this diagram, the appeal to former embodiment involves the idea that the experiences *themselves* had been formerly embodied. There are several responses that can be made to such a suggestion. First, it is important to see that this proposal has the odd (and presumably unacceptable) consequence that a disembodied mind would necessarily be limited to having only those experiences which it had when it was formerly embodied, thus precluding any new experiences. This is because, on this view, the experiences having been formerly embodied would purportedly provide the needed criterion for their identity and diversity.

Second, the appeal to former embodiment as a required ground for identifying and individuating disembodied minds would, in effect, constitute a rejection of the Humean notion that experiences are ‘substances’ or ‘distinct existences’ that could conceivably exist alone in the universe. But this is the very assumption that was needed in order to launch investigation into the question of whether sense could be given to the idea of sorting disembodied experiences into one or several disembodied minds. Thus, appeal to the

necessity of disembodied experiences having been formerly embodied (in order to try to make sense of sorting them into disembodied minds) would preclude posing the very question to which this is offered as an answer. Furthermore, even allowing that former embodiment might provide the needed ground for the identity and diversity of disembodied minds, it is not readily apparent why experiences that had been formerly embodied in different bodies may not be thought to be included in the same mind, nor why experiences formerly embodied in the same body might not be said to be included in different minds. Without providing further grounds to rule out these scenarios, appeal to former embodiment alone will not insure the identity and diversity of Humean disembodied minds.

From a Cartesian perspective, appeal to former embodiment would involve the idea that the experiences inhere in a mental substance or soul that was formerly embodied. This suggestion could be diagrammed as follows:

<u>t1</u>	<u>t2</u>
Throbbing Pain (Inhering in Cartesian Soul A Formerly Embodied in Body A)	Auditory Experience (Inhering in Cartesian Soul A Formerly Embodied in Body A)
Green After Image (Inhering in Cartesian Soul B Formerly Embodied in Body B)	Visual Experience (Inhering in Cartesian Soul B Formerly Embodied in Body B)

Such a suggestion would fare no better, as many of the points made above would apply *mutatis mutandis* to Cartesian souls. The claim that the identification of Cartesian souls rests on their having been formerly embodied would rule out Cartesian souls lacking prior embodiment. It would also constitute a clear rejection of the Cartesian notion of mental substance as being logically independent from that of material substance. Similarly, without supplementary explanation of why two or more Cartesian souls might not have been previously embodied in the same body, why Cartesian souls might not have switched former bodies, or why one Cartesian soul might not have been formerly embodied in two different bodies, appeal to former embodiment of Cartesian souls alone would not provide a principle of individuation.

Is There at Least One Disembodied Mind in Our Diagram?

In light of the above arguments, it may still be thought that there is at least *one* disembodied mind in our diagrams. Consider this highly intriguing and illustrative passage from W.T. Stace:

Suppose that two persons, A and B, expel all empirical content from their minds so as to reach the unity of pure consciousness. We incline to say that what we have left is two pure egos. But if these egos are distinct and separate, there must be some principle of individuation that makes them two distinct beings. What is the individuating

principle or fact? There is, in the first place, no difference of empirical content to distinguish A from B, for both A and B have expelled all empirical content. Nor is there any spatial division, for we are here talking about minds, not physical bodies. Mental phenomena do not occupy space. It makes no sense, for instance, to ask whether my belief in God is to the left or right of my belief in the existence of matter; nor whether my feeling of anger is north or south of my feeling of joy. But, if we suppose that A and B are simultaneously reaching the mystical consciousness, can time be a differentiating principle? There is, in fact, no difference whatever between pure ego A and pure ego B. Therefore, by the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, they are in fact identical, and this conclusion may be extended from these two individuals to all individuals in the world. There are in the universe not a multitude of pure egos, but only one. For the difference between one mind and another is solely a difference of content; and if we abstract from the content, there is no difference. Hence there is ultimately one ego, which is in all men but above all individuals; it may reasonably be called a super-ego, or a universal Self, or God.²⁰

Stace is here discussing a special case of consciousness, what he calls “mystical consciousness,” a state of consciousness reached by expelling all empirical content from the mind. However, Stace’s conclusion that there must be one ego, or universal Self, does not really hinge on the idea of mystical consciousness. As we have argued, it does not matter what states of consciousness, mystical or otherwise, are ascribed to minds in a disembodied state, it will not be possible to specify a principle of individuation by reference to the contents of the minds alone. So he might just as well have argued that if pure ego A was in mystical state M and pure ego B was in non-mystical state N, no principle of individuation by reference to the contents of these states could be found to ensure that the egos are distinct. He also suggests that time may be a differentiating factor, and so he supposes that the mystical consciousnesses are reached simultaneously. But this is also inessential. If pure ego A was in mystical state M at t_1 , and pure ego B was in non-mystical state N at t_2 , still there could be no principle supplied to ensure that they are distinct egos.²¹

In our arguments against the possibility of identifying and individuating disembodied minds, we have concentrated on showing that any choice of disembodied experiences occurring in our diagram could be compatible with there being only one mind. However, just as there could be no principle for deciding that there were two, three or six disembodied minds, there could also be no principle for deciding that there was one. And if

²⁰Stace (1967, 51–52).

²¹In this vein, Campbell (1984, 44–45) notes the following:

Atoms and material things generally, are individuated and counted by their positions. Non-spatial spirits cannot, of course, be individuated and counted in this way. But then, in what way can they be individuated and counted? If there really is no difference between one spirit and two spirits of *exactly similar history and contents* (our italics), then spirits are a very suspect sort of thing indeed.

Here Campbell is talking about two souls existing at the same time with the very same experiences and thoughts over time, and notes that they would be indistinguishable, lacking any criterion of individuation. See Shaffer (1968, 38–39) for a similar case. Of course, this is analogous to the case of “mystical consciousness” offered by Stace. However, as we have argued, the problem of identification and individuation of disembodied minds extends well beyond examples of minds in qualitatively indistinguishable states.

there could be no ground or principle for deciding that there was one, it would be just as senseless to say that there was only one!

Are Material Bodies in the Same Predicament as Disembodied Minds?

The arguments presented embrace the view that, in the absence of criteria for their identification and individuation, disembodied minds cannot qualify as a possible ontological category. In response to this type of claim, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz have suggested that material bodies are no better off than souls.²² Their argument involves consideration of two qualitatively indistinguishable bodies, *x* and *y*, along with examination of the underlying assumption that the criteria for synchronic identification and differentiation of *x* and *y* must rely on these bodies occupying different places, *p*₁ and *p*₂, respectively.

Their major argument is that, on a relational view of space, places cannot be differentiated without reference to bodies, and that as a consequence, it would be “viciously circular” to “individuate bodies in terms of places, and places in terms of bodies” in order to explain how bodies can be identified and differentiated.²³ The problem with this argument is that it covertly assumes that there is no conceptual relationship between the notion of ‘body,’ (a thing that has extension in space), and that of ‘a position’ or ‘a place’ within a spatio-temporal framework. By doing so, the argument drives a wedge between these interdependent concepts, and then demands independent grounds for relating them. However, to borrow a phrase from J.L. Austin (1963), it should be urged that these notions “take in each other’s washing.” That is, the identification of places is *not* independent from the identification of bodies and vice versa.²⁴

It might be helpful to consider an analogous account in which two notions are conceptually interrelated. (For example, such philosophically interesting notions might include those of ‘self’ and ‘other,’ ‘substance’ and ‘property,’ and ‘real’ and ‘apparent.’) In this vein, assume that, on a relational view of space and time, the concept of ‘motion’ is to be analyzed by appeal to the notion of ‘time’ (e.g., that motion is measured by reference to change in place over time) and vice versa (e.g., that time is measured by reference to the motion of objects). Given such an account, it would be perverse to demand an explanation of motion that precludes appeal to the notion of time, and then to go on to charge that an account that appeals to the interrelationships between these concepts is viciously circular. This type of account, as well as that considered above in terms of the interrelatedness of the

²²Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (1991, 201–204).

²³Ibid, 189.

²⁴Strawson (1959, 26) writes, “For the reidentification of places is not something quite different from, and independent of, the reidentification of things. There is, rather, a complex and intricate interplay between the two. For on the one hand places are defined only by relations of things; and, on the other, one of the requirements for the identity of a material thing is that its existence, as well as being continuous in time, should be continuous in space. ... There is no mystery about this mutual dependence. To exhibit its detail is simply to describe the criteria by which we criticize, amend and extend our ascription of identity to things and places.” It is worth noting that Descartes insisted on the conceptual connection between spatial location and bodies. It could be said that he defined bodies as things that take up space (whereas minds, by contrast, only take up time).

concepts of places and bodies, is not so much an “explanation,” (as Hoffman and Rosenkrantz suggest is needed), as it is a description of, often complex, conceptual connections between fundamental concepts. In this sense, such accounts are not viciously circular. Given this, the onus falls on Hoffman and Rosenkrantz to provide a concept that is interrelated with the concept of a soul or a disembodied mind that will enable us to individuate or differentiate among souls or disembodied minds. But, allowing that invoking such an interrelated concept would not be viciously circular, it is not apparent that there any good candidates for such a concept.

Conclusion

We have urged that specification of criteria for identification and differentiation is essential for the inclusion of a type of entity into our ontology. We then undertook an investigation of whether, given descriptions of disembodied experiences occurring at a particular time or over time, a principle could be specified to compel a conclusion that there was more than one disembodied mind.

In doing so, we first considered and rejected a variety of suggestions as to how such experiences themselves could be construed to be incompatible with one another so as to provide a ground for determining that there was more than one disembodied mind (we considered “Incompatibility Generated by Appeal to Contradictory Mental States,” “Incompatible Mental States that are Not Contradictory,” “An Attempt to Attach Being in Pain and Not Being in Pain to Separate Sets,” and “Visual Fields”). Next, in the search for a principle to generate more than one disembodied mind, and given that a set of disembodied experiences may be compatible with there being only one disembodied mind, we investigated whether there may be other grounds for holding that they make up identifiable and distinguishable disembodied minds. In this regard, we considered and rejected a variety of other types of attempts to provide a ground for the identity and diversity of disembodied minds, (we considered “A Causal Relation Among Experiences,” “Genuine Memory,” “Russell’s Relation of Co-personality,” “Direct Awareness,” “An Appeal to Cartesian Souls to Guarantee Distinctness of Disembodied Minds,” and “Former Embodiment”).

We then argued that the lack of a ground for determining that there is more than one disembodied mind does not warrant a conclusion that there can therefore be at least one. We conclude that until criteria can be specified for the identification and differentiation of disembodied minds, we must withhold inclusion of disembodied minds from our picture of the world.

What the arguments in this paper against proposed criteria for the identification and differentiation of disembodied minds suggest is that there is a deep and intimate conceptual interrelationship between the notions of ‘mind’ and ‘body,’ for if the identification and individuation of minds is not possible without appeal to such a logical relationship, it seems to follow that the criteria for the identification and differentiation of minds are ultimately connected with those for the identification and individuation of bodies. The discussion of this critically important topic, however, is beyond the scope of the present paper.²⁵

²⁵We’d like to thank Max Hocutt for invaluable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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