IMMORTALITY AND THE IDENTITY PROBLEM

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Through the centuries, people have speculated about life after death. In many of these discussions, including some scholarly ones, there has been a notable absence of clarity and precision. People have often seemed unaware of the need to distinguish carefully between the various concepts of survival (e.g., immortality of the soul, resurrection of the body, the process view, the existential view, and so forth) and to sort out the arguments (pro and con) relevant to each.

I intend to focus here on that concept of survival commonly known as the immortality of the soul wherein an incorporeal soul (or mind) is released from its physical body at death. During the last few decades, immortality has encountered such serious difficulties that it is no longer regarded as a viable option by large segments of the population. One of those difficulties involves the problem of incorporeal identity. This paper is an examination of that problem.

Skeptics maintain that incorporeal souls do not and cannot have identity. One avenue by which this skeptical attack comes involves the claim that incorporeal souls do not possess some characteristic which is required for identity (i.e., incorporeal souls lack a necessary condition of identity). Another avenue by which the attack comes involves the assertion that there is no sufficient condition for incorporeal soul identity, and hence that incorporeal souls can be neither individuated nor reidentified (i.e., there is no characteristic, or set of them, which would guarantee that something is a particular incorporeal soul, and which would serve at the same time to pick out that incorporeal soul over time and space). Are the skeptics correct here? We shall explore their double-pronged attack.

IS IDENTITY RULED OUT?

In any discussion of identity and survival, the obvious place to start is with the claim that the meaningfulness of disembodied existence is ruled out because bodily continuity and/or spatial-temporal continuity is a necessary condition for identity involving objects and disembodied souls do not meet that condition. Certainly this is the first major question to consider.

The attempt to prove that bodily continuity and/or spatial-temporal continuity is not (or, at least, is not clearly) a necessary condition of identity usually revolves around an appeal to certain

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well-known "puzzle cases" on the basis of which we are (presumably) led to discover that we actually believe the criteria of bodily continuity and/or spatial-temporal continuity are expendable.

We may divide these puzzle cases into three categories. Category I would include cases of reincarnation, such as the 'Bridey Murphy' story and the one mentioned by John Locke:

> Had I the same consciousness that I saw the ark and Noah's flood, as that I saw an overflowing of the Thames last winter, or as that I write now, I could no more doubt that I who write this now, that saw the Thames overflowed last winter, and that viewed the flood at the general deluge, was the same *self* . . . than that I who write this am the same *myself* now whilst I write . . . that I was yesterday.[1]

Category II would include cases of switching bodies, both in terms of metamorphosis (whereby a soul successively animates a human and a non-human body) and in terms of metempsychosis (whereby a soul successively animates two human bodies), such as those by Anthony Quinton[2] and another by John Locke. Locke writes:

> Should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon as deserted by his own soul, every one sees that he would be the same *person* with the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions.[3]

Category III would include cases where gaps exist (whether those gaps are spatial, temporal, or a combination of both) within the life-span of a single entity. C. B. Martin, for example, imagines a conversation taking place between himself and Merlin the magician.[4] He imagines that Merlin tells him that he (Martin) will disappear completely for five minutes and then reappear. A second story has to do with the same "trick" being performed on a pearl of great beauty. John Hick has produced an even more comprehensive story of this type.[5]

We do not, I take it, regard these three categories of stories as

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[1]John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Vol. I, Book II, Chapter XXVII, Section 16.

[2]Anthony Quinton, "The Soul," *Journal of Philosophy*, LIX (July 19, 1962), pp. 401-403.

[3]Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Vol. I, Book II, Chapter XVII, Section 15.

[4]C. B. Martin, *Religious Belief* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), pp. 96-97.

[5]John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 181-186.

incongruous, as we ought to if bodily continuity and/or spatial-temporal continuity were necessary conditions of identity. Of course, this does not automatically make them coherent, for we are sometimes mistaken about such things, especially when they involve extraordinary events. Still, these stories are evidence, probably very strong evidence, that under unusual circumstances we would not insist upon either bodily or spatial-temporal continuity for identity.

But if neither bodily nor spatial-temporal continuity are demonstrably necessary conditions for identity, the application of identity to incorporeal souls has not yet been ruled out. Now, we must proceed to inquire what, if anything, could be meant positively by ascribing identity to them.

Does Identity Lack Sense?

Memory

Could remembering be a sufficient condition of identity? While undoubtedly attractive, this idea faces numerous obstacles. First, as Joseph Butler put it long ago: "Consciousness of personal identity presupposes, and therefore cannot constitute, personal identity; any more than knowledge . . . can constitute truth, which it presupposes."[6] In other words, the concept of identity is involved in defining the concept of memory, just as the concept of truth is involved in defining the concept of knowledge; hence, it would be circular to attempt a definition of identity in terms of memory or a definition of truth in terms of knowledge:

Second, we would, I'm sure, be most reluctant to say that M's seeming-to-remember what N experienced made M identical with N. After all, there is always the spectre of paramnesia. (remembering too much; the opposite of amnesia) hanging over any attempt to take memory claims and ostensible memories too seriously. Both Terrence Penelhum[7] and Peter Grave argued that mental continuity cannot itself be a sufficient condition of identity. Geach puts it like this:

> Imagine a new 'Tichborne' trial. The claimant knows all the things he ought to know, and talks convincingly to the long-lost heir's friends. But medical evidence about scars and old fractures and so on indicates that he cannot be the man; moreover, the long-lost heir's corpse is decisively identified at an exhuma-

[6]Joseph Butler, "On Personal Identity," in *Body, Mind, and Death*, ed. by Antony Flew (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 167.

[7]Terence Penelhum, *Survival and Disembodied Existence* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), pp. 64-67.

tion. Such a case would bewilder us, particularly if the claimant's *bona fides* were manifest. (He might, for example, voluntarily take a lie-detecting test.) But we would certainly not allow the evidence of mental connexions with the long-lost heir to settle the matter in the claimant's favour: the claimant cannot be the long-lost heir, whose body we know lies buried in Australia, and if he honestly thinks he is then we must try to cure him of a delusion.[8]

Everything here is beginning to point to memory not being an independent criterion of identity, but being dependent on some sort of bodily or other identity. Sidney Shoemaker, in *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity,* has tried to show otherwise, but insofar as I can determine, his efforts have not been successful.

Third, sometimes, however, it is felt that these seemings-to-remember become decisive when we add a qualification such as M is seeming-to-remember *something which only N could have known or experienced.* Nevertheless, there are at least two factors that should put a damper on any premature enthusiasm for such a move.

For one thing, as illustrated by the history of experiments in extra-sensory perception, it is notoriously difficult to decide whether some particular item could be known or experienced by just one person. Geach is helpful here. He reminds us that in discussing alleged memories about things "only so-and-so" could have known:

> Our ordinary beliefs as to what 'only so-and-so can have known' are based on well-founded generalizations as to the limits of human knowledge. Regarding cases that would constitute exceptions to such generalizations, it is absurdly inconsistant to make inferences still using a premise that 'Only so-and-so can have known that.' There is a well-known story in psychical research that ought to show the fallacy of such inferences. A medium gave a sitter touching and convincing 'messages' as from the spirit of a dead friend, including things that 'only he can have known'; but the friend turned out to have been alive and in a normal state of mind at the time of the 'messages'.[9]

With respect to such memories, he again says: "In normal circumstances we know when to say 'only he can have known that'; when queer things start happening, we have no right to stick to our ordinary assumptions as to what can be known."[10]

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[8]Peter Geach, *God and the Soul* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 27.
[9]*Ibid.*, p. 15.
[10]*Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

The other factor which ought to put a damper on any premature enthusiasm is the fact that even if there are certain things which could only be known or experienced by one person, there is little reason (and perhaps no reason) to suppose that only the person who actually knew or experienced that thing could seem-to-remember it. While such seemings-to-remember might then provide some evidence for personal identity, they cannot guarantee it.

All of these remarks continue to indicate that the connection between memory and identity is such that invoking the former will not enable the latter to be comprehended any more clearly, especially where incorporeal souls are concerned. Indeed, attempts to use memory as the sole criterion of identity invariably lead to a blurring and eventually to an elimination of the distinction between actually remembering and only seeming-to-remember.

Substance

Let us now ask: "Does calling the soul a 'substance' help to provide the sought after chain of identity?" Locke, as we know, was one who argued that identity of substance is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of personal or soul identity.[11] The problem with Locke's presentation, as well as with the whole effort to employ substance to provide identity for incorporeal souls, revolves around what is meant by "substance" and "identity of substance."

What do we mean by "substance"? If we take it to mean a featureless substratum whose sole function is to be the bearer of properties, then we immediately face a dilemma, for we have just given substance itself a property (and an essential one at that!)—namely, the property of being the bearer of properties.[12] Furthermore, what could we mean by the "identity of substance"? Could it mean spatial-temporal continuity? It could not, since doing so would once more involve ascribing a property (or set of properties) to substance per se.

Substances in this sense cannot have natures or essential properties, for though there are many kinds of substances, substances themselves do not form a kind.[13] Indeed, the only way in which we can

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[11]Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* Vol. I, Book I, Chapter XXVII, Sections 10-13. More precisely, he argued that it was not a sufficient condition and, with certain qualifications, not a necessary condition. This despite his apparent belief that there is, as a matter of fact, identity of substance whenever there is identity of consciousness (memory).

[12]An excellent discussion of this topic in the thought of Locke and Leibniz may be found in Jonathan Bennett's *Locke, Berkeley, Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 59-63.

[13]*Ibid.*

(logically, not simply as a matter of fact) identify different kinds of substances in this sense is by their properties; thus, our question would not be whether subsances could exist without any properties or what they would be like if they could, but rather what those other properties must be in order to make something a soul substance and, more particularly, an identical soul substance. And if we discover that those properties cannot do the job alone, it surely follows that adding in the idea of substance as a featureless substratum is not going to be of any value.

Why have people thought that calling the soul a "substance" might be useful in establishing identity? A possible anwer is that if one takes seriously criticisms such as those Hume directs against identity,[14] one may be led naturally to search for and even to posit something absolutely unchanging to account for or perhaps to justify our identity judgments. If this is behind the attempt to use substance to insure identity, the joke is on us, since Hume's critique is itself vulnerable to attack.[15]

There is, of course, a sense in which the soul must be a substance in order to exist disembodied. As Antony Flew says: "If my soul is to survive my death and dissolution it must be, in one of the senses of a philosophically overworked word, a substance. It must, that is to say, be the sort of thing which can significantly be spoken of as existing separately and in its own right."[16] This is, presumably, also the point of Plato's contention that the soul is not a harmony (*Phaedo,* 85E-86D), for if it were, it would not be able to exist independently.

The soul, then ,must be a logical substance if it is to survive disembodied, but merely calling the soul a "substance" will not, by itself, solve the identity problem. The relation of substance to identity is well summarized by Penelhum:

> The inutility of the concept of substance is a sign of something deeper. Beyond the wholy empty assurance that it is a metaphysical principle which guarantees continuing identity through time, or the argument that since we know identity persists some such principle must hold in default of others, no content seems available for the doctrine. Its irrelevance to normal identity-judgements is due to its being merely an alleged identity-guaranteeing condition of which no independent characterization is

[14]David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* Book One, Part IV, Section 6.

[15]Terence Penelhum, "Hume on Personal Identity," *Philosophical Review,* LXIV (October, 1955), pp. 571-589.

[16]Antony Flew, *An Introduction to Western Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971), p. 138.

forthcoming. Failing this, the doctrine amounts to no more than a pious assurance that all is well, deep down. It provides no reason for this assurance.[17]

SPATIAL LOCATION

Let us move now to consider an avenue which ,though seldom explored, may hold some promise for solving the problem of incorporeal identity. As we noted earlier, a common objection to incorporeal identity contains the following argument:

(1) Spatial-temporal continuity is a necessary condition of identity.

(2) Incorporeal souls lack spatial-temporal continuity.

(3) Therefore, incorporeal souls lack identity.

Ordinarily, as we have already seen, proponents of immortality direct their energies toward proving that spatial-temporal continuity is not a necessary condition of identity. But is it not at least conceivable that one might accept spatial-temporal continuity as a necessary condition of identity and argue instead that souls do possess such spatia-temporal continuity?

What is basically at issue here ,of course, is not whether it makes sense to attribute spatial-temporal continuity to incorporeal souls, but whether doing so helps make sense out of attributing identity to them. Still, we must consider the former question before proceeding to the latter.

Does it make sense to suppose that incorporeal souls might have spatial temporal continuity? More specifically, it is not inconsistent to conjoin incorporeality and spatiality?[18] The answers to these questions obviously depend upon what one means by "corporeality" and "incorporeality" as well as what sort of "spatiality" one has in mind. While these concepts are frequently employed, they are seldom defined and often used confusedly. An instance of this confusion may be found in Flew's *An Introduction to Western Philosophy.* He notes that for Plato souls are incorporeal rather than corporeal. He writes: "People are . . . corporeal: . . . people are objects which eat and excrete, which can be and are photographed and weighed."[19] He also quotes from the *Phaedo* where Plato has Socrates say: "Do you want us to postulate two kinds of existents, the visible and the incorporeal?"[20] Yet Flew

[17]Penelhum, *Survival and Disembodied Existence,* pp. 76-77.

[18]It is this conjunction, and not the conjunction of incorporeality and temporality, that is he major source of dispute.

[19]Flew, *An Introduction to Western Philosophy,* p. 141.

[20]*Ibid.,* p. 130.

does not even notice that Plato's notion of incorporeal is vastly different from his own.

I do not want to pursue here the possibility of incorporeal souls having spatial extension, but only the possibility of their having spatial location.[21] And yet, we may be doubtful as to what it means to say that something has spatial location, but not spatial extension. The only helpful analogy I can think of is what mathematicians mean by a point.

Even so, is not the very act of endowing (or attempting to endow) incorporeal souls with spatial location an especially flagrant example of what Gilbert Ryle has called a "category mistake"?[22] Many philosophers seem to think so. John Hospers, for instance, states it explicitly:

> What kind of substance is the mind? . . . It is non-material, and as such it has no spatial location at all. . . . Anyone who said that it was either inside or outside the brain would be guilty of a category-mistake, just as he would if he attributed spatial location to the number 2.[23]

Similarly, Richard Taylor has written: "Mental processes are, by the very description that is usually given of them, not localizable."[24]

Are these confident claims decisive? I think not. Even if there are category mistakes, it is notoriously difficult to gain agreement on any interesting cases, i.e., cases where serious disagreement exists. And one reason for thinking that something is not a category mistake is the presence of sophisticated language-users who see no problem in speaking coherently about whatever is under consideration. Is any such counter-evidence available in the present dispute about incorporeality and spatial location? There is.

Some philosophers have held that incorporeal souls might have spatial location. John Locke did.[25] He thought not merely that incorporeal souls might have spatial location, but that they really did have it. His reasoning was that finite incorporeal souls (by which, I take it, he means to include human souls and exclude the divine soul) must have spatial location because they are capable of motion. He wrote: "Nobody can imagine that his soul can think or move a body

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[21]We are talking about spatial location in an ordinary sense, and not in the sense of having experiences as if from a particular location in space.

[22]Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind,* University Paperbacks (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1949), pp. 15-18.

[23]John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis,* 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 407.

[24]Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 21.

[25]Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* Vol. I, Book II, Chapter XXIII, Sections 19-21.

at Oxford, whilst he is at London; and cannot but know, that, being united to his body, it constantly changes place all the whole journey between Oxford and London, as the coach or horse that does carry him."[26] I do not wish to defend Locke's reasoning, but merely note that he felt no qualms about attributing spatial location to incorporeal souls.[27]

And though Descartes' position is more ambiguous, I believe his ordinary view was that incorporeal souls have spatial location. While his official doctrine demands that incorporeal souls lack spatial extension, it does not demand that they lack spatial location.[28] Let me cite several supporting examples. In the *Dioptrics,* Descartes speaks about "the soul, residing in the brain"[29] and in the *Treatise on Man* he states that "when the *rational soul* is in this machine, it will have its principal seat in the brain."[30] In the *Discourse on Method,* in reference to the soul, Descartes says: "It is not sufficient that it should be lodged in the human body like a pilot in a ship, . . . but . . . it is necessary that it should also be joined and united more closely to the body."[31] Similarly in the *Meditations*: "I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but . . . I am very closely united to it, and so to speak so intermingled with it that I seem to compose with it one whole."[32] These last two passages have commonly been misread as though they said "I am not lodged in my body" instead of paying attention to the phrase "not only"—which indicates that Descartes accepts the spatial location of souls.

At least some philosophers have not found the notion of incorporeal souls with spatial location blatantly incoherent. And if it is contradictory to do so, that contradiction is by no means universally apparent and will require some sort of demonstration.

A recent article by C. W. Webb[33] may be helpful here. He observes that some prominent philosophers have held that time should be regarded as extended in the same sense as space. And if they are extended in the same sense, they can be occupied in the same sense. The author proceeds to distinguish four types of spatiotemporal ob-

[26]*Ibid.,* Section 20.

[27]He made no use of this, however. Perhaps he assumed his own criterion was adequate without it or perhaps he was suspicious of its value in this case.

[28]Descartes already allows mental and physical to share some properties, e.g., temporality, and so they may share others as well.

[29]Quoted in John Morris, *Descartes Dictionary* (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1971), p. 204.

[30]*Ibid.,* p. 203.

[31]Descartes, *Discourse on Method,* Part V.

[32]Descartes, *Meditations,* Sixth Meditation.

[33]C. W. Webb, "Spatiotemporal Objects," *Journal of Philosophy,* LXVIII (December 16, 1971), pp. 879-890.

jects according to whether they occupy a finite or nonfinite (by the latter he does not mean an infinite quantity, but something like a mathematical point) quantity of space and a finite or nonfinite quantity of time. The type which interests us contains "objects that necessarily have a finite temporal size, but not necessarily a finite spatial size."[34] These are what Webb calls "quasi-temporal objects" and about which he remarks:

> Some of the entities that philosophers have recognized and called phenomenal objects, sense-data, or sensa are quasi-temporal objects. But it has been wrongly supposed that these entities are purely temporal. Not everything that has been called a phenomenal object or a sense-datum is a quasi-temporal object. . . . But those phenomenal objects . . . which are supposed to be "in time alone" and, hence, purely mental, are, I want to argue, quasi-temporal objects.[35]

One of the major stumbling blocks in conceptualizing disembodied existence concerns the presumed fact that a disembodied existent appears to be a purely temporal object. However, Webb tries to show that a quasi-temporal object might easily be mistaken for a purely temporal object:

> An object that occupies different finite stretches of time in such a way that at every distinct finite-sized location in time, it exists at only a point in space . . . will appear to be equivalent to a pure process object. It will appear to be occupying continually different times, but not to be in space at all. It will seem impossible to follow the path of such an object in space. . . . We will suppose, if we lose track of it, that it has gone clean out of existence. We will suppose that it cannot be reidentified, and consequently that it cannot have hidden aspects.[36]

Quasi-temporal objects may thus be mistaken for purely temporal objects. Webb's thesis seems quite helpful in trying to think about incorporeal souls with spatial location.

Assuming, then, that incorporeal souls have spatial location and also spatial-temporal continuity, let us recall the analogy with a mathematical point. While it would be true that in any given area, however small, an infinite number of these souls might exist, would it be logically possible for two souls to be at exactly the same place at exactly the same time?

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[34] *Ibid.*, p. 881.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 884.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 885.

If the reply is in the negative, then souls must be impenetrable. But then souls would not be as totally different from ordinary physical objects as they are sometimes thought to be. As a result, incorporeal souls might not be at any special disadvantage vis-a-vis physical objects with regard to the identity problem. Another, less sympathetic, way to put this conclusion is that such souls would no longer be the incorporeal souls in which we were originally interested, but something else, something vastly different.

If, therefore, we are led to reply in the affirmative, what follows? Let us construct mentally a space-time graph on which we chart portions of the life-spans of souls A and B. Suppose also that they meet at some point p. The life-spans of A and B have intersected. But what if the lines are extended beyond p? For convenience, the straight extension of A could be called "A'" and the straight extension of B "B'."

The crucial question becomes how, if at all, we are to link A and B with A' and B'. But let us be quite clear about what we are asking. The question is what we mean by calling two things identical, what constitutes identity, not how or whether someone like you or me could, as a matter of fact, discover an identity (or lack of it). The real issue, then, is not whether we can "get it right," but whether there is anything to "get right" at all.

I don't think we have any idea about how to apply our ordinary notions of identity to such a complex situation. Indeed, if spatial-temporal continuity were a sufficient condition of soul identity, then from the fact that A' is spatially and temporally continuous with both A and B, as is B', it would follow that both A' and B' must be identical with both A and B—which is certainly some kind of nonsense.

In this section, I have tried to show that attributing spatial location and thus spatial-temporal continuity to incorporeal souls should not be ruled out a priori because it is not positively nonsensical. Nevertheless, the line of argument we have followed suggests that this attribution does not appear to be of much assistance in establishing a sufficient condition of identity for incorporeal souls and, moreover, that this attribution may destroy the corporeal/incorporeal distinction which raised both the hopes and the problems associated with disembodied existence.

Language and Questions of Identity

C. B. Martin has emphasized the inter-relationship by commenting:

It is not easy to accept the fact that there is such an element of

> verbal legislation and linguistic convention concerning the identity of people and physical objects when their situation is described in terms of puzzle cases. We are inclined to think that our ordinary concepts of "same" and "different but exactly similar" must be ready-made for application to any situation. This is not so. They do, however, serve us admirably well in the world as it is.[37]

It does not follow, however, that we can or should apply our concept of identity to incorporeal souls (or anything else) willy nilly. After all, we presumably have good reasons for the linguistic conventions we have adopted and would no doubt insist that attempts to extend or otherwise revise those conventions must be backed by equally good or better reasons. Flew is certainly correct when he says: "We assume too early that all questions about personal identity must be straight questions of fact, even though some questions about the identity of things are decision issues";[38] that is, they are not wholly about facts, but are partly about proper linguistic usage.

Several philosophers seem quite willing to grant that we could have adequate reasons for extending our present usage regarding identity. Martin, for example, says that if it often happened that something disappeared and something exactly like it reappeared: "It would be an almost unavoidable economy to speak of them as the same."[39] In a like manner, Geach maintains:

> It would thus be a natural extension of our existing usage, supposing that we found reason to say that in some cases the same mind successively animated different bodies, to say that in these cases there was the same person, and that this person's identity survived a change of body, as we know it can survive considerable physical changes within the lifetime of one body. Anyhow, I am not going to retreat into what Professor Flew has aptly called a conventionalist sulk against such a way of talking. (He himself is surely indulging in just such a sulk when he says that it is logically impossible for a person to survive death; for saying this only records a determination, though someone rose from the dead, not to *call* him the same person, or alternatively, to go back on admitting he was dead.)[40]

Our failure to appreciate this linguistic element in questions about

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[37]Martin, *Religious Belief,* pp. 105-106.

[38]Antony Flew, "Death," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology,* ed. by Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1955), pp. 271-272.

[39]Martin, *Religious Belief,* p. 105.

[40]Geach, *God and the Soul,* p. 3.

identity stems at least partly from our belief that "there must be some chain that binds together the person of today with the very same person tomorrow,"[41] though we have ever so much difficulty trying to locate that chain. As mentioned previously, some of this tendency derives from Hume and attempts to answer him. As Penelhum has made clear:

> In spite of Hume, there is no contradiction in saying that certain kinds of things are composed of a succession of parts, and yet are each only one thing. Whether a thing can have many parts or not depends entirely on what sort of thing it is. Most things (including people) do.[42]

Further, "What kind of changes can occur without our having to say that the thing has ceased to exist and given place to something else depends on what *kind* of thing we are talking about."[43] Now, with respect to the ideas of substance and self:

> What emerges from this is that such philosophers, in inventing their fictions, are not defending the layman at all. For they concede, with Hume, that the only chance of showing there is no such paradoxical error in the layman's language is by finding the unchanging kernel within each changing thing. But the layman does not need this sort of defense, because there is no paradox in the first place.[44]

Can this talk about the inter-relation of language and questions of identity be used to save the incorporeal soul theory? Not as easily as one might suspect. The reason is simple. All of the examples which suggest the extension of identity are pointed in the direction of the resurrection theory rather than the incorporeal soul theory. Penelhum puts it well when he says:

> The doctrine of disembodied survival is not helped by concentration on the puzzle-stories of the literature of personal identity, for these at most provide an option to speak of this identity transcending the bounds of one particular human body, not of any human body.[45]

Conclusion

Our study of incorporeal identity has so far served mainly to underscore the skeptic's original claim that immortality of the soul is

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[41]Martin, *Religious Belief*, p. 96.
[42]Penelhum, "Hume on Personal Identity," p. 580.
[43]*Ibid.*, p. 581.
[44]*Ibid.*, p. 588.
[45]Penelhum, *Survival and Disembodied Existence*, p. 103.

not a viable option. While it has not been proven to be logically impossible, it has not been proven to be consistent either. But we are not yet finished. We should notice that the proponents of immortality have been placed and have allowed themselves to remain on the defensive. The skeptic has been permitted to set both the problem and the limits within which an acceptable solution must be found—a single feature of incorporeal souls (defined as possessing properties the opposite of physical objects) which would provide a sufficient condition of identity under all conceivable circumstances. Let us consider these points and their alternatives.

First, the possibility of massive duplication in the universe (and the like) has created difficulties for incorporeal identity. Yet, we ought to wonder a little about whether we must be able to identify and individuate individuals under all possible circumstances or, perhaps, only under some circumstances. Surely it must be the latter. After all, the advocate of disembodied existence is not (or, at least, need not be) trying to prove that life-after-death could occur in all possible worlds, he is only trying to prove that it could occur in some possible world—presumably our own. Now memory, possibly, and spatial location, certainly,[46] although they would not individuate in all possible circumstances, would individuate under some—including, perhaps, those which actually obtain.

Second, even if it were the case (as apparently it is not) that no single feature would ever provide a sufficient condition of identity, there is no reason to think that some combination of them would not do the job. A candidate (in very rough form) might be the following:

> If A and B are incorporeal souls, then if B, at place P_2 and time T_2, is spatially and temporally continuous with A, at P_1 and T_1, and if B's present (ostensible) memories at P_2 and T_2 are causally dependent on A's (actual) past experiences at P_1 and T_1, then A and B are identical.

It strikes me that this theory is plausible, though not without problems,[47] as a means of applying the concept of identity to incorporeal souls. Of course, I do not claim that in any concreate instance it would be easy or even possible (empirically) to decide with absolute certainly whether two such souls were identical, but then, that would seem to be true with most, if not all, of our other concepts.

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[46]For instance, the intersection problem evaporates under the permissible assumption that souls (in a least some possible worlds) do not intersect or do not intersect often.

[47]One problem involves stating the causal conditions. Compare the work of C. B. Martin and Max Deutscher in "Remembering," *Philosophical Review,* LXXV (April, 1966), pp. 161-196.

Third, the corporeal/incorporeal distinction is so imprecise as to make it exceedingly hard to determine what might be meant by terms like "incorporeal soul" and "disembodied mind." We have seen how some have tried to separate incorporeality from any kind of spatiality. I argued that it was not senseless to endow souls with spatial location, as some have contended. But I could have gone on to argue that it is not senseless to endow souls with spatial extension either. Our reluctance to conjoin incorporeality and spatial extension can, I suppose, be traced to the influence which Descartes (and the manner in which he drew the mental/physical distinction) exercised on modern philosophy.

So, it is not so absurd to talk about incorporeality and disembodiment in the same breath as spatial location and even spatial extension.[48] And perhaps the best proof that in such cases the corporeal/incorporeal distinction and the embodied/disembodied distinction do not collapse is the fact that most people at most times and in most places have spoken without hesitation or embarassment about disembodied souls being located, extended, and more.

Those who are interested in verifying this statement can do so by consulting any standard work on primitive and modern cultures.[49] Those especially interested in the Judao Christian tradition might remember that the soul has been thought of as "an attenuated material double of the body."[50] It has been said to stay around the grave and to go to a common abode . While disembodied souls were by no means regarded as complete persons, they seemed to possess certain powers. Consequently, the disembodied souls (perhaps to prevent their escape from Sheol) were shut in by gates and bars,[51] and, in the extra-canonical Book of Enoch, put in deep hollows with smooth walls. There are even indications that they needed food and drink.[52] There is also evidence that corporeal and incorporeal were more a difference in degree than in kind.[53]

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[48]Professor George I. Mavrodes has suggested that there might be two sets of "bodies" operating within the same space-time framework (wherein members of each set interact largely or exclusively with other members of their own set) such that each set would be "corporeal" among themselves, but "incorporeal" to members of the other set.

[49]For example, Mircea Eliade, *From Primitives to Zen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 177-200.

[50]George Foot Moore, *Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927 and 1930), Vol. II, p. 287. Other material may be found on pp. 279-322.

[51]See Is. 38:10, Job 38:17, Ps. 9:13, and Ps. 107:18.

[52]This notion, which often issues in the tending of graves was, as we know, even more common in other cultures (e.g., the Egyptian).

[53]See Harry F. Wolfson, "Immortality and Resurrection in the Philosophy of the Church Fathers," in *Immortaliy and Resurrection,* ed. by Krister Stendahl (New York: Macmillan Company, 1965), pp. 74-75.

But if proponents of immortality have more latitude in characterizing incorporeal souls than certain modern thinkers wish to grant, it is likely that still other ways may be found for solving the identity problem—for instance, the idea of impenetrable souls with spatial location (discussed earlier) would be available.

Fourth, although the problem of constructing a fool-proof criterion of identity is difficult in the case of incorporeal souls, this difficulty is by no means unique or confined exclusively to them. What constitutes identity in the case of ordinary physical objects is likewise perplexing (if perhaps slightly less so). In other words, it is not as if we knew exactly how to employ identity in every instance except that of incorporeal souls. Thus, if we make rigorous demands on soul identity, then we ought to make similar demands on all types of identity—a rigor which would, unfortunately, wreak havoc on every facet of our intellectual lives.

The traditional doctrine of immortality is not intellectually bankrupt. The problem of incorporeal identity can be solved, although whether the problem can be solved and how it can be solved depend very largely on the way one chooses to define "incorporeal" and the demands one places upon an identity criterion. It may be hoped that this presentation will be both an incentive and a springboard for other investigations of the complex, yet important, problem of incorporeal identity.