

An embodied life in heaven is entirely possible. Discuss.

The question of whether there is a life after death is not an issue for scientific concern, for science deals with death as the ultimate eventuality, whilst the realms of philosophy and theology deal with death as the possibility for a new beginning. Philosophy often goes beyond empirical understanding.

In order to evaluate embodied existence I will explore the philosophical theories which support it and furthermore attempt to contrast these with other theoretical beliefs which oppose embodied survival.

The beliefs of what happens to us when we are dead differ radically from religion to religion. Buddhists believe time is cyclical, that people do not simply live and die just once, but are able to be reborn a number of times before reaching their final state. Buddhists believe they will be continually reborn into this world if they were not able to achieve liberation from Samsara in their previous life. This is the continual process of birth, death and rebirth. Freedom from Samsara occurs only when a person has reached the state of mind, which is known as Nivana, or Nibbana. This literally means 'blowing out'. It describes the state of mind when people have extinguished all their selfish desires, this in turn leads to dukkha. Such a process of realisation or enlightenment would normally take place over many lifetimes.

In contrast to this, although Christians also believe in life after death, their religions teach fundamentally different ideas about what it is. The Christian belief in an afterlife is based on a linear view of time. This indicates that Christians are of the opinion that each person

will live on this earth only once and after that go on to be judged by God, "just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement"¹

For Christians there are two main theories of life after death, the resurrection of the body and the resurrection of the Soul.

The resurrection of the body is a belief that the body will remain in the ground until judgement day, when the dead are raised, complete with bodies and sent before God to be judged. "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life ever lasting"²

There are several variations of the resurrection theory, the recurring theme however, is being that the body is resurrected. This suggests that ones identity as a person is intrinsically linked to physical presence.

The resurrection of the Soul is a belief that the soul, which encapsulates ideas such as personality and self, is separate from the body and that it is the soul which goes on to the after life, leaving the body behind. This theory sees the body as a vessel which holds the identity and higher functions during a soul's existence on earth.

Within Philosophy dialogue there are two main theories of human nature that have implication for a meaningful survival after death. These are known as Dualism and Materialism.

Dualism is the belief that our soul (mind) is inseparable from our body. One proponent of dualism is Rene Descarte. He opens his second meditation by describing the extent of his doubt. Virtually every item of knowledge he previously believed in is subject to some kind of doubt. Descartes borrowed this strategy from Augustine's attempt to refute scepticism in his own day. Augustine writes, 'On none of these points do I fear the

¹ (Hebrews 9:27).

² (Apostles Creed)

arguments of the sceptics of the Academy who say: what if you are deceived? For if I am deceived, I am. For he who does not exist cannot be deceived. And if I am deceived, by this same token I am (City of God, 11:26).

Descartes concluded from this doubt that this is one thing he can be certain of and that is he is thinking, 'I think, therefore I am' (or in Latin, 'cogito ergo sum'). Descartes made a clear separation here, between the mind and the body. The mind being the only thing of certainty.

The second of these theories is known as Materialism. This theory states that our minds are inseparable from our bodies. Within materialism there is a belief that science will one day be able to access and explain all aspects of human life, for example the emotion of love could simply be a chemical reaction to physical urges. In addition to this, materialism can be divided into two schools; hard materialism and soft materialism.

Hard materialists refuse to accept that a person's characteristics are anything more than physical and therefore because of this, consciousness is nothing more than brain activity. Hard materialists conclude that because of this life after death ceases to exist.

However, soft materialists believe that some of a human's characteristics are not physical, that conscience does indeed go beyond brain activity although any activity is still linked to the physical form.

John Hick adopts a materialistic stance, however suggests that a materialistic approach can be reconciled with the prospect of external life. His paradigm of the after life is first put forward in Hick's work, 'Death and External Life' (1976).

John Hick was the first person to put forward the theory. Hick believed that it was theoretically possible that after death an exact replica of the person would be created by God therefore allowing life after death. Hick believed this will be possible because God is omnipotent therefore creating a replica will not be a problem. He argued that the

replica would be the same person as it is a perfect copy. This is not dissimilar to the Christian understanding as expressed by St Paul in the New Testament, who suggests after death God creates the perfect body of the dead person to go on to the after life.

Hick's theory makes use of the Aristotelian conception of the soul rather than the Cartesian soul. It is not dualistic. It is perfectly compatible with the scientific idea that thinking is a brain process and that a person is an informational process going on in a human body. It is consistent with computational resurrection theories. The form of the body is like a program that is realized once again by the replica. Hick's theory can also be naturalised, it does not necessarily need God's intervention. All that is needed is all physically possible universes exist, thus even atheists can believe in resurrection.

Hick is heavily criticised as the replica is just a copy of the earthly body; by definition a copy isn't the same as the original. For example; I may photocopy a document, the copy may have all the same properties and characteristics of the original document, however, the new page is simply a replica of the original. This therefore indicates that the version before death is different to the one after death. Hick defends his position by suggesting if you were to test and examine a copy both physically and mentally it would be exactly the same and therefore the same person.

Hick uses the term replica in a way that rules out a contemporaneous counterpart. The term is intended to signify the reappearance of a person, identical to a person who has died. The second person is said to be a replica of the first.

The significance of the replica theory is that it is a model that can allow us to determine whether resurrection is logical. A primary question in the philosophy of religion is whether bodily resurrection is indeed possible. If there is a model that is sufficiently similar to resurrection that is coherent, then the resurrection itself is rational. Hick claims the following situation are coherent and therefore lend support to the idea of a bodily resurrection.

‘A man A is in London and suddenly disappears. Another man B suddenly appears in New York, B, has the same memories, personality and physical features of A. they are physically and psychological the same. It is coherent to suppose that A and B are the same person for we can make sense out of a replica being who replaces a person Who has disappeared.’

Similar to John Hick, Gilbert Ryle also adopts a materialistic stance. Ryle’s “The Concept of the Mind (1949) is a critique of the notion that the mind is distinct from the body, and is a rejection of the philosophical theory that mental states are distinct from Physical states. For Ryle the traditional approach to the relation of mind and body assumes that there is a basic distinction between mind and matter. According to Gilbert Ryle, this assumption is a basic ‘category-mistake’, because it attempts to analyse the relation between ‘mind’ and ‘body’ as if they were terms of the same logical category.

Furthermore, Ryle argues that traditional idealism makes a basic ‘category-mistake’ by trying to reduce physical reality to the same status as mental reality and that materialism makes basic ‘category mistakes’ by trying to reduce mental reality to the same status as physical reality. Ryle argued that the concept of the soul leading to the belief of a separate entity, is simply a mistake in the use of human language. He argued that the soul is used to describe aspects of human nature but is not a separate entity in the same way I could describe someone as being intelligent, however this does not mean being intelligence exists outside the human condition. Furthermore, Richard Dawkins in contrast to Hick and Ryle believe there is not such thing as a soul, we are simply the calculation of the DNA. He believes through the evolutionary process and not through any define process. Dawkins does not believe we should worry about the meaning of it all nor what our place is in the universe, as we are the universe.

In addition, Plato believed that in the everyday world everything is in a state of flux of decay. The world we live in, is made up of imitation and imperfect copies of things in the external world of forms. He believed that we are able to reach and undersand the

world of forms. This is because we have a soul, which is external. The soul pre-exists the body in the world of forms and is then trapped in the human body at which point it loses all memory of its past existence. Plato's analogy of the cave introduces this concept of forms and the differences between the two worlds. The soul wants to spend eternity in the world of form of the good.

Aristotle, also adopts a dualistic approach, believing that the soul is a separate entity to the body. However, when the body dies the soul also dies. For Aristotle, the soul is more than a part of life that facilitates certain functions. A human soul, for example is a rational soul, this is what sets it apart from other types of soul. For Aristotle, all living things have souls. There are various degrees of functionality within different types of souls, in the hierarchy human souls being considered the highest.

However, for St. Thomas Aquinas, the soul is the force that animates the body, giving it life, making it different to a tree, for example. In 'Summa Theologica' Aquinas refers to the soul as the "anima" which refers to 'that which animates the body'. Furthermore, Aquinas also believes only things that are divisible are able to decay and die. For Aquinas the soul is not divisible and therefore is eternal.

As the soul has a connection to the body and experiences when the body dies, the soul is able to take these experiences and memories and identify to the next life. Bodily resurrection would seem to be reliant on the soul and the body being intrinsically linked. Theories examined, such as Hick's 'replica' theory would seem to give some support of this view point. However, when one adds to the melting pot, criticisms and opposing theories, for example, Plato and Aquinas, this concept becomes questionable. It is perhaps, therefore important to examine the concept of 'personhood' in an attempt to determine whether identity can be defined by the whole body or is separable.

There is of course the argument that appearances often help to form personality; some individuals' lives often revolve around body and image. Personality is often formed by obsession with one's own body, and reactions towards it from other people. One could

argue that nature is not in fact a product of our appearance, and therefore the physical body is required for identification purposes. The storage and retaining of memories is of course a key aspect; if they are indeed carried through to the afterlife, is it really the only component required to define 'personhood'. For people such as Penelhum, memories are the key to continuity and the only necessary attribute to identification.

Indeed memories are constant in the sense that one can never cease to bring in new information. Memories are surely a mere reminder of physical existence. Even if memory could continue after death, then new information will continue to be absorbed, and after centuries of learning new information in the afterlife, can one possibly be the same person? It can also be argued that memory is not always a necessary component to the individual. Extreme cases memory loss, or even confabulation and the recovery of 'fake' memories do not change the character or personality of the individual.

The problem which arises within continuity is whether one retains identity and continue to exist in some form. Many would respond with the fact that it is not necessary as the spirit is the only relevant issue. However, how can it be recognised as one's own spirit with no distinguishing characteristics of either mind or body? The notion of emotions and feelings surviving after death may suggest that a physical manifestation is not required. One may question why humans should need a body if God does not. However, the form of a God of classical theism may be beyond one's understanding and capacity and of course this being would be a divine one, as opposed to the mere human existence.

There would seem to be a whole myriad of support for embodied existence after death, put forward by theologians and philosophers such as Ryle and Hicks, however each of these theories are open to many criticisms, which lead to weakness in belief in an embodied afterlife. In contrast much other scholastic work suggests that the soul is the centre of humanity and it is this which can extend after death into a new life. Against this has to be considered the problems of personhood, am I more than my consciousness and do my physical characteristics in some way define me.

In conclusion most theories supporting embodied existence in the after life seem to be incoherent in that they cannot ultimately give a wholesome defence of their critics. However other theories of resurrection of the soul meet a similar criticism leaving the question of what happens after death seemingly impossible to ratify. Embodied or disembodied existence or even no existence after death is a question which neither philosophy or science seem to be able to answer satisfactorily leaving the issue as a matter of personal or religious belief.

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