

Idea of Immortality

H. Dermot McDonald

[p.17]

The thought of life after death seems inevitable. Yet when the question is framed, Is there any certainty of a further and fuller life beyond the grave? it is met by an assured affirmation at one end of the scale, and by a complete denial at the other. In between these two extremes come all sorts of ideas, agnostic, reincarnationist, annihilationist, and absorptionist.

The question of a possible after-life has become pressing through the influence of contemporary Existentialism which has made preoccupation with the subject of death characteristic of the modern mood. This preoccupation is not manifested, as W. H. Poteat has pointed out, in the mere reiteration of the fact that each one of us must die, nor indeed in the mere encouragement of us to summon up courage to face the ordeal. Although not always realised by the Existentialists, the interest is in the grammar of assertions about death.¹ It is here that the link is made with the linguistic analysts who found in a 'dark saying' at the end of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* the occasion for an investigation of the logical status of utterances about death. Wittgenstein's states, 'As in death, too, the world does not change, but ceases. Death is not an event in life. Death is not lived through.' To be sure such analysis is quite proper, for philosophy is concerned not only with the 'critical reflection on the justification of basic human beliefs', but no less with an 'analysis of basic concepts in terms of which such beliefs are expressed'.² We shall concern ourselves in the main with the first of these necessities of the philosophical programme, but we shall allude, in its place, to the analysis of basic concepts. This means that the focus will be centred upon a discussion of the idea of immortality; but account will also be taken of the specifically Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

IMMORTALITY AND THE FUTURE LIFE

First, then, we may make a beginning by noting that belief in the soul's immortality and belief in a future life are not necessarily the same. Both beliefs are, however, at one in the conviction that death in some way is not the end. Those who contend for the soul's immortality as such have tended to regard something in man, more particularly the reason or some shadowy-ghost-like duplication of the body, as that which survives the shock of death. Plato seems to have been the first to have formulated arguments for the soul's immortality conceived in this fashion. It was he, indeed, who initiated the body-soul dualism, which is held by some as expressive of the essential truth, and by others as the source of all our troubles, throughout the long story of Western thought.

In the Platonic philosophy, however, the dualism between body and soul was not that between equal partners. The body was regarded as of little account; it was the soul's temporary dwelling-place, the tomb of the eternal in man. At death the god-like element would be released from its prison-house. Plato, therefore, virtually identified the immortal in man with

¹ cf "*I will Die*"; An Analysis, *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 9 (1959); see reprint in *Religion and Understanding*, ed. D. Z. Phillips, (1967), pp. 199f.

² cf *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards and Arthur Pap (revised edition -1965), General Introduction, p. xii.

the reason. He saw the body as sharing with the things of time and sense, and therefore certain of change and decay. The intellect on the other hand, is related to the realm of unchanging

[p.18]

realities and is by its very nature able to grasp the true and the real in the realm of the perfect forms. By virtue of its essential nature the soul or reason cannot share in the fate which befalls the body. Being orientated to the higher realm of the abiding and the true, rather than to the impermanent world of the senses, the soul or reason is necessarily immortal.

The one who follows the way of reason, who uses reason to control his senses, who seeks to live by the contemplation of eternal realities and verities, rather than in the gratification of the fleeting cravings of his body, will find that at death the body will disintegrate in dust, but the soul will go marching on to its proper home in the world of the unchanging. In Plato's reckoning the very essence of the soul is its aliveness; to think of the soul as dying would be an unbearable contradiction. Plato's immortality is then that of a disembodied soul. He does in fact deem it to be his special business to give philosophical justification to the belief that the soul lives on bodiless after the house of clay crumbles in the dust. The hope of immortality shone bright for Plato and is closely linked with his most sacred aspirations. Every time he pronounced the word 'athanasia' the fall of the vowels was charged with a special intensity. But while one can catch the emotive overtones in his assertions about death and immortality their stark factuality are not thereby lessened for him. Thus in the *Phaedo* he sets about giving a 'Demonstration that the soul is immortal and indestructable'.

The really distinctive thing however in Plato's view was the conviction that the soul-element in man is simple and uncompounded. It is not made up of elements; it is a unity in itself. Body, on the other hand, is composite; it is of the nature of the earthly things. This view of Plato's dominated Western thought for well-nigh twenty centuries, and was given, under the authority of Aristotle, virtual ecclesiastical status by Aquinas, thus to become the stock-in-trade type of proof for the soul's immortality to those for whom Thomas is more of an apostolic Father than a mediaeval doctor.

The idea of man as possessing something immortal seems to be one of man's strongest convictions. And it was a major theme for Aquinas that the soul is a special kind of spiritual substance which cannot be broken up into constituent parts. The concept of the soul as a 'simple' rather than as a 'complex' substance was specially underscored by Descartes. Descartes sharpened the dualism between body and soul and so, according to William Temple, is responsible for that 'Cartesian Faux-Pas' which is the source of 'many of our worst troubles'.³ Be that however as it may, Descartes refused to have the body confused with the soul or the soul with the body: the body was one substance and the soul another. The soul is a spiritual substance and without 'parts'; and immortal because 'simple'.

The very meaningfulness of the concept of 'simple' in reference to the soul is much in question today so that the terms of the ancient argument appear pointless. 'Simplicity seems little more than a defining characteristic of the soul' declares Thomas McPherson, 'with no real cash-value of its own. Part, indeed, of what meaning it has is, I think, precisely indestructibility, deathlessness; so that to appeal to the soul's simplicity in proof of its

³ *Nature, Man and God* (1934), p. 57.

immortality is to beg the question'.⁴ I am not sure whether this objection itself moves beyond the range of a linguistic quibble. It would seem to condemn every attempt to isolate the essential nature of anything as a verbal tautology. Would not this introduce nonsense into all our discussion? Without however discussing this question further at the present,

[p.19]

it is time to take up the arguments which have been adduced as proof of man's immortality and consider at the same time the efforts made to blunt their force.

MAN'S BELIEF ABOUT HIMSELF

We will make a start by taking note of those reasons for immortality which arise from man's beliefs about himself and his future.

The generality of common men, no less than Plato and Aristotle, have found it difficult to believe in their own extinction. And this is no meagre point; for it tells us something about man as a sort of being whose own continuity he believes to be of worth. Of course the objector may cut in here with the reminder that a belief founded on one's own hopes and aspirations is nothing more than believing what one wants to believe. But is the hope for life immortal the phantom offspring of our own desires? Right well should we heed every warning against becoming the victim of our own wishes, yet the criticism that the desire for immortality no more proves its reality than the desire for food proves its presence misses the real point. For is it likely that we should ever have the least desire for food if we were not such beings that require it? If there were no food would we ever feel the hunger for it? If we are not made for eternity, however does it come that man yearns for it? How could such an idea ever have occurred to men that they are made of more than transitory stuff if they are altogether creatures born for, and bound to, the limits of earthly space and time?

THE UNIVERSAL DESIRE FOR CONTINUED LIFE BEYOND

And the universality of such a belief is an impressive fact. This is not to assert that a belief is necessarily true because it has a majority vote. We all know that there have been notions which have had in other days the widest popular acclaim and yet were later shown up as false. At the same time it is important to remember that there are instinctive beliefs common to man, as for example, that there is a right and a wrong, which hold out against the shrewdest and cruellest opposition. The critic of the soul's immortality has a lot more to do before he can claim to have shown that this idea is another of humanity's bogus beliefs. After all, it is not as if the belief was confined to the little or the half civilised. Rather, as Emerson remarks, whenever man ripens, this audacious belief is inevitable. Thus as Pringle-Pattison contends, the existence of the very general, if not indeed universal, desire for immortality, so long as it is an immortality of the right sort that is desired, may be taken as a strong argument that the desire will be met.

It will not do to say that the wish to be immortal is the quintessence of egotism, that it is an inflation of one's own sense of importance. For why should the sacred passion for the second life, to quote Tennyson's phrase, be specially selfish? Is the desire to see tomorrow's light due to man's false and futile sense of his own estimation of himself? It does not appear to be a

⁴ *The Philosophy of Religion* (1965), pp. 156, 7.

particularly ignoble thing to wish to live on into the coming day. And there does not seem to be any way of marking at what tomorrow egoism enters. Admittedly this is not quite the same thing as what is meant by a continued existence beyond the grave. The idea of a continuing life beyond, after the fashion of this-earthly one, might well be a selfish passion for prolonged existence, and a desire for such, an obsession

[p.20]

which distorts, rather than a faith which inspires. There is a dream of a life to come which empties the life that now is of reality and vitality. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin has made the point that there is a self-centred ideal of a future life which is but the egoistical extremity of 'every man for himself'.⁵

It is, to be sure, altogether too possible for the thought of a life beyond to be cherished on lines so individualistic that its effect on the life that now is, is merely to inflate one's native egoism. The tragedy here is that the conception has become demoralised; what is hoped for is an endless life after the pattern of the present one, only, of course, with every natural desire met and every sensuous craving satisfied. It is only when the notion of an endless life of a this-worldly sort gives place to that of eternal life in the kingdom of just men made perfect, does belief in an after-life lose its egoism, and free itself from the charge.

There are, however, those who have been foremost in charging believers with egoism who are themselves open to the same condemnation. There is a greater egoism which some anti-egoists display who want an immortality while repudiating belief in God, for here is an interest in one's immortality without concern for one's morality; in one's enduring life more than in one's ethical nature. J. M. E. McTaggart assured himself of his soul's immortality but would have none of God. In a letter to a friend he confessed, 'I know few people who believe as vividly in heaven as I do... but... I have no room left in my life for belief in God'. He had, his biographer tells us, a positive dislike for the idea of God. But a Godless immortality is not a heaven but a hell. For as P. T. Forsyth remarks, to worship is not to be infected with egoism, but to lose it. To glorify God is to find our soul, which is smothered in its own pursuits. It is not egoism to court an immortality which is communion with and obedience to God's absolute life. Man's chief end is to glorify God *for ever*.

So far we have been concerned with the argument for immortality arising out of man's persisting desire for a life reaching beyond the bounds of his present existence. We must now consider the evidence for immortality which is based upon man's instinctive feeling of himself as a creature of more than the passing years. Some revolt against the conclusion of Rupert Brooke: 'Death ends all things; Death is the end, the end'. They ask, would life with its heartbreak, its toils, its struggles be worth the candle if it were all to end in nothingness? To be thrown on the scrap-heap when three score years and ten have sped past, to be snuffed out—Is this a worthy end to man's story?

There are those who would have us be brave with a sort of stoical heroism and who bid us be content with what life has to offer, doing our duty without expectation of reward; and when life's task is ended to lay down one's life in the dust without repining. But somehow there is a hollow sound about such acclaimed nobleness. We do not find ourselves so easily satisfied with the triviality of a world of order whose end is disorder. The suggestion of the Marxist that

⁵ *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), p. 244.

we must altruistically endeavour to bring about the utopia of a classless society is no sufficient answer to the Existentialist counterblast of the tragic meaninglessness of existence. It was Aristotle who declared that God and nature do nothing in vain. It would seem to be worse than nothing, and vanity, for human life which has the power to transcend the present moment, to look before and after and sigh for what is not, to be obliterated into nothingness after so brief an appearance.

[p.21]

THE HOPE FOR IMMORTALITY

It is the hope of life immortal that gives to the life that is, its purpose and its poise. If there is an eternal dimension to which our present experiences may be orientated then the sense of worthwhileness is brought into our struggles. But if all come to the same end then the question does have meaning, why bother to be good, to choose, often at cost and loss, the harder way of righteousness? In the case of there being no goal except the grave then, why bother? why not let passion dictate our duty? and why not regard the maxims of justice, patience, brotherhood as so many empty words signifying nothing more than what some prefer to follow but none need? If there is no more charity and honour than this at the core of the universe, then what hope is there of such from man for his fellow-man? If the good and the bad alike perish in the dust then morality is a hollow mockery, a bugbear of human invention.

But this, it is retorted, is to make immortality serve the ends of morality; this is to make morality less than moral. We must do good, counsels Bradley, for its own sake. For this is virtue. There must be no searching for some ulterior end or object. Pringle-Pattison contends that to argue for the indispensability of the doctrine of a future life merely as a check upon our own worst passions or as a kind of police protection against the excesses of others, is hardly an adequate way of handling a professedly religious belief. Like Sidgwick, he thinks that morality can take care of itself without the reinforcing and restraining sanction of religion.⁶ I H. D. Lewis has made the point that because we are responsible beings we cannot conclude ipso facto that we are immortal.⁷ And he takes Ian Ramsey to task for the latter's well nigh equation of man's more than 'spatio-temporal' awareness as one and the same with the reality of his everlastingness.

Yet Ramsey himself is not disposed to allow much strength to the moral argument for an extended life beyond. If however a case is to be made out for the invincibility of the moral absolute then it does not seem possible to reject out-of hand the moral argument for immortality. For we are moral beings supremely and it is not therefore the mere prolongation of the soul as it is, not just the continuance of a process more or less natural, with which we are concerned. Our interest is in the immortality of our moral personality which is reared by our action, by our personal action of response. And even if we are compelled to admit with John Baillie, that at best the ethical consideration is only the minor premise of the argument, it still carries a certain quality of conviction on its own account. Should we further be disposed to accept Baillie's contention that historically speaking it was in the theological realm that the ethical consequences of personality were first discovered, this does not rob of polemical value the ethical argument for immortality. It merely means, as we shall see, that the final certitude for life beyond must be sought where it can alone be ultimately found, in the reality of faith.

⁶ *The Idea of Immortality* (1922), p. 183.

⁷ *Freedom and History* (1962), p. 309.

So far we have been concerned with the arguments for immortality based on man's desire for a continuing life which is virtually universal, and his hope for it which is virtually instinctive. We must now consider more specifically arguments consequent upon man's valuation of his own nature.

[p.22]

MAN'S VALUATION OF HIS NATURE

Certainly it is a distinctive of man to regard himself as a being of value. As long as we are not altogether blunted by greed or blinded by racialism we see the sense in Kant's dictum that man must never be used as a means to an end. He is an end in himself. Personality is a sacred thing and something of intrinsic value resides therein. Man is not as some seem to conceive of him, and treat him, merely a bearer of values, a sort of sandwich-board advertiser of goods to be had elsewhere. He has worth in and of himself. This valuation of man derives from the Christian gospel. Its central message is that man is of more value than all the world of inanimate and animate life together: What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

It is by its regard for the human personality that the moral level of any community is to be judged. To believe truly that my neighbour's personality will disappear at death and that nothing of consequence will be lost is really to exempt oneself from any present responsibility respecting him. The judgment that the human individual can lose his identity at death without anything of value being forfeited does not answer to man's deepest awareness of the truth at the heart of things. How can we esteem our fellow-man as possessing worth in his own right; and even more, treat him as such a being, if in a few years time his final goal is submergence in the abyss of nothingness? Even the pantheist's desire for absorption in the sea of universal life does not answer the demands of the situation; it merely robs the idea of immortality of meaning. For here is a negation almost as complete as annihilation; the loss of all those determining factors and features which make life significant and personal. For, as Herbert Butterfield contends, 'It is a question whether our emphasis on human personality is a feasible thing in fact unless it is accompanied by a powerful affirmation of the spiritual side of life'.⁸

THE IMPERISHABILITY OF LOVE

While some are impressed with this argument from the conviction of personality which has value, others seek to stress the idea of love which needs scope. The fact of love is, according to Marcel, the prophetic assurance of immortality. Love is the discernment in another of the imperishable. It is participation in the life of another; it is the conviction that such participation will endure and conquer death. Love abides. Death reduces a person to the status of a thing, an object.⁹ That which we love perishes before our eyes if so be that death ends all

⁸ *Christianity in European History* (1951), p. 63.

⁹ cf 'Love perceives the sense of things because it is when a thing is loved by us that we come closest to seeing it as God sees it. It is then that we see it, as it were, from Eternity, with the whole world as background to it. Where persons are concerned, what love of another gives is perception of his or her unconditional significance. To see a person as unconditionally significant is to see him as God sees him.... A person whom I love is somehow revealed to me. I no longer see him through the miasma of his mere relevance to my wants or mere usefulness for my plans and purposes. And when he ceases thereby to be a mere adjunct to my life, I, as it were, break through to him. I no longer see him "through a glass darkly". I begin to see what it means to understand as all

things. It seems rather that no final or perfect good is attainable in this world at all. Only by the sacrifice which death seals can the work of love be brought to finality. We all know only too well how hampered we are by limitations which beset us within and without. The first step to our neighbour's heart finds our foot frozen by reserve or it stumbles at his invisible fences. But in the kingdom of just men made perfect, the kingdom of God active now within history, but realised in its fullest when the sequence of human events has run its course, it will be otherwise. Then and there we will be delivered from the restrictions which keep us to ourselves and within ourselves. The barriers will be down in a spiritual telepathy and tact; and we will talk across our fences. The feature of our idiosyncrasy, the physiognomy of our soul, limits though they are, are not final limitations. They are

[p.23]

frontiers not barriers. They make for contours and characters; not for isolation. As he grows and develops the individual has powers infinitely expansible and reciprocal. As the soul grows into perfection it grows at once more capacious and more communicative. For it is such persons, and not mere individuals, that can interpenetrate. It is in this context that each has wealth to give, as he has room to receive the rest.

It is Christianity alone which has succeeded in giving to the actuality of dying this unique value. At this point other religions and philosophy in general have run to a full stop. But the significant thing in Christian faith is that here is demonstrated the final fact that 'dying' is a necessary element for the perfection of created life at its highest. Here as Oliver Quick observes, 'dying is an essential part or moment in the act through which love accomplishes the self-sacrifice which issues in eternal life. And thus physical death, in all its terrible universality, becomes for the Christian the sacrament of the spiritual truth that, because it is love which saves, life must be lost before it be fully won'.¹⁰

Love makes for the enlargement of life. It is ever reaching out towards greater fulfilment because inherent therein is a sense of transcendence. Love is a counter balancing force in that it reduces hate and nullifies destructive impulses. 'Love is a fire' says the poet-scientist Robert Bridges, 'in whose devouring flames all earthly ills are consumed.' Unless we can be sure of love's immortality, energy and zest would seem to be drained from living. It means the loss of the soul's sense of dignity, the mockery of its hidden wealth; and in the end the negation of all the things that are worthwhile. Unless we can be sure of the soul's immortality, a blight would descend upon love's lovingness and loveliness; and it would be as Tennyson says, 'Half dead to know that I must die'.

By regarding himself as a personality having eternal value and a being which can express a love which needs eternal scope man stamps himself with the hallmark of immortality.

And in addition to all this, as J. H. Holmes contends, man has endowments which require a more than temporal sphere for their fulfilment. Man has an evident over-endowment for a mere creature of this world, a surplus equipment for the adventure of his present life. Plants and animals have all that is requisite for existence upon this planet; but the outfit of man, by contrast, seems to constitute something like 'a vast over-provision' for his necessities. Man

along, from Eternity, I have myself been understood.' J. R. Jones 'Love as Perception of Meaning' in *Religion and Understanding* (1967), ed. D. Z. Phillips, p. 149.

¹⁰ *Doctrines of the Creeds* (1938), p. 213.

carries with him and bears within himself evidences which seem to suggest that he is destined for some further port than any on these shores. What he is in mind and heart and spirit, in the range of his interests and the lift of his soul, can only be explained on the supposition that he is preparing for another and a vaster life.¹¹ Holmes gives idyllic presentation of 'Ten Arguments for Believing in Immortality', all of them centred in man; on his greatness, his glory, his achievements, his hopes. It is his contention that all that is precious in the world, its beauty, its wonder, its meaning, exists in man, and by and for man.

STARTING FROM THE HUMAN END

We have been looking at the arguments which have taken their start from the human end; from what man conceives himself to be or regards himself as possessing. But there is much in the criticism that beginning in this way is to set off on

[p.24]

the wrong foot. For no argument for immortal life which takes its point of departure from an analysis of the soul's nature and interest can carry ultimate conviction. To base the soul's immortality on man's desires, hopes, and equipment do no more than inflate human selfhood. No amount of enlargement upon man's importance can ever permit us to say with confidence that he is as a consequence able to transcend death. When therefore the psycho-analysts and the speculative philosophers have had their say, the one probing man's psychical nature and the other plotting the reaches of man's mind, the idea of immortality is not removed from the realm of bare possibility. Not in this way is the certainty of life's continuity after the fold-up of our earthly tabernacle made sure. The notion of survival beyond the grave as a creed deduced from man's estimate of his own manhood, is an empty thing. It is lacking in the vital sense of reality and intensity. It is not therefore by logical deductions but in religious faith that the conviction of life everlasting finds its clear awareness and its full assurance. It would seem, then, in the last reckoning, that the only strong argument for immortality must begin from the opposite end; it should be, that is to say, theological rather than anthropological. It is, as John Baillie says, more in thinking of God than by thinking of ourselves that the certitude of our immortality is likely to be born in us.

We are not, of course, intending to imply that religious faith is therefore essentially irrational. We are merely expressing the fact, which the simplest believer knows so well and demonstrates so surely, that logic as such is not the last word in the affairs of the spirit of man. In the things which go beyond the realm of space and time, the deductions of faith's vision are no less certain because they transcend the region where text-book logic can enter. Thus to attain a surer hope and firmer conviction of the life everlasting we are not, as Baillie tells us, so much to attend to a sharpening of our wits, as to the deepening of our fellowship with God. It is, indeed, in fellowship with God Who is good that the awareness of everlasting life is given and on belief in God Who is perfect that the assurance of it is built.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

Our programme is therefore now to be more specific regarding the religio-theological argument; and then to have a look at what McPherson calls 'the many-headed empirical argument for survival' drawn from the findings of psychical research. We shall conclude with

¹¹ cf *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, ed. Edwards and Pap, pp. 241f.

some account of the no less many-headed empirical argument against a life beyond, and especially against the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body.

We may begin this part of our task by admitting that few people, if any, have ever reasoned themselves or been argued by others into a belief in immortality. There are not for eternal existence, any more than there are for the existence of God, a collection of knock-down arguments. But this does not put religion in a peculiar position. In all realms of knowledge belief comes first. The question is, then, do the facts square with the fundamental belief? It will be our contention that the reality of personal survival is alone consistent with the experience of fellowship with God which is the heart of religion.

It is, then, religion which gives the living awareness to the idea of immortality;

[p.25]

and it is theology which provides the final assurance of it. The one gives the eternal perspective to the vision of faith; and the other provides the major premise for the reasoning of faith.

The awareness of immortality is given in the experience of religion. Even Plato's famous arguments for life beyond as set out in his *Meno*, *Apology* and *Phaedo* were grounded in an already belief in his survival. What Plato was about was to give intellectual justification for this belief, which was implicit in his religion. In actual fact Plato's eschatology as it concerns the soul's destiny had its roots in the Orphic religion of which he was heir. To be sure Plato did not speak kindly of other aspects of the Orphic mythology, yet it was to the *theologi* and priests of the mysteries that he owed his strong faith in immortality. Plato's mistake was his failure to state clearly the source of his conviction. When we enquire into the grounds for his belief in continuing life, instead of leading us into the region of communion with God wherein his own faith had its origin, he confronts us with a host of philosophical and scientific speculations about the inherent indestructibility of souls.

But it is a different matter when we turn to the prophets of Israel. The more vividly alive they were to the spirituality and personality of God the more certain they were that God's interest could not be restricted to the short span of this life. The higher their conception of the personality of God, the deeper their apprehension of His spiritual nature, and the fuller their realisation of His creative power, the brighter shone their conviction that His concern for men who trusted in Him could not terminate with their existence in this world.

It is, however, in Christian faith that life and immortality are brought out into clearer light through the gospel. For here is found a fellowship with God, Who, out of His love for men, has come forth to find them, and Whose goodness works for their good. The one who has so experienced religion as a redemptive fellowship is not disposed to believe that God would make him good for nothing! The awareness of immortality, then, we are contending, arises out of religion when religion is read in terms of a living and life-changing fellowship. While the only argument for immortality which carries conviction rests upon the implications of God's goodness made actual in personal experience.

IMMORTALITY AS A DERIVATIVE CONCEPT

This means, let it be stated boldly, that the idea of immortality belongs to 'the depth grammar' of religion. Or put otherwise, immortality is not something easily deducible from an analysis of the soul's structure of human existence. It is a derivative concept; deriving, that is, from faith and disclosed to faith. The central thought about life after death is that, provided that certain conditions touching one's life here within the world of space-time are satisfied, it will be a life of intercourse with God. And given intercourse with God as an experienced fact, then immortality is entailed in the reality of it. A sure belief in immortality founds upon God. It rests, not upon the nature of man's psychic organism, but upon his relation to a Higher Other. Communion with God is the heart-centre of religious faith in the life everlasting. What man says about himself is not so important in the long run: he could be mistaken. But what God says about him is much more significant. However naively or philosophically man speaks of

[p.26]

himself his statements about his immortality boil down to this; because I am alive, I shall live. What Christian faith hears is a word spoken by One over Whom he believes death had no final mastery; because I live, you shall live also.

It may be fairly said then, that the Christian thought of immortality does not express a conclusion to which every thinking man must come if he used his wits with sufficient discernment. It is rather a fact which certain people experience in their faith in God. In the last resort then the argument for immortality is an inference from faith. For it is the reasoning of the man of faith that a being that is really embraced by the fatherly love of God cannot be destined to extinction in God's world. The one who has tasted the love divine knows it can never die. It is in the nature of God that the soul finds its anchor both sure and steadfast. This means that theology, not psychology, provides the major premise for any convincing argument for the life everlasting. Put in the language of theology this is to say; 'Whatever reason be adduced on the natural plane for the soul's survival after death, it is certain that the mode of existence imparted to the blessed in heaven is to be explained only by a continuous miracle of divine omnipotence through a gratuitous sharing of the human soul in the everlasting life of God Himself. In the next life the soul continues in existence not merely in virtue of the spirituality of its nature, but also in virtue of God's infinity, through the divine nature eternal and self-subsistent. Its survival is no longer in the created essence, but in the divine nature, in the very source of eternal life whose eternity is communicated to the blessed soul.'¹²

It would appear then that it is only by turning the arguments beginning from the human end upside down that they gain strength. It may seem all right, for example, on sunny days when the heart is tender, that the experience of love pure and loyal seems to carry within it the promise of eternity. But in the larger induction of life's ways all is not so clear; and it is not enough to say that he who knows what love is knows it will never die. For sometimes love becomes blighted, soured and quenched. We may indeed feel that love should abide; but what gives substance to the hope is the knowledge that love is of God, that He first loved us. Human love, without the conviction that love itself is a divine thing can, and probably must, wither and die. It is in God that love's deathlessness has its guarantee. This does not mean that the believer has attained; for 'Whether the love of God means anything in a man's life can be

¹² Josef Staudinger, *Life Hereafter* (1964), pp. 164, 5

assessed, not simply by his attainments, but also by his inspirations'.¹³ The love of God will get him through; the love that will not let him go.

The same, too, may be said about all our idealisms about human personality, its sacredness, its autonomy, its power to transcend the present, and the like. For it was in the theological realm that all such ideas came to full bloom. The last truth about man is not of man, but of God. As Karl Adam remarks, 'I must first reach to heaven to find man through God'. Human value is not therefore the ultimate, but the penultimate value. God and God alone is the measure of all things, as He is the cause. It is only in the transcendent fact of God that we understand man: it is here in the open possibility of a personal intercourse with God that human personality gets its significance and its worth. And it is on this reality that the claim to endure beyond the shock of death finally rests. For the religious believer the language of religion, is, as Donald Evans argues, that of self-involvement. Thus to acknowledge the living God is to declare that God is my life and my salvation. In the Bible, as Forsyth observes, the supreme interest and final ground of immortality is not the continuity of an organism, physical or psychical, but of a relationship, a relationship with God. The ground of belief is not that life must go on; but that a life in God, and especially in the risen Christ, will abide.

IMMORTALITY AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Life in the Risen Christ—here the Christian believer finds the reality of his immortality made sure. For belief in immortality, we contend, rests upon the goodness of God. And that goodness, the Christian knows, is declared and mediated through and by the person and work of Christ. It would seem obvious therefore that death could have no final hold on Him. He Who in the living present mediates the love of God in redemptive fellowship is no longer in a grave upon which the Syrian stars look down. Because He makes real the love of God, He must be alive; because the love of God is made real the hope of immortality is assured. This alone is the answer that will suffice: for here in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ eternity has set its foot in time. He has conquered death, becoming a Victor over hell and the grave, and as triumphant Lord has inaugurated a new creation, a kingdom of redeemed spirits to reign with Him for ever.

The resurrection of Christ introduces us to that 'notable break', as C. C. J. Webb specifies it, which marks off Christian faith from all others. For the Christian faith is not concerned with survival beyond death of the soul alone. The New Testament is not content with a disembodied immortality. It holds out the promise of 'new and glorious' bodies, after these present bodies have broken into dust; bodies which by their very nature are suited to the new conditions of existence. Or perhaps stated more truly, these present bodies glorified and re-created will become fit vehicles of a far higher life of the soul than it is possible now to enjoy. 'The distinctively Christian biblical commitment about the after life' says W. E. Stuermann, 'is expressed in the concept of the resurrection of the body, which entails the idea that God's redemptive activity is directed to the whole person, body, mind, affections, and other persons.'¹⁴

Thus is the New Testament gospel opposed to a naked spiritualism, and accords well with that deeper philosophy which conceives of the body, not merely as the sheath or garment of the soul, but as a part of the total person, his mirror or organ, of the greatest importance for his

¹³ D. Z. Phillips, *op. cit.* p. 78.

¹⁴ *Logic and Faith* (1962), p. 160.

activity and history. Biblical faith, then, does not merely find assurance of immortality in the experience of redemption in Christ, but here too is found assurance of the resurrection of the body. It is the total man that is reconciled. The New Testament makes it clear that Christ's resurrection, the pattern for those who are united to Him, includes the body as well as the soul. And the indwelling of His Spirit has put such honour on this frail tenement of flesh which He has made His temple, that we cannot believe that God could permit it wholly to perish. The faith that Christ has been raised was for the first believers in the gospel the starting-point of their conviction of their own resurrection to eternal life.

Only by a complete misinterpretation of the New Testament or a complete misunderstanding of its purpose can we admit C. D. Broad's contention that the resurrection of Jesus, 'a favourite theme for Easter Day sermons' is 'one of the

[p.28]

world's worst arguments'.¹⁵ For, after all, Paul's argument in First Corinthians fifteen was not just the naked statement that a man was known to have been done to death on a Roman gibbet and was buried and was seen to walk again. Such a declaration would be empty of all spiritual conviction. But when the One about Whom such a statement is made is Jesus the Son of God then the case is completely different. We are not to suppose that the faith of the first believers, any more than ours, rested upon the incredible statement that one man in the forty-six thousand billion of men who, according to experts have lived before us, somehow managed to cheat death. That is not at all the issue. The One Who was raised from the dead is One Who is known in the Christian revelation, faith and experience to be redeemingly related to man, and essentially related to God. And that is the difference that makes all the difference. Paul and the other New Testament writers never adduce the bare historical testimony for the resurrection as, on its own, decisive for belief in its reality. Always there is added the creative reality of an indirect spiritual evidence. We can therefore say emphatically that 'The resurrection is not attested in the gospels by outside witnesses who had inquired into it as the Psychological Research Society inquires into ghost stories; it is attested-in the only way by which it can be attested-by people who are within the circle of realities to which it belongs'.¹⁶ Standing within those realities, in the light of the empty tomb in the garden beyond the cross, we cannot but enter a blank contradiction to the assertion of Goethe that 'our view into the beyond is blocked up'. The faith and experience of the Christian gospel answer, 'it just is not so'.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

We must now turn to the second part of the programme set out above and enquire concerning the alleged empirical findings of the many societies for psychical research. It is not possible here, even if I were competent for the task, to set out the nature of these supposed data for post-mortem survival. We must therefore content ourselves with a few conclusions. And the first is this; some who have entered into these matters have come to regard the evidence as certainly suggestive. C. J. Ducasse, for example, who repudiates the idea that the reality of immortality is tied to religion or has any necessary connection with belief in God, is

¹⁵ Religion, *Philosophy and Psychical Research* (1953), p. 209

¹⁶ James Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel* (1908), p. 157.

impressed: so too are C. D. Broad and J. B. Rhine.¹⁷ H. H. Price is not put off by the apparent triviality of the alleged communications from the other side; he even goes so far as to suggest what it would be like to exist beyond in a disembodied state.¹⁸

On the other hand there are those who remain unconvinced by the array of supposed empirical evidence. Corliss Lamont dismisses the whole endeavour as a hopeless effort to perpetuate a pathetic fallacy. E. R. Dodds likewise is not impressed and after a critical survey of the evidence declares himself a sceptic still.¹⁹ Antony Flew seems to regard it as his special calling to have us rid of all ideas of anything beyond the present show. He protests that the programme of the members of psychical research is irrelevant to the issue. Looking out from his linguistic glass-house he shows some impatience with the hunt for empirical justification of what he contends can be neither confirmed nor disproved by such evidence. For isn't it just plain nonsense to suppose that a man can witness his own funeral?²⁰

[p.29]

Yet it must be admitted that the psychical researchers do seem to want to have their cake and eat it. What they are after is proof for the soul's survival beyond the tomb, but what they adduce as evidence is so material and bodily that we are not quite sure what is supposed to exist beyond. The 'apparitions' and the mediumistic communications picture their 'contacts' as following such human business that we are left wondering about the validity of their goings on. We know, of course, that Ducasse assures us that the after-life is just another region or dimension of the universe; but that assurance does not alter the case since he relies on sensory evidence which suggests existence of a bodily nature. And Flew would want to challenge the possibility of such evidence.

H. D. Lewis thinks that if survival after death could be proved in this way, then it would surely break through the barrier of doubt and enlist our interests more profoundly by its religious implications. But we are not convinced that this would be so. For if the idea of immortality does not arise within religion itself, belief in an after-life need be no more religious than belief that there is life on the planet Mars.

We confess ourselves unable to comprehend how strange knockings and whispering voices in the unlit gloom of a West End lounge-even if the whole performance is not regarded as a devilish hoax-can be supposed to bring sure comfort to our love, any more than it can be a firm foundation for our faith. Not in this way can the stress and sting be taken out of our anxiety for our departed loved ones. All we can get in this way is a non-moral faith, if indeed faith it can be called; because it is a future tied to our concern about others rather than one freed by the conquest of the Saviour from death's sting. Jesus certainly rejected the calls made upon Him to provide sensory signs and worldly wonders to establish His high spiritual claims. He had little interest in stampeding people into faith: and He clearly regarded the demand for material evidences as a negation of faith's own reality. As far as the gospel of Christ is

¹⁷ For a bibliography of the literature on the several aspects of the subject see *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, Edwards and Pap, pp. 266f. A. Flew (ed.) *Body, Mind and Death*, *ad. loc.*

¹⁸ *Survival and the Idea of 'Another World'*. Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (1953); and see *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, J. Hick (ed.) p. 364f.

¹⁹ Why I do not believe in Survival. Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (1934).

²⁰ cf 'Can a Man Witness His Own Funeral?' *Hibbert Journal* (1956), also 'Introduction, Body, Mind and Death' (1964). See his 'A New Approach to Psychical Research' (1953) and 'Sense and Survival', in *The Humanist* (1960).

concerned the frame of mind which desires evidences of mediumistic mumblings has missed the point and purpose of all Christ had said and come to accomplish. For if they believe not Him Who has spoken the truth of God neither shall they believe in any authentic Christian sense by the spell of the occult and the strangeness of the magical. The hopes which seek comfort in the ghosts' banalities are mocked by the trivialities which purport to come from a better life beyond.

Put quite simply—to believe in the life everlasting through the mediocre messages of spirits rather than through the moral victory of Christ is to put faith on an unsure footing. To rest our belief in life's immortality on anything less than Christ's moral revelation is to slip from the certainties of the Christian gospel into the gropings of the occult. To make the medium more than the Mediator is to have done with the finalities in preference for the tentative. It is 'in Christ' the future is given to us: and it is here eternal life is found as a reality not for the end of our days merely, but at the heart of them.

EMPIRICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST SURVIVAL

But a number of objections, spawned from the same logical root in empiricism, are urged against the possibility of post-mortem survival: and with them we have to deal albeit in short compass.

[p.30]

We drew attention at the beginning of this chapter to the Platonic and Cartesian dualism which for so long has dominated Western thought. The last thirty years or so have witnessed a notable change in philosophical thinking. The body-soul dualism has come in for severe criticism and sustained attack. The idea of man as the possessor of a non-material, spiritual soul has been subjected to rigorous analysis and not a little ridicule. It is no longer possible to hold to the notion of a ghost-in-the-machine as Gilbert Ryle deemed the ancient view to be. Contemporary analytical philosophers argue that the words we use to describe mental characteristics and operations do not in fact describe mental activities in contradistinction to bodily activities. They have reference to the empirical individual as such, to the actual observable human existence, and not to some illusive and illusory, some mysterious shadowy non-material other self.

It is argued that it is only as actual physical objects that people are identifiable; and, as far as we have any conception of, they exist as bodily organisms only. The notion of 'soul' existing apart from ourselves, as a sort of perpetual light in a lantern which continues to shine after the lantern itself has been shattered, is an impossible one. Person words, as Antony Flew calls them, are words which refer to physical organisms and have meaning only in this context. Words such as 'you', 'I', 'him', 'McDonald', 'John Brown's body', 'Mr. Jones', and the like indicate actual objects 'which you can point at, touch, hear, see and talk to'.²¹ In a sentence, 'people are what you meet'. Before we proceed further it is worth while to interject here that there is something odd in the way Flew presents his argument at this point. If people are really what you meet, however can Professor Flew be so sure of himself? For he has not had, as far as we know, what Professor H. H. Price referred to as one of those out-of-body experiences in which he has seen his own body from the outside. He has not, that is to say, met himself in the

²¹ 21 cf *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (1955), ed. A. Flew and A. MacIntyre, p. 269.

way required by his own thesis. And it would be as disconcerting to meet one's self as to witness one's own funeral.

The general empirical argument against survival has three main thrusts: and it will make for clarity if these are singled out and dealt with separately.

A. The first may be baldly stated like this: the immortality of a naked bodiless soul is inconceivable, therefore the reality is impossible. We are bidden to make clear what we mean by a disembodied soul. We are asked, Is not the notion of a soul-less body beyond our comprehension?

For the moment we are concerned with the bare argument from inconceivability. I must acknowledge that I find difficulty myself in thinking about a simple spiritual substance. That may however well be a fault in my own mental equipment, for others do not appear to suffer from the same handicap. Professor Price, for one, not only believes that disembodiment does not involve the destruction of personal identity, but he is prepared to argue the issue. And argue it he does with a good deal of cogency and conviction. The feeling of liveness, he contends, does not at all depend upon somatic appendages. And he pictures the after-world to be an 'imagy', but not an imaginary one. For this reason he suggests that it may well be that idealist metaphysicians have given us a substantially correct view of the next world, though a mistaken one of this. He does not see any reason why we should not be 'as much alive', or at least feel as much alive, in an image-world as we do in the present material world, which we perceive by means of our sense organs.²²

[p.31]

Professor Ewing too does not accept as final the argument from inconceivability. Contending that it is not possible to give a philosophical disproof of survival, he goes on to urge that if there are good religious, ethical and empirical reasons for accepting survival then the apparent dependence of mind on body will need to be understood in the light of these facts. He seems to allow that there are no insuperable difficulties in conceiving of a mind without a body, and, he adds 'if we are unable to see this we must not claim that it could not do without one after death'. Ewing does however suggest that a bodiless soul is not a likely form of survival. He prefers to see some sort of bodily existence beyond the grave.²³ But be this as it may, the point to emphasise now is that to reject survival on the score of inconceivability is to charge those who claim that they can conceive of it with speaking falsely. And that is, to say the least, somewhat ungenerous.

B. Another thrust of the anti-survivalists takes the form that since the idea of immortality is unverifiable the proposition is meaningless. The objection can be pressed from two angles according to whether the emphasis is put on the empirical or the linguistic demand.

²² cf 'Personal Survival and the Idea of Another World' in *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the philosophy of Religion*, ed. J. Hick (1964), pp. 364f.

²³ *The Fundamental Questions of Philosophy* (1951), p. 133f. cf 'I cannot understand how Strawson can claim that no identification of bodiless entities is ever possible after having written the brilliant chapter on "Sounds" (the second chapter of *Individuals*), in which he does precisely this, i.e., creates a model of identifiable bodiless entities.' 'Sensations, Raw feels, and Other Minds' by E. M. Zemach, *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. xx, No. 2, December 1966, p. 333.

The first takes the line that the collapse of the dualistic psychology has made belief in a life beyond the grave impossible since the human individual is not to be conceived, as Pringle-Pattison contended years before Gilbert Ryle, as 'a mechanical union of a corpse with a ghost'. But whereas Pringle-Pattison sought to modify such a crude dualistic conception to make immortality the more sure, recent writers have abandoned all dualistic notions to render survival impossible. In its place we have what goes by a variety of names, the monistic, the naturalistic, the physicalist or the identity theory, all of which boil down to the view that human consciousness could not survive the crisis of death because its essential realities, self-awareness, memory and the like, are bodily conditions only. There is an inseparable co-existence between body and personality. The mind is completely bound up with the physical organism and the connection is so intimate and inclusive between them that thought cannot be conceived to exist without its this-earthly biological base. It is in fact the body which thinks.

This view is sometimes expressed from a more scientific and sometimes from a more philosophical stand-point. The older materialism running back to Democritus was given classical statement by La Mettrie in the first half of the eighteenth century. Man is 'a self-winding machine'; Man is what one sees; and what is termed 'soul' is but sentient matter. The view was elaborated by Baron Holbach in his *System of Nature* published in 1770. He sees 'Man's life' as a product of 'nature', and thus 'connected to universal laws' compelled to meet the destiny imposed upon him. Feuerbach gave a distinctive twist to this materialistic view of man. He concluded that man is a complex of organic matter although he allowed him to be a unique kind of being. He is unique because he can encounter reality in an I-thou relation. But more particularly does he emphasise the idea of thought as the result of a relationship between persons. This conception of 'I-thou' has become, of course, characteristic of modern personalism and existentialism, but Feuerbach regarded the encounter and bond between men as events within the physical realm of the senses alone. For him, therefore, the real is what is related to the senses; and the body and soul 'substances' merely abstractions isolated by the activity of the reason. To ask how they affect each other is consequently a meaningless question. The soul is but another way of speaking of

[p.32]

the expression of a man's individuality. Man is merely a material-organic being existing within the context of human interrelations. He exists as a psychological object and a physiological object to be sure; but not in any dualistic sense. I am a psychological object 'for myself', but a physiological one 'for others'; but these are merely two ways of knowing. The idea that I am a spiritual essence distinct from a body is a delusion created by taking the subjective way of looking at things as expressive of a separate reality.

One after another has proposed a view of man which denies to him anything beyond the material. A recent elaborate statement is that of D. M. Armstrong who argues that mental states are purely physical activities. He pronounces the conviction that it is scientifically demonstrable that there is nothing beyond brain states, so that we must accept as conclusive that mind is but a function of the brain.²⁴ Some have gone so far as to claim that the identity theory is so well proven that it must be accepted as a psychological law. And when no small number of philosophers join in loud chorus that the idea of a substantial soul is out for good what can the uncritical man-in-the-street do but bow in acknowledgement that it must be so.

²⁴ Cf. 'A Materialist Theory of Mind' (1968), pp. 49-66 cf 'Materialism and the Mind-Body Problem'. P. Feyerabend, *The Review of Metaphysics*, xvii, 1 September 1966.

But is the situation as assured as is made out to be? Is the case for survival so desperate that to whisper a protest is to be written off as outmoded? Maybe it is not so. For does it not seem clear that the most that can be established by observation and experiment is that there is a certain empirical correlation between, what William James calls, brain-states and mind-states. If indeed there were an absolute identity between a man's thinking and his brain then they must surely be both subject to the same conditions. But they obviously are not: for although the body is bound by factors of space and time our thoughts are not. Thoughts wander. Speaking generally we may say with Bergson, that mind overflows brain. A. J. Ayer to be sure regards talk about minds and talk about bodies as different ways of classifying and interpreting our experiences, but he acknowledges the serious philosophical difficulty in specifying how far statements about people's so-called mental processes are equivalent to statements about their observable behaviour. Yet even he cannot help making some sort of a distinction in that which is fundamental to one's behaviour.²⁵

Thoughts, it is argued, are mental events. But surely we do not speak of thoughts 'occurring' in the manner that bodily events do. But if they are aspects of the same somatic activity it would be consistent to regard them in this way. We usually advance ideas because they purport to be true: and without committing ourselves to any theory of truth, it would seem that we advance ideas because we regard them as in some way corresponding to reality. We do not however refer to bodily occurrences in that way. Bodily occurrences are 'facts', but they are not spoken of as 'true' precisely because they just do not, and cannot assert anything other than themselves. But if the physicalist theory were 'true' then it would appear to be meaningless to speak of 'thought' as 'true'. This looks an odd sort of conclusion. And especially is it so when the physicalist theory itself is advanced as a 'true' account of the facts. For in this case all it turns out to be is the bodily event of some one or other which, if correct, is only the result of the peculiar behaviour of that organism. And there can be no way of knowing that it is correct. The thesis then that thought and personality are alike explicable in physical terms and subject to the same physical conditions just does not hold.

[p.33]

Professor J. J. C. Smart contends that the physicalist theory is to be recommended on the grounds of 'parsimony'. Smart wants to apply the principle of Occam's razor so as to reduce the ancient dualism to a monism. But Professor Smart can only advocate his theory by contradicting the very principle he uses to secure it. To rebut the criticism that the physicalist doctrine must regard the one nervous system as undergoing all sorts of contortions to perform so many different activities, Professor Smart states 'that we have to consider not one nervous system, but a group of such "machines", the machines in this group regulate their behaviour according to certain rules. It might be explained physiologically how of two different in the structure of their nervous systems no two such machines were likely to produce the same sorts of shape when they wielded a pen'.²⁶ Is this really a law of simplicity or of complexity? It claims to be a law of parsimony, but it very much looks like a law of prodigality. And why not one 'group of engines' produce a physicalist theory and another a spiritualist one in the same or different individuals? Smart's theory of a group of engines is not essentially different

²⁵ cf Body, *Mind and Death*, ed. Flew, esp. p. 244.

²⁶ See 'Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society', *Supplementary Volume*, xxxviii, 1964, cf *The Philosophical Review*, lxxviii, 2 (April 1959), pp. 141-156. cf *Body and Mind*, ed. G. N. A. Vesey (1964), Ch. 39. 'Physicalism,' by Thomas Nagel, *The Philosophical Review*, lxxiv, 3 (July 1965), pp. 339-356. 'The Logic of the Identity Theory,' R. Brandt and J. Kim, *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. lxiv, no. 17 (September, 1967), pp. 515-537.

from the ancient materialist Laucetius who like Smart admitted that he could not explain 'the secret causes of the differences' in behaviour except by postulating a 'multiplicity of atomic shapes' for which he cannot account.

U. T. Place asserts that the 'statement "consciousness is a process in the brain", although not necessarily true, is not necessarily false'.²⁷ This is hardly a reassuring introduction: yet he goes on to maintain that it is a 'reasonable scientific hypothesis'. But can the terms of the proposition that 'consciousness is a process in the brain, although not necessarily true, is not necessarily false' have any real meaning on the supposition that it is in fact a brain process only? At the close of his article he expresses his thanks to Professor Smart 'for the moral support and encouragement in what often seemed a lost cause'.²⁷ But then is not Professor Smart's 'moral' support a mere complication of some sort of physical structures? And it would be interesting to know which 'engine' worked in this case, or whether it took a whole 'group'. To get such an astonishing result must surely have been the result of group action.

Yet while the dualistic theory which for so long dominated Western thought is quite out of favour and perhaps has no chance of being revived there may be ways of constructing the present vogue for the 'psychosomatic unity' of the human individual so as to allow for the possibility of the continuing life beyond. There is, for example, the 'hypophenomenalism' elaborated by Professor Ducasse.²⁸ Ducasse examines the initial assumption against survival with which we are concerned. It is the tacit assertion that 'to be real is to be material'. The world is so much with us that we tend to take the perceptually public world of which we are aware by our senses as the totality of reality. By so doing we turn an appropriate method of investigating the material world into a metaphysical doctrine of ultimate reality. But this is to err. For the very perceiving of material objects we, at the same time, interpret; our sensations are signs of a something other than themselves. Thus physical objects are as one removed, which is to say they are extra-mental postulated realities. Sensations themselves and mental states are observed at firsthand, directly and literally. And what is direct and literal is the ultimately real.

Professor H. H. Price opts for what he calls 'the expressive theory of the mindbody relation'. The idea appears to be that there is no sharp dualism between

[p.34]

mind and body; they unite somehow as one. In this the view is akin to the double-aspect theory; but it is stressed that 'no mental process can occur unless it is "expressed" by means of bodily changes of some sort or other'. The point that is being made is that a human personality must of necessity have a body through which to express itself. Price contends that this version of the 'psychosomatic unity' theory does not necessarily exclude the possibility of some sort of survival after death. All that it excludes is the possibility of a disembodied immortality. Contrasting his statement of the 'expressive' theory with Ducasse's 'hypophenomenalism', Price allows that the latter makes survival more credible. 'A hypophenomenalist,' he says, 'might be expected to think that the survival hypothesis is more

²⁷ 'Is Consciousness a Brain Process?' *British Journal of Psychology* (February, 1956), See *Body, Mind and Death*, ed. A. Flew, p. 276f.

²⁸ cf *A Critical Examination of the Belief in Life after Death* (1961) Chap. xi. cf 'Is Life After Death Possible?' in *Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, ed. Edwards and Pap (1947). Section 26 'What Could Survive?' in *Does Man Survive Death?* ed. Eileen J. Garrett, Chap. iii, pt. 1 (1957), being a reprint from *Tomorrow*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Autumn 1956.

likely to be true than false. A holder of the expressive theory might be expected to think that it is more likely to be false than true, since there is not anything in our normal experience (as he interprets it) to prepare him for such a possibility, whereas on the hypophenomenalist interpretation of normal experience, there is. But both alike, if they follow the logic of their respective theories, would be prepared to consider any paranormal evidence which appears to favour the survival hypothesis, and neither would think that the survival hypothesis must be false.²⁹ It would seem then that even on a 'monistic' view the idea of life beyond is not utterly incredible. And it is surely apposite to enter the remark of Pascal that 'Atheists ought to say what is perfectly evident; now it is not perfectly evident that the soul is material'.³⁰

This brings us to add a word on the approach to the subject from the linguistic stand-point. It is argued that the logical nature of propositions about the afterlife which state the idea of a disembodied existence are logically contradictory. Apart from the body-state there is no means whereby to distinguish one person from another. The only possibility of identifying a person is to indicate some bodily criteria. Without this there is no clue whereby to distinguish 'one spirit' from another. Now at death the body really ceases to be, thus we have no way by which to identify a supposed post-mortem existence as being the same person.

Into the large issues of 'self-identity' we do not intend to enter here. But we can concern ourselves with the significance, or, perhaps, better, the extent of the word 'necessity' which the argument entails. Of course bodily criteria are 'necessary' to personal identity; but within the structure of language. What is being said is in effect just this: bodily criteria are contingently necessary. That is to say, bodily criteria are necessary to existence and identification in the conditions of the world as we know it and in which we now live. It is, however, another matter when these conditions no longer hold. What is not proved, and yet what needs to be proved, is that bodily criteria are absolutely necessary; necessary, that is to say, when 'this-earthly' conditions are absent. It is part of the conception of life beyond that spacial and temporal conditions, at any rate as we know them here, no longer exist. And we know at least this from the behaviour of astronauts that when the condition of gravitation is absent the body reacts in odd ways, yet identity is still possible. This observation is not of course to be pressed beyond merely suggesting that it seems essential to keep as much as possible this-earthly conditions for the continuity of identity after the fashion we know in this world. The objection then amounts to nothing more than this: this-earthly existence is a bodily state and as such is a necessary condition of existence and identity in a this-earthly state. And that seems suspiciously like a tautology.

[p.35]

The real trouble with the programme of those who would discount or destroy faith by the analysis of religious language is that they suppose they have touched the fundamental reality by exposing the verbal confusions of believers. They take 'ordinary language' as the norm of meaningfulness for religious language and then set about playing the language game according to their own rules. Beginning, for example, with existence in the present world they call on the believers to join their game. Now we all know what it is to 'exist'—and you as a believer say you will continue to 'exist' beyond death. But for 'existence' there must be this and that and the other; will these things be there in your other world? The believer who has joined the game finds himself beginning to qualify with a hundred 'buts', until his opponents

²⁹ cf *Current Philosophical Issues, essays in honour of Curt John Ducasse*, ed. F. C. Dommeyer (1966), p. 126.

³⁰ *Pensées*, sect. 221.

explode: your words have been emptied of all meaning; 'stretched to breaking point', chants Professor Hepburn, 'killed by inches, the death by a thousand qualifications', crows Professor Flew. 'The game is ours,' all unite in chorus. And according to the rules they have made, so it is. Existence has been evacuated of all significance and the concept lost all meaning as a result of the stretching and eroding.

But why should we be tricked like this; tricked into playing the linguistic game according to dictated rules? Philosophers who insist that a word must have a certain meaning without specifying a context are, says D. Z. Phillips 'guilty of arbitrary legislation'. For their 'must' is not a logical 'must'. It is simply the 'must' of their own preferences, or the 'must' of one context which they have elevated either consciously or unconsciously, to be the standard for all others.³¹ But the procedure simply will not do. Let us acknowledge that there is need to clarify our religious language, but when some philosophers contend that because some of our religious language is confused, therefore religion itself and the realities it brings with it are false, it is a different matter. Must we throw out the baby with the bath water?

And we must beware of confusing the theological statements of faith with faith's own primary apprehensions. The theoretic reflection on religious experience can only be verified within the context of the primary apprehension which gave it birth. The judgments of religious faith can only, that is to say, be 'verifiable on their own level' as Reinhold Niebuhr declares. This means that the judgment that I shall survive death and shall know myself and shall be known for whom I am, can only be verified by a return to the religious experience out of which it arose.

C. We shall bring our extended discussion to a close with a reference to the reiterated argument which runs back to Hume; the self is a non-reality therefore the conclusion that it persists beyond death is vacuous. Hume, it is well known, gave radical denial to the idea of a perduring self existing within, through and above the totality of life's experiences. But all the time Hume was denying the existence of the self he was assuming its reality. It was Hume who gave to those who followed the ammunition wherewith to explode the idea of a continuing self beyond death. But the shot-gun he used, as he himself admits, misfired badly. Since Hume's day a great deal has been written for and against the actuality of a self. There are those like C. A. Campbell who are sure they can prove the existence of a substantial self beyond the mere series of relationships which go to make up life's experiences. My own view has been stated elsewhere: it is in effect that the existence of a self cannot be proved for it is everywhere demonstrated. It is

[p.36]

given in self-awareness; for self-awareness means nothing if it is not the awareness of the self.³²

In the end, therefore, it may be urged that the 'soul' is the real 'self', the essential person. We would like therefore to relieve Professor Flew of his anxiety. He writes; 'for unless I am my soul, the immortality of my soul would not be my immortality; and the news of the immortality of my soul would be no more concern to me than the news that my appendix

³¹ cf *The Concept of Prayer* (1965), p. 10.

³² cf H. D. McDonald, *I and He* (1966), chs. 1-4.

would be preserved eternally in a bottle.³³ To speak then of the immortality of the soul is, as Ian Ramsey rightly underscores, better referred to as the immortality of the 'I'. Ramsey asks, is life after death 'meaningless'? Death, he allows, does mean the end of characteristic verifiable behaviour. But this does not mean that death is the end of life. For the concept 'life' covers, after all, far more than what can be brought within the area of verifiable behaviour.³⁴

Survival, after death, declares Fred Hoyle, is meaningless without some interaction with the physical world.³⁵ With this we must agree and disagree. If by 'physical' is meant this world precisely then we cannot accept Hoyle's verdict. But if by 'physical' is meant a reality in which the spirits of just men made perfect can live and have their being then the case is different. For it is part of the hope expressed in Christian eschatology that there shall be a new heaven and a new earth in which dwells righteousness; a realm in which man redeemed from all evil in the totality of his being, as body and soul, can operate and act for the glory of God.

Whether John Hick pictures his other world too much after the fashion of this I am not prepared to say, but he is perfectly justified in his contention that 'Resurrected persons would be individually no more in doubt about their own identity than we are now, and would be able to identify one another in the same kind of ways, and with a like degree of assurance, as we do now'.³⁶ For it is the real 'me' and the total 'you' as redeemed that will be resurrected. 'When the Christian says that he believes in the Resurrection of the body, this is one way he has of saying that he—that part of him which in other circumstances can be cashed in empirical language and the something more that cannot—will have fellowship with God.'³⁷ We shall gather up then what we have been saying in the words of H. A. Wolfson. He is commending the Fathers of the Church whom he regards as having said to their day what is no less relevant to ours: 'The impossibility of resurrection and the fact of its being contrary to what is known of the laws of nature had already been proclaimed by the outmoded ancient science of our time; modern science of your present time cannot make it more impossible. Still, if we, despite the science of our time, were willing to believe in the resurrection, and you, because of the science of your time, are unwilling to believe it, your unwillingness to believe in it is not to be explained by the opposition of the science of your time. It is to be explained on other grounds, and there are other grounds by which it can be explained.'³⁸

There can be no doubt, then, about the fact that where belief in the existence of God and in the reality of spiritual things is alive that there goes with it the unshakable conviction that human personality is not a mere accidental and ephemeral collocation of atoms. The loss of conviction that John Brown's soul went marching on while his body lay a-mouldering in the grave, was followed as history attests, in short space by the rise of systems in which the human individual counted

[p.37]

³³ *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* ed. A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (1955), p. 270.

³⁴ cf *Freedom and Immortality* (1960), chap. 5.

³⁵ *The Nature of Universe* (1952), p. 116.

³⁶ cf *Theology Today* (April 1960), also in part in *Body, Mind and Death*, ed. A. Flew (1964), pp. 270ff.

³⁷ 'I will die,' W. H. Poteat, in *Religion and Understanding*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (1961), p. 212. cf 'One who shares that hope will hardly wish to take out an occultistic or philosophical insurance policy, to guarantee some sort of survival as an annuity, in case God's promise of resurrection should fail.' Peter Geach, *God and the Soul* (1969), p. 29.

³⁸ *Religious Philosophy* (1961), p. 102

for less than nothing and vanity. It was as Butterfield observes, during a period, 'when all men in Christendom, year in and year out, for century after century, were continually being told that they were souls to be saved and that they were destined to a life eternal, there was one point which it did not need any philosophy to understand, namely, that there was something in human beings which was to go marching on even after the whole globe should have become a heap of dust drifting through space. This was not a theoretical valuation of personality, but something which was accepted as factual, as genuinely descriptive of people. The statement has reference to the very stuff that human beings were assumed to be made of, and it involved an assertion concerning the spiritual nature of personality itself. For those who believed this statement there could be nothing in the visible universe to which human beings could be regarded as subject or subordinate'.³⁹

And the statement is to be believed still for it is still believable. It is a fact not lessened or made untrue by the distance of time or in the din of uncertainty. God has come to man in the embrace of a love everlasting; of a love that many waters cannot quench nor the years diminish. And because God and man have each an authentic existence the Christian gospel does have solid ground and certain hope on which to build. In the relationship of love's commitment between the living God and needy man there is contained faith's affirmation that by a love so Godlike the believer cannot be let go: and this faith has for itself a more sure word in the divine affirmations of the Christian Gospel. In the end we may state in the words of Jürgen Moltmann that, 'A Christian faith that is not resurrection faith can be neither Christian nor faith'.⁴⁰ And there is no better note with which to conclude.

© 1971 *London School of Theology* (<http://www.lst.ac.uk/>). Reproduced by permission.

Prepared for the Web in March 2007 by Robert I. Bradshaw

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

³⁹ *Christianity in European History* (1951), pp. 52, 53.

⁴⁰ *The Theology of Hope* Eng.Tr. (1967), p. 166.