

## LIFE AFTER DEATH – (teaching notes)

- arguments for and against belief in...
- reincarnation
- rebirth
- resurrection
- immortality of the soul

### What do we mean by death?

*'The complete and permanent cessation of all vital functions in a living creature, the end of life.'*

### Why is the concept of an afterlife important?

- Fear of death
- Can this be all there is?
- Does life have no ultimate purpose?
- The need to have the moral law upheld
- How do we explain the premature death of the innocent?
- How can God's work be completed if there is no afterlife?
- Life after death in one form or another is central to the scriptures and belief systems of both western and eastern religious traditions.

### What form might life after death take?

- The continuation of genes in our children and their descendants
- Living on in our lives' works
- Living on in the memories of others
- The immortality of the soul
- The resurrection of the body
- Reincarnation

### How does our understanding of human nature affect our conception of the form life after death might take?

In terms of the relationship between mind and body there are 3 distinct theories of human nature – idealism, materialism, dualism.

### Task: Match up above definitions with terms:

- Matter is the only reality – our minds are inseparable from our bodies
- Thought or the mind is the only reality – objects, including human beings are merely ideas
- Reality consists of two basic principles - mind and matter. These are distinct from one another, but linked together in some way

**Materialists** believe that there is no such thing as a separate soul and body. Death is therefore the end of all life, at which point the whole person ceases to exist. For materialists it is wrong to talk of mental processes as a separate function, somehow independent of the body. In other words, thought, consciousness, mind, are all concepts to be understood as functions of the physical organism. There is no scientific evidence of the existence of a soul.

### **Is it possible for a materialist to believe that there is life after death?**

Since the physical body cannot be separated from the mind or 'soul', life after death would only be possible if the body survives death in some way. Otherwise the personal identity, the 'I' of the individual could not survive death. This might happen through the **re-creation** or **resurrection** of the body.

### **John Hick and re-creation through replication**

Since God, if he exists, is all-powerful it would be **logically possible** for him to create a replica of the body of the dead person, a replica which would be complete with all the individual's memories and characteristics (see **Anne Jordan p. 183**). This is a slightly strange idea but is perfectly compatible with the **Christian** understanding of the resurrection of the body (see St Paul – I Corinthians 15: 35-44).

In order to determine whether the same person has survived death, Hick proposes three scenarios, which although odd, he maintains are within the bounds of the logically possible.

At a learned gathering in England one of the delegates disappears. At the same moment an exact replica of him – similar in every way appears at a meeting in Australia. There is everything to suggest that it is the same person except continuity of occupancy of space and we should have no reasonable alternative but to extend our usage of 'same person' to cover this strange case. In the second scenario the man dies in England and a replica of him, again identical in every way, appears in Australia. Hick maintains that even now it would still be an extension of 'same person'. In the final scenario supposes that the replica reappears not in Australia but in some different world altogether - one inhabited by resurrected persons (see sheet).

### **What are the main virtues and shortcomings of this view of life after death?**

#### **Strengths**

- It is unaffected by any criticisms that can be levelled at the dualistic conception of man and its associated conception of life after death.
- A life after death, which is bodily, if it were possible, could be regarded as the life of a human person.
- It therefore gives the physical body some value
- It supports orthodox Christian teaching

### **What are the philosophical problems associated with life after death?**

1. Is bodily life after death possible?

2. Are there grounds for belief in bodily life after death? (Is it reasonable to believe that bodily life after death is possible?)
3. What evidence is there?

### **Is Hick's replica theory possible? ( see sheet)**

If we accept God's omnipotence, it may be argued that Hick's theory is a logical possibility. It is difficult to argue with Hick's assertion that such a replica would be, to all intents and purposes, the same person as the 'original'. But is replication enough for the continued existence of a person? Consider the example of cloning and the question of the relative value we attach to original artefacts and their replicas. On this matter, Peter **Vardy** makes the point that if God can create one replica of an individual he can create 20 such replicas. This would beg the question of which one, if any, would be the same person as the original.

The other philosophical issue, which needs to be tackled, is whether Hick's theory is a reasonable one. Is there any evidence for Hick's replica theory? There have been many claims for sightings of dead people. When considering the value of such testimony it is worth remembering what Hume had to say about testimony in relation to miracles.

### **John Locke (1632-1704) and the inhabiting of a different body**

Locke draws a distinction between 'man' and 'person'. Men are biological entities, whilst a person is 'a thinking +intelligent being, that has reason and reflection ...consciousness which is inseparable from thinking'

According to Locke's theory we might have persons (as opposed to men) who exist in an entirely incorporeal world and persons who move from body to body (see sheet).

### **What is the difficulty with this position?**

As Joseph Butler pointed out in arguing against Locke, memory *presupposes* personal identity, and cannot, by itself constitute it. According to Thomas Reid (see sheet). Locke's theory also seems to imply that 'a man may be, and at the same time not be the person who did a particular action', if we accept that identity is determined by memory alone. In other words, does it make any sense to say that by virtue of forgetting an action, we cease to be the same person who did that action? Surely not – though this would be very convenient sometimes.

### **Conclusion**

We might be tempted therefore to come to the conclusion that Brian Davies comes to '...if I am a bodily individual, I will survive my death only by being physically continuous with what is there now.' This, of course, prompts the question can what is there now be physically continuous with what is there after my death? Or, to put it another way, do dead bodies have the power of living again?

The modern science of **cryogenics** suggests that this may be possible. It is as yet untried, but even if it does work, there are issues involved.

- Would revival from a state of ‘suspended animation’ at some time in the future really constitute life after death or merely life after deep-frozen life?
- Even if the physical body is revived, can we be sure that the soul will return to the body?

Apart from human agency, in the form of modern technology, it must be conceded that divine agency may enable people who have died to live again as physically continuous with people who have died. Those who believe in God will, of course, argue that he has such power, and that, therefore, there is no conceptual barrier to the idea of people being resurrected.

### **Resurrection and the Christian orthodoxy**

Christianity inherited from Judaism the concept of the resurrection of the body. By body is meant the total personality, which dies and is then raised by the power of God to new life with him. This is a view consistent with the notion that both body and soul are not two separate entities. As J.A.T. Robinson puts it in *The Body*: ‘Man does not **have** a body, he **is** a body...he is-flesh-animated-by-soul, the whole conceived as a psycho-physical unity.’ To Christians it is a concept which is preferable to that of the immortality of the soul because the latter does not do justice to the biblical concern for the ultimate fulfilment of the total life of man, and stresses the worthlessness of the body.

According to St. Paul, after death the body will be raised but transformed into a spiritual body, as unlike its earthly form as the seed from which a plant grows. This view of life after death is one way of explaining how the individual can keep the personal identity they had in life whilst being able to achieve eternal life in bodily form.

Difficulties with this conception of LAD:

1. What exactly survives?
2. Where does it survive?

### **Dualism**

A **dualist** conception of man argues that the body is a kind of outer shell, which houses the real self. The body is contingent and therefore destined for decay, whereas the mind or soul is immortal. If a man’s life is spent in contemplation of the higher realities, such as truth, goodness, and justice, his soul can enter eternity after the death of the physical body. This belief is known as the **immortality of the soul**.

### **Plato and the forms**

Plato stated that the soul belonged to a level of reality that was higher than that of the body. The soul is a substance and is immortal. For everything in existence, Plato believed that there was the perfect idea or **form**. For every horse, for example, there is the ideal form of the horse of which the individual case is merely an imperfect copy. The idea or form is prior to the individual instance of it and is therefore more real. Because ideas are not physical things, they must belong to a spiritual realm, which is

more real than the material realm. The soul is that which can grasp the realm of ideas. Whilst the body exists in the physical world and it is through our body that we receive sense-impressions, the soul (the real essence of a person), on the other hand, is immaterial and is capable of knowing eternal truths beyond the world. The soul wants to travel into the realm of heavenly ideas. The soul is trying to steer the mind to this realm. Knowledge is the recollection of the acquaintance we had with the forms before our immortal souls became imprisoned in our bodies. The aim of the soul is to break free of the chains of matter and flee to the realm of ideas.

### **Aristotle**

The soul is that part of the body which gives it life. It is what turns the physical form into a living organism of its particular type. Humans have a human soul. Horses have a horse soul. Soul and body are inseparable. The soul develops the person's skills character or temper, but it cannot survive death. Body and soul are a unity and when the body dies, the soul ceases to exist. Although this position appears similar to the materialistic conception, Aristotle believed that the soul and body were different. It is the soul that enables us to think, reflect, and grasp universals and thereby come to understand eternal truths.

### **St Thomas Aquinas**

Aquinas agreed with Aristotle, that it was the soul that animated the body and gave it life. He called the soul the **anima**, that which animates the body (see sheet). According to Aquinas the soul operates independently of the body. Unlike the body, which is contingent, subject to change and therefore decay, the soul is **indivisible**. This means that it can survive death. However, through the link with a particular human body each soul becomes individual. So, even when a body dies, the soul that departs retains the individual identity of the body to which it was attached

### **Rene Descartes**

Descartes included in 'mind' all feelings, thoughts, sensations, which could not be located physically. Although distinct from each other, mind and body interact (think of examples). The mind is not located in the body, and is not the same as the brain. Mind and body are different substances. The property of mind-substance is consciousness and the property of bodily or material substance is extension in space. The mind has no extension. Whilst the body's activities are observable to all, the mind's activities are not.

Descartes maintained that since our identity comes from our ability to think and reason, then it was conceivable that we could survive without our bodies, and remain the same person. He did not believe that we need our bodies to live an intellectually aware life and therefore that the mind could survive the death of the body.

When an individual dies, that person's soul is able to continue with God after death as the same individual as existed in a physical form on earth (see sheet).

HD Lewis, a modern supporter of Descartes believes that it is possible to espouse the dualistic conception of man: '...no recent discussions of the mind-body problem have

succeeded in showing that we can dispense with an absolute distinction between mind and body...there are mental processes quite distinct from observable behaviour.

Swinburne is another modern advocate of dualism (see sheet).

### **Is dualism correct?**

The idea of the separation of mind and body has concerned many philosophers. These are some of the challenges to dualism:

- Is our identity only the result of memories and actions in the mind?(brain transplant, paralysis)
- If mind and body are separate, how do we explain the causal effects between mind and body (e.g. drugs and alcohol).
- Modern science suggests that there are links between the mind and the brain, so how can the mind survive on its own?(brain scans, stroke victims)
- If minds are non-physical objects how can the mind cause anything to happen in the non-physical world? (running for the bus, deciding to eat)

### **The survival of the disembodied self- Brian Davies' analysis of the philosophical issues**

If Descartes is right and human beings are not to be identified with their bodies, there is no obvious reason why they cannot exist without their bodies. If they can exist without their bodies then it is reasonable to suppose that they can survive death (since we normally think of death as the end of a person's bodily life).

### **The strengths of dualism**

Dualism seems to correspond to our tendency to talk about our real selves as distinct from our bodies. For example, we talk about *having* bodies

Most people would claim that in spite of physical changes we remain essentially the same person over the years of our life.

We are able to think about something without displaying this activity through any bodily behaviour.

Even if people were to look at our brains while we were thinking they would not see our thoughts

