

RESURRECTION AND IDENTITY

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We sometimes imagine situations that do not at present exist to find out what we think what we might do, how we might react. We consider alternative possibilities, for example, for the future, so as to help us in making decisions in the present. We also consider fictional situations to help us in making judgments. If I were placed in situation x . . . what would I do? If such-and-such were the case what would be the outcome? Then as we reflect on the decisions we might make, think how we might choose to act, we may come to understand better the kind of person we are.

We often do this profitably when considering a problem. We ask, If such-and-such were to be the case what would we think about it? How would we react to it? What judgments would we make about it?

Philosophers do this too. They create imagined situations and ask, 'What would we make of them?' They ask the question we have raised: 'What does the continued existence of a person consist in?' Put concretely, for example: 'What is it necessary for us to say that Mary is the same self or person now that she was twenty years ago?' We can then, quite profitably, imagine situations or possibilities which lead us to give to different answers to the question. We can then evaluate the answers available to us. So let us ask, 'What makes a person at two different times one and the same person?' The two different times may be within our present existence, or it may be that the one time is now, in the present life, the other time after death. For the answer we give will apply equally to both. So imagine the following:

Mary has no memory of her former life.

Mary the princess remembers only the events of Jean the pauper's life.

A person with a body exactly resembling Jean's has only memories of Mary's life.

Mary disappears from New York and a body in all respects resembling hers appears in London.

Mary dies in New York and a body exactly resembling hers appears in London.

Mary dies in New York. Her body disappears, and a body exactly resembling hers and having the same memories as hers appears in London.

Mary enters a teletransportation machine which encodes her here and sends the message to a machine on another planet which decodes her there, producing a replica of Mary on another planet. She has the choice either to continue to exist here as well as being replicated, or, having been replicated, not to exist here.

Mary dies here and a body exactly resembling hers and having her memories appears on another planet.

So much for imagined situations. How do they help us with our problems about personal identity and resurrection?

We must first make an important distinction. It concerns the meaning of 'same.' This is the distinction between *numerical identity* and *qualitative identity*. If I say to my students, 'Bring along the same book that I am using,' what I mean is that twenty students will each bring along one book each. Each of these books will have the same features as mine. They will have the same number of pages, same words on page one, two, three etc. They will be *qualitatively* identical. But if I say, holding up a particular book, 'This is the same book as the one I brought along last week,' I may mean something different by 'same.' I mean that it is the very one and no other. It is numerically the same book. It is numerically identical with

the one I brought last week. I am referring to only one object. This is *numerical* identity. There is only one object in view here. The object is the same with itself over time.

So what is the question we are asking when we talk about personal sameness, or identity? Is it numerical or is it qualitative identity? Which one, if we must choose, or if we feel we must choose, is the appropriate idea when we are speaking of survival of death. Does it matter which? If we insist that we be the same persons after death as we were before, do we mean that we must be numerically identical, or are we satisfied with being qualitatively identical? But since we are bodily creatures what would it mean to be numerically identical after death with the same person as we were before death. Perhaps we should then speak not so much of identity but of continuity, physical and psychological.

An interesting proposal for interpreting resurrection as replication has been made by John Hick. Does such an interpretation satisfy the religious hope for a future life?

Hick presents his 'replica' theory in his book *Death and Eternal Life*¹, in the chapter on the Resurrection. If we reject a dualistic understanding of the soul, and hence the existence of the soul as an incorporeal thing, we will raise the question of life after death in a new way. Is it *possible* to conceive of continuity between the present person and the future person after death? Can we think it? Is it logically possible to think of identity between person one before death and person two after death? Are they in some sense 'one'? If we can conceive the possibility, we can go on thinking about it. Otherwise it is inconceivable and so we must stop thinking about it. If the identity of a resurrected person with a person who has lived in this life is conceivable, that is to say if it is logically possible, it will then be profitable to consider its real possibility, to ask whether it could actually be.

What makes the resurrection life of interest to the believer is that it is possible that it will be the same person's life that ended here on earth. But how can this be understood? Resurrection is not resuscitation, that is to say, the revival of the same body which died. Survival of the same body would not ensure immortality of the same person. Since resurrection does not mean the physical continuity of the same body which died, what other kind of continuity between this life and the resurrection life is it possible to conceive? Is it possible to conceive any? Is it possible to speak of identity without speaking of physical continuity?

As we have seen the term 'same' is used in two ways. I speak of reading the same book as you, when there are two books, in fact thousands of the same book. I do not mean when I say 'the same book' that there is only one. What I mean is that the book you are reading and the book I am reading are *qualitatively* identical, i.e. alike in all respects. The term 'same' is also used in the sense of *numerical* identity. In a police investigation, for instance, it may be a question of establishing whether this book is the same book as the one that was in a particular room at a particular time. 'Same' here means 'numerically identical' or 'one and the same.' To be 'one and the same,' 'numerically identical,' means to be in no respect different. So you can connote that and no other book: torn on page sixty-two, ink stain on the back cover, a signature in identifiable handwriting on the title page. There can be only one. The question of identity arises when this 'same' thing is perceived on different occasions.

Qualitative identity in contrast is of more than one thing. (Of course a numerically identical thing is qualitatively identical with itself, at least in some respect(s).) Two things (or more) are one in this sense. But two things that are one, 'the same' in this sense, are more than one in being two. So they are different in that they are plural.

If the resurrection life is not numerically or physically identical with this one, what other alternative is there? Can we speak of identity in a different and at the same time satisfactory way? Can we conceive of personal identity without requiring material continuity between the person who died and the person who lives immortally?

If we reject the dualistic understanding of soul and body, and accept the fact that the human person is a psycho-physical unity, and the fact that at death such unity ceases, what shall we say of the possibility of life after death? The alternatives are two. Either death is the end, or it is not. If God should perform a creative act then it is possible to hope for resurrection. If we believe God will perform such an act the problem is to see if and how we can intelligently think today of the resurrection body and of the process by which it comes into being.

John Hick proposes that we think of it 'as the divine creation in another space of an exact psycho-physical replica' of the deceased person' (279). A 'replica' (note the inverted commas) is not a replica. By 'replica,' Hick means that there is only one specimen. He assumes a non-numerical identity. 'Replica' means 'same' in the sense of qualitative identity, but with a qualification. How many identical things can there be? If 'same' means 'numerically identical,' there can be, by definition, only one. If 'same' means 'in all respects exactly similar' there still may be only one. For Hick, 'replica' means something in all respects exactly similar to something else, there being only one. The resurrected person is identical, in a non-numerical sense, with the person who lived. There is only one recreated self. Thus Hick refuses the possibility that God might simultaneously replicate the same person more than once. The idea that there might be several simultaneously existing same persons leads to quite interesting problems!

The addition of inverted commas suggests that the term is being used in a special sense. The one 'replica' is so 'exactly similar to him (the person who died), in all respects' (283), that we can regard the 'replica' as the same person as the original person. In this way, Hick feels that he can allow for the Christian teaching of resurrection and make intelligible the notion of identity, without relying upon dualistic assumptions.

So, we must establish minimum criteria for saying that Y is the same person as X. Hick invites us to consider three 'pictures.' Person Y disappears in London and an exact 'replica' of Y appears in New York. If this happened we would, after due consideration, say that the 'replica' in New York was the 'same' person as the one who disappeared in London.

A second case is that of Y dying suddenly in London and with his dead body in London, an exact 'replica' of him appears in New York. The 'replica' is of the man as he was before his death, physically and psychologically, specifically with respect to his memories. We would in these unusual circumstances use the term 'same person' of the 'replica' in New York. We would, of course, make sure that he was conscious of being the same person who had previously lived and died in London. What we would then be doing would be to give the term 'same' or 'identical' as now used of the person a new meaning that it did not have before, because the circumstances which occasion the new use had not arisen before. That would by no means be an unusual linguistic phenomenon.

The third picture is of Y dying and his 'replica' appearing in a resurrected world inhabited by resurrected 'replicas.' This 'replica' is a psycho-physical reality, not a disembodied soul (285). There would be sufficient evidence in such a situation, the situation of existing in another world (in another space, says Hick) for Y to identify himself as the same person he had been before his death. The evidence for such identity would be of the same sort which enables one to identify oneself and other people in the present existence, and in the other unusual cases considered.

He would have the same memory in the resurrection world as in this one and also a similar psycho-physical unity. In some sense he has the same body then as now. He has as, moreover, the consciousness of being the same person, 'same' in that he has been created a 'replica,' 'same' in the sense of qualitative not numerical identity.

The purpose for which Hick has presented these three 'pictures' is to suggest how we might intelligently think of the resurrection body today (279). Such a philosophical exercise is demanded if our modern understanding of man as 'an indissoluble psycho-physical unity,'

as an 'empirical self,' is to be taken as the basis for consideration of the possibility of life after death. Such a suggestion, assuming the psycho-physical unity of man, means that there is no room for the notion of soul as an entity in distinction from body. If there is no soul in distinction from body, there can be no question of the soul surviving the death of the body. Hence the need to present an intelligible conception of what life after death might be, while denying the traditional dualism.

Hick wishes to establish the logical possibility of life after death, while at the same time rejecting the existence of the soul as a separate entity. To establish that logical possibility is to show that the conception is intelligible. Hick has done this, whatever the difficulties of his position. That being the case, we may feel free to proceed and explore the possibilities which 'resurrection of the person' opens up for theological construction.

If we have established the *logical* possibility of speaking of the person resurrected in a different world as the same person as the one who lived on this earth, we can then go on and ask about the *real* possibility. Not everything that is logically possible happens. If there is to be a resurrection it will be, according to Christian belief, because God raises the dead. The *real* possibility depends upon God. The belief that there will be a resurrection of the dead involves belief in a certain kind of God. Grounds for belief in such a God can then be considered as grounds for the resurrection of the dead at the last day.

Our question must now be whether such an interpretation of resurrection and survival in terms of qualitative identity satisfies the religious hope. We have seen that it presents us with an alternative to two other interpretations, namely that of cessation of all life at death, and the dualistic proposal of disembodied soul.

If this is the one logical possibility which is compatible with the Christian belief that God graciously gives life after death, and enables us to understand how this might be so, when other alternatives are not satisfactory, then it would seem that it is rational to accept the suggestion. Derek Parfit, from whom the discussion has taken its cue, has an interesting analogy.² Numerical identity is not possible, he says, after discussing the imagined teletransportation cases, in one of which the replicated person exists simultaneously with the original person. It is not possible that two things are numerically identical. Numerical identity means that a thing at time^{two} is in no way different from the thing at time^{one}. There is only *one* thing. Qualitative identity means that *two* things at the same or at different times are identical. The resurrected person is qualitatively identical with the person that lived pre-mortem.

Suppose that you lost your sight and that scientists developed an artificial, electronic, eye that functioned in all respects like your original eyes. You now have two implanted eyes and they function to give you all the capacities your old eyes ever had. Moreover suppose they look the same as your old eyes. (Here we depart from Parfit's example). It is in fact a case of replication. Would there be any reason why you should not be content? Why should you wish for more? Even if, as in Parfit's example, the artificial eyes did not have the appearance of normal eyes, they would be as good as normal sight. It would not be plausible to reject these eyes because they were not the normal cause of human sight. Nor, argues Parfit, in the case of the teletransported construction of the replica, would it be plausible to reject him. He is like me in every way, with a normal brain and body. So of the recreated person whom God creates as replica of the person who lived. Reconstruction provides for the same person to exist.