



Discovery Series-Eight

Personal Identity and Life after Death

Death-Immortality-What should we think? Three views held by the church traditionally:

1. Traditional View – God alone possesses immortality. Still, though humans are properly and normally to be construed as a unity of material human bodies and immaterial substantial souls, at the time of death, a person enters a disembodied state that is less than complete and receives a new resurrected body at the general resurrection.
2. Immediate Resurrection Position – View that upon death a person is given some sort of temporal body while waiting for a final resurrected body.
3. Re-creation position on immortality says that at death a person becomes extinct – but at the resurrection of the dead God re-creates that person all over again out of nothing.

For purposes of this discussion we will focus on the issue of identity. In doing so, we must make a distinction between the metaphysical aspects of personal identity and the epistemological ones. The former focuses on what constitutes personal identity – what is personal identity and what makes it real? The epistemological aspects focus on criteria for personal identity. How is it possible to know or justifiably believe that a person is the same at two different times? After all, people do change.

THREE MAIN VIEWS OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

1. Absolute View of Personal Identity – Persons differ from artifacts in that persons maintain strict, absolute sameness through change. Persons do not have temporal parts. If an arm or leg is replaced, it does not change the person as an essence. Personal identity is an absolute. If half a table is taken away and replaced with new parts, it becomes a different table (we refer to it as a “new” or “refurbished” table). A person is a unity at any given time and a unity through time.
2. Empiricist Views of Personal Identity – There are two of these – The Body View and the Mind View. They share three things in common which center around the rejection of the absolutist position.

(1) They start with a view of identity through change derived from personal artifacts and extend this to the identity of persons. Personal identity through change comes in degrees

(2) Personal identity is not unanalyzable. A person is like a process. A person is a series of person stages that are related to each other in an appropriate relationship.

(3) There is no substantive soul or ego. A person is a bundle of physical and mental states through time.

A. The Body View of Empiricism – The connection between various person stages that unites them as stages of the same person is that all the mental states of the person are connected to the same body. Sameness of person is analyzed in terms of sameness of body.

B. The Mind View – Continuity of Psychological characteristics constitutes personal identity. Chief among these is memory. Other psychological factors could include likes, dislikes, goals, interests, character traits, etc...

Absolutists have pointed to the following weaknesses of the empiricist's position:

1. Why do we possess a fear of future pain and punishment from past wrongs we have done?
2. If people are only made up of "different stages," what if the stages conflict constantly?
3. No account of the world in terms of third person descriptions will suffice since a first person perspective is all that counts.

Empiricists point out to absolutists that postulating in an enduring soul to ground an enduring self proves nothing.