

Substance Dualism

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This essay first explains what substance dualism is. It then considers what can be said in favour of substance dualism, and what might be said to be its “weak spot”. Following this, the essay enters upon the subject of the afterlife by looking at the relationship between substance dualism – old and modern – and personal immortality. The main emphasis of this essay, however, is on resurrection and the substance-dualistic conception of it. That conception turns out to be far from being as untenable as even believers in the Resurrection have widely thought it to be.

What is Substance Dualism?

It is appropriate to begin with René Descartes. The first edition of Descartes’s epochal *Meditations on First Philosophy*, of 1641, bears on its title page the following inscription: “*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia in qua Dei existentia et animae immortalitas demonstratur* [in which the existence of God and the immortality of the soul is demonstrated]”. The second edition of the *Meditations*, of 1642, displays on its title page a significantly modified inscription: “*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia in quibus Dei*

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existentia et animae humanae a corpore distinctio demonstrantur [in which the existence of God and the distinctness of the human soul from the body are demonstrated]". The modification is confirmed (and made more precise) in the first French edition, of 1647, which has on its title page: "...dans lesquelles l'existence de Dieu et la distinction réelle entre l'âme et le corps de l'homme sont démontrées [in which the existence of God and the real distinctness of the soul and the body of Man are demonstrated]".¹ Only the latter two inscriptions, and *not* the first, reflect the intentions of the author of the *Meditations*. This is clear from a letter Descartes wrote to his friend Marin Mersenne, probably on December 24, 1640, even before the *Meditations* were first published: "Concerning that you say that I haven't put in a word about the immortality of the soul, you should not be astonished about this; for I would not be able to demonstrate that God could not annihilate it [*la*: the soul], but only that it is of a nature which is wholly distinct from that of the body, and that consequently it is not by its own nature [*naturellement*] subject to dying with it [the body], which is all that is required for establishing our religion [*la Religion*]; and which is also all that I have set myself to prove."² Thus, Descartes himself is a witness to the (purely logical) fact that (psycho-physical) *substance dualism* does not (by itself) entail personal immortality, *provided* substance dualism is defined – in the spirit of Descartes – as the doctrine that the human psychological person (in traditional language: the human soul) and the human body both exist and are *really* (or *wholly*) *distinct*.

Before going on, I stipulate that in the rest of this essay the qualification "human" of the expressions "person", "psychological person", "body", and "soul" is *in force* (unless excluded by the context) but usually *kept tacit* for brevity's sake.

Now, the expression "really distinct" is of scholastic origin. Being really distinct is *more* than not being numerically identical: *x* and *y* are *really distinct* if, and only if, *x* and *y* are not only *two*, but two in such a way that each *can exist without* the other (for this conception of real distinction, compare *Meditations* VI.9). But the existence and real distinction of *x* and *y* does not by itself entail that *x* and *y* are *substances*, in other words: that they are non-abstract individuals without temporal parts ("present in their entirety at each moment of their existence"), with a salient (not necessarily maximal) degree of ontological independence.³ However, if the existence and real distinctness of *the psychological person* and *the body* is the truth about us, then it is also true that the psychological person – a non-abstract individual without temporal parts (this is what the phenomenology of the inner life delivers) – has a degree

of ontological independence which is high enough for its being a substance; the body, in turn, is a substance *anyway*, on independent grounds. Thus, *substance dualism* is already adequately defined by merely saying that it consists in the doctrine that the psychological person and the body *exist and are really distinct*; the *substantiality* of the two is already implied *if* SUBDUA (see the end of this section) is asserted. Of course, very often these days the substantiality of the psychological person or even of the body is denied (as will be considered in detail).

Many people attribute discrediting assertions to the doctrine of substance dualism, assertions which in no manner belong to it. It does not entail that the body exists without the soul, or that the soul (the psychological person) exists without the body; it only entails that body and soul *can* each exist without the other. Nor does substance dualism entail that body and soul exist one beside the other, and in this sense not without each other, but in such a way that they have just about nothing to do with one another. Especially this latter misinterpretation of substance dualism has been a very popular one, from the time of Descartes right up to the present (but merely reading Descartes's *Meditations* carefully would already be a safeguard against it).

Nevertheless, there is some room for interpreting substance dualism in a stronger or weaker sense. It all depends on how the phrase "x can exist without y" is interpreted. Does this phrase mean that x can exist *without y existing*? Or does it merely mean that x can exist *without causal support from y*? It is (logically) impossible that x can exist without y existing but cannot exist without causal support from y; it is, however, possible that x can exist without causal support from y but cannot exist without y existing. Descartes's *Meditations* – especially *Meditations I and II* – show that Descartes has mainly *the first interpretation* of "x can exist without y" in mind. But what is the strength of the possibility which is expressed by the word "can" in "x can exist without y"? Descartes is very clear – explicit – on this latter question: x can exist without y if at least God can make x exist without y (see *Meditations VI.9*). One does not need to believe in the existence of God to see which concept of possibility Descartes intends here. The possibility he has in mind is a very weak one. Put in terms of the possible-worlds-analysis of modalities, the relevant possibility is truth in at least one possible world that Almighty God can make actual (or: could make actual if Almighty God existed). For possibility *in this sense*, I will use the term "God-possible"; it is the weakest possibility that can be expressed by "metaphysically [or ontologically] possible".

Based on what has been said in the last paragraph and before, the following precisification of substance dualism is entirely in harmony with the intentions of Descartes (at least in the *Meditations*):

SUBDUA

The body and the psychological person exist, and it is God-possible that the former exists while the latter does not exist,⁴ and God-possible that the latter exists while the former does not exist.⁵

Justifying Substance Dualism

The proffered formulation of the thesis of substance dualism (SUBDUA) does not only recommend itself by reflecting the position of its greatest defender, it also makes substance dualism a doctrine which is rather more reasonable than many people may expect. Scrutinizing each of the main parts of SUBDUA, let us see what can be said against it, and what for it.

The existence of the body – conceived of as part of the *external*, in the realist sense *physical*, world – has comparatively seldom been denied in the history of philosophy (but Bishop Berkeley is a notable exception). In recent times, it has become fashionable to treat bodies not as substances but as four-dimensional matter-filled chunks of space-time. The existence of the body is not impugned by this; what is impugned, however, is *substance* dualism. For, as was stated in the previous section, it is implied as a background assumption by SUBDUA (and therefore need not be explicitly included in it) that the body is a *substance*: a non-abstract individual without temporal parts, with a salient degree of ontological independence (this conception of substance, roughly, is what Aristotle has in mind when speaking of *first substances*).

A reasonable *and* ontologically liberal position vis-à-vis *four-dimensionalism* is this: Nothing is to be said against four-dimensional physical objects, nothing even against matching ordinary material objects with their four-dimensional (spatiotemporal) counterparts – *as long as* the existence of ordinary three-dimensional material objects, of *material substances*, is not denied in the face of experience. Applying Ockham's Razor to material substances – in particular, to human bodies qua substances – because of their alleged uselessness for science, or the simple dismissal of them because of their alleged incompatibility with science: all of this is far from being justifiable.

It seems indubitable to me that it is God-possible that the body exists while the psychological person does not exist. To some, this may seem indubitable because it seems to them an empirical fact that some human bodies are alive, and therefore existent, without the corresponding psychological persons existing. On a closer look, experience shows, even in the most glaring cases, only the non-presence – at best the irreversible non-presence – of the psychological person, *not* its non-existence. The most interesting question in this connection is whether it is God-possible that the body exists *with the full functionality of normal waking life*, but without the existence of the psychological person. In other words, are (so-called) *philosophical zombies* possible, possible at least in the weakest metaphysical sense? Some have opted for the answer *Yes* to this question (for example, David Chalmers, and many other modern dualists), others for the answer *No* (for example, Daniel Dennett, and many other modern materialists). As far as Descartes himself is concerned, it can safely be concluded that his answer to *the zombie question* is *Yes*.⁶ But he does not put much emphasis on this issue – quite in contrast to scores of philosophers of recent times: the sophisticated and often highly technical discussion of the zombie question has exercised them considerably. Descartes is much more interested in demonstrating that it is possible – God-possible – that the psychological person exists while the body does not. In short, whereas the focus of modern dualists, and of their adversaries, is on the possibility of *disensoulment*, Descartes's focus – and mine – is on the possibility (God-possibility) of *disembodiment*.

In the *Meditations*, there are two arguments that seek to establish this possibility, one explicit, the other implicit. The implicit argument, which can be gathered from *Meditations* I – III, is much better than the explicit one, which can be found in *Meditations* VI.9. In this latter section of the *Meditations*, Descartes infers – *in effect* – that it is God-possible that the psychological person exists without the body (existing) from the premise that it is “*clare et distincte*” *conceivable* that the psychological person exists without the body (existing). Few have been convinced by this. It has been doubted that it is conceivable that the soul exists without the body; and if this has not been doubted, then it has been doubted that the *conceivability* of the soul's existence without the body entails the *possibility* of the soul's existence without the body. Indeed, a fatal inverse proportionality lurks in Descartes's explicit argument for the possibility of disembodiment: the less the premise of the argument is drawn into doubt, the more the inference in it *must* (in reason) be drawn into doubt; and the less the inference in the argument is drawn into doubt, the more the premise of it *must* be drawn into doubt.

It is better to do without conceivability, and in fact Descartes *did* without it in his *implicit* argument for the God-possibility of disembodiment. There is a “secret” connection between external-world-scepticism and substance dualism. Descartes disclosed this connection. It is an old idea that the existence of the *external world* – or in other words: of the *physical world in the realist sense* – is *doubtful*, *provided* that “doubtful” is defined as “in principle dubitable”. But the existence of the external world is *in principle dubitable* only if it is in the weakest metaphysical sense *possible* that the doubter exists while the external world does not exist; which, in turn, cannot be true without the God-possibility that the psychological person exists without the body (existing) – *quod erat demonstrandum*.

What might be said against this argument? One might hold against it that it is not reasonable to define “doubtful” to mean as much as “in principle dubitable” (doubtfulness, one might say, always needs a substantive reason). But although defining “doubtful” by “in principle dubitable” is certainly not the only rationally legitimate definition of the word “doubtful”, that definition is – just as certainly – a rationally legitimate definition of it, one among others. The best response, however, to the previous objection, is this: *Simply* let the argument start with the premise that the existence of the external world is *in principle dubitable* (and not with the premise that it is *doubtful*), and let the rest of the argument remain as it is.

One might deny, then, that the existence of the external world is in principle dubitable. But it is safe to say that the vast majority of those professional and lay philosophers in the last 2500 years who came upon the question whether the external world exists have thought that its existence is *in principle dubitable*. Evidently they have a powerful elementary intuition on their side. The burden of proof, therefore, lies with those who *deny* that the existence of the external world is in principle dubitable. It is a heavy burden.

One might deny, next, that the *in-principle dubitability of the existence of the external world* entails that it is in the weakest metaphysical sense *possible* that the doubter exists while the external world does not exist. But one should take into account that the in-principle dubitability of the existence of the external world *means* (or can legitimately be taken to mean) that it is in principle reasonable – not in principle unreasonable – to doubt the existence of the external world. And how could this be if it were not even in the weakest metaphysical sense possible – but in the strongest metaphysical sense impossible – that the doubter exists while the external world does not exist?

If one accepts that it is in the weakest metaphysical sense possible that the doubter exists while the external world does not exist, then the dualistic

conclusion follows: it is God-possible – possible in the weakest metaphysical sense – that the psychological person exists without the body existing.⁷ This follows because (a) it is with logical necessity true that if the external world does not exist, then nothing external – nothing physical in the realist sense – exists, hence also not the body (qua physical in the realist sense); and because (b) it is with logical necessity true that the doubter is identical to the psychological person. For who doubts, like Descartes, the existence of the external world (perhaps, like Descartes, for quite non-sceptical purposes), relying on the in-principle dubitability of its existence, will, like Descartes, refer to himself by using the first-person pronoun, and will accept the proposition whose truth is the *conditio sine qua non* of that dubitability: it is in the weakest metaphysical sense (the God-sense) possible that *I exist without the external world existing*: an absolutely omnipotent being could have made it be the case that *I so exist* (could make this be the case even now, provided it is not the case already). Using “I”, the (relevant) doubter is referring to himself, the (relevant) psychological person;⁸ for this is what a doubter (or thinker, or feeler, or senser, or perceiver, or willer) logically must be: a psychological person.

In sum, Descartes’s *implicit argument* for the second independence assertion of substance dualism is a good argument, in contrast to his *explicit argument* for the same conclusion, which is not. Readers are reminded that if something is a good argument, then this does not mean that it is an argument that everybody has to be convinced by. Indeed, since every argument has at least one premise, one can evade *any* argument simply by denying one of its premises, or *its premise* if the argument has only one. In fact, premise-denying is what I would recommend to those who do not relish the idea that it is God-possible that the psychological person exists without the body existing: *Deny* that it is in principle dubitable that the external world exists (for this is the truly operative premise of Descartes’s implicit argument for the second independence assertion of substance dualism). You *are* rationally permitted to *deny* the in-principle dubitability of the existence of the external world⁹ – just as Descartes was (and I am) rationally permitted to *accept* it.

The Achilles Heel of Substance Dualism

It is time to scrutinize that part of SUBDUA which has so far not been scrutinized: the existence of the psychological person. It is logically and psychologically impossible to doubt one’s own existence – this, too, is

something that Descartes discovered (see *Meditations* II.6). Nevertheless, the existence of the psychological person has been under attack for centuries. For Buddhism, the psychological person – or in another word: the self – is an illusion (but of *whom?*). In western philosophy, the existence of the psychological person is explicitly attacked in David Hume's famous negative introspection report in the *Treatise of Human Nature*: "I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception. [...] [Somebody else] may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls *himself*; though I am certain there is no such principle in me. But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions [...] There is properly no *simplicity* in [the mind] at one time, nor *identity* in different, whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. [...] They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind" (emphases in the original).¹⁰ Many other philosophers have more or less followed suit (for example, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, William James, Friedrich Nietzsche, Derek Parfit, Thomas Metzinger).¹¹ But it is fair to say that the denial of the existence of the psychological person leads to incoherence. This is apparent, in a particularly glaring way, in the case of Hume himself (see the quotation), who, when denying that the psychological person exists, implicitly takes himself to be a *psychological person* (but is purblind to the fact that he is doing so): *not* a bundle of successive perceptions, but an introspective observer and judge, existing identically and simply – without temporal parts – over time.

When raising the accusation of incoherence one should, however, keep in mind that the denial of the psychological person – of the self – may be intended by at least some of the deniers to be more a denial of the self's *substantiality* than a denial of its very existence. Is the psychological person a substance? I repeat, first of all, what has already been asserted in the first section of this essay: If the existence and real distinctness of the psychological person and the body is the truth about us, then it is also true that the psychological person – a non-abstract individual without temporal parts – has a degree of ontological independence which is high enough for its being a substance. Now, the existence and real distinctness of the soul (the psychological person) and the body is rationally acceptable (on argumentative grounds); and that the soul is a non-abstract individual without temporal parts is also rationally acceptable (on phenomenological grounds). But is it really true that all this rationally acceptable content already *implies* (as asserted) that the soul has

a degree of ontological independence which is high enough for its being a substance? This may seem doubtful.

The undeniable fact – given present-day science – that the existence and so-being of the soul depends *nomologically* – that is, on the basis of the laws of nature – on the existence and well-functioning of the body, in particular, *the brain*, does not in itself prove that the degree of ontological independence of the soul is *not* high enough for its being a substance. If, however, the soul – the psychological person – were a *mere nomological epiphenomenon* of the brain (or the entire nervous system), which many consider to be an unshakable scientific fact, then the degree of ontological independence of the soul would, indeed, *not* be high enough for its being a substance.

Here, then, is the Achilles heel of *substance* dualism. Note that psychophysical dualism, if it is not substance dualism, is able to live very well with the alleged scientific fact. Fortunately, the purely epiphenomenal character of the psychological person is rather more alleged than established. The causal priority of brain events to *all* aspects of *all* actions of the soul is certainly *not* as certain as it is widely made out to be. In fact, a purely epiphenomenal soul would be pointless from the biological point of view,¹² and its evolution entirely inexplicable since there is no survival-advantage whatsoever to be had from a purely epiphenomenal soul. On the contrary, a disadvantage in the struggle for survival is to be expected from the soul's epiphenomenality, in consideration of the fact that also the production of an epiphenomenal soul costs a large amount of energy; that energy had better be used otherwise. Thus, those who hold that the soul is purely epiphenomenal cannot explain its existence, even less its continued existence as a (generic) phenomenon these thousands of years. The true picture seems to be this: The animal soul – and in particular the human psychological person – evolved as a non-physical emergence of the physical nervous system, to act as a consciousness-based and at least rudimentarily rationality-guided decision maker (in human beings: *sophisticatedly* rationality-guided decision maker) for the biological advantage of the animal in situations where alternative possible courses of behaviour are open to the animal and where an automatically determined reaction is not automatically the best possible response to the situation.¹³ This view implies that the soul is a *dependent substance* (to put it slightly paradoxically); for what is capable of free action (and fulfils the condition of being a non-abstract individual without temporal parts) certainly has a high enough degree of ontological independence for being a *substance* – a substance that nevertheless deserves to be explicitly designated as “dependent”, since, *nomologically*, it cannot exist without the physical basis from which it emerged. The proposed view of *the soul*, the psychological person, is the only one which wholly agrees with *the*

phenomenology of the self: with our *natural* experience of ourselves as free conscious agents (i.e., as non-abstract individuals without temporal parts, capable of consciousness-based free action) who inhabit a body which we – though really distinct from it – depend on for life. That phenomenology is not necessarily true, but it has every right to be respected.

Modern Substance Dualism and Personal Immortality

Many people would say that their favourite idea of personal immortality is this: the body continues to exist forever (*and* stays forever young),¹⁴ with the psychological person forever emerging from it. SUBDUA does not (logically) contradict this idea of personal immortality. But no one mature – whether believer in SUBDUA or not – seriously *hopes* for personal immortality of this kind. The simple reason is this: everybody who has come into sufficient contact with this world of death is hopelessly convinced that no human body exists forever. Personal immortality based on *bodily immortality* may be wished for (in a way), it is certainly not hoped for: the subjective probability one accords to it is strictly *zero*. Personal immortality *that is hoped for* (and therefore accorded a subjective probability greater than zero) is personal immortality in the presence of the unavoidable fate of bodily death.

One upshot of the previous section is that *modern* substance dualists will do well to embrace the following assertion in addition to SUBDUA, and it seems to me that already Descartes embraced it:

ADD

It is nomologically impossible that the psychological person exists without the body existing.

SUBDUA and ADD do not contradict each other. They can be true together, because what is *nomologically impossible* – impossible *provided* that there is no breach of the laws of nature – may nevertheless be *God-possible*: possible in the weakest metaphysical sense. (Note that it is *God-possible* that the laws of nature are broken.)

ADD does not (logically) exclude substance dualism as formulated by SUBDUA. But it excludes something else. *Suppose* that there is *no* breach of the laws of nature; *then*, according to ADD, it is never the case (because it is impossible) that the psychological person exists without the body existing. Hence

it follows that *natural* purely psychological immortality is non-occurrent, since natural purely psychological immortality is precisely the (generic) event that *without a breach of the laws of nature* the psychological person continues to exist forever after the body has ceased to exist (and is, first, a warm corpse, then a cold corpse, then a visibly decaying corpse, then a skeleton in rotten tissue, then a heap of dust, ..., finally a collection of scattered atoms, getting ever more scattered).

What ADD does also not exclude, in addition to SUBDUA-substance-dualism, is *non-natural* purely psychological immortality: the (generic) event that *via a breach of the laws of nature* the psychological person continues to exist forever after the body has ceased to exist. Non-natural purely psychological immortality need not be supernaturally – for example, divinely – induced. But it is usually (more or less implicitly) believed that a breach of the laws of nature *must be* supernaturally induced, and hence it has seemed to most people that non-natural purely psychological immortality, too, can only be supernaturally induced.

Natural purely psychological immortality is excluded by the conjunction of SUBDUA and ADD (since it is already excluded by ADD), and *non-natural* purely psychological immortality is not entailed by that conjunction. It is, however, also not excluded by SUBDUA & ADD. In the presence of bodily death, SUBDUA & ADD do leave room for a breach of the laws of nature, usually called “a miracle”. A miracle – *perhaps* a deed of God – could make real what is metaphysically possible in the weakest sense (i.e., God-possible) but nomologically impossible: the existence of the psychological person *without* the existence of the body. It may seem surprising but it is certainly true: making room for a miracle was all that Descartes had in mind as a service to religion when he inaugurated modern substance dualism. Without a miracle there is no personal immortality. But if no miracles happened, substance dualism would be left quite untouched by this and the consequent absence of personal immortality. This is something that every modern substance dualist – and indeed Descartes himself – would subscribe to. The often-made claim that the sole motivation for substance dualism is the need to rationalize one’s belief in personal immortality – which belief is taken to be of a religious, irrational nature – is unfounded.

Conceptions of Resurrection

A traditional Christian religious view is the following: The psychological person has due to its divinely given nature a *natural* purely psychological immortality, one without metempsychosis, whereas the body is destined to die, that is, to go into non-existence.¹⁵ The non-existence of the body has

various degrees, which succeed each other in time according to the degree of decomposition reached: warm corpse, cold corpse, visibly decaying corpse, skeleton in rotten tissue, heap of dust, ..., scattered atoms (sometimes the stage of scattered atoms is reached from one moment to the next). However, no matter how great is the degree of non-existence/decomposition reached by the body, according to traditional Christian doctrine, numerically the same body as the one that died is, after a time that is more less long, reconstituted in glory by divine miracle, and is reunited with the psychological person who was once "most intimately connected to it and, as it were, permeated it (*illi arctissime [erat] conjunctum & quasi permixtum*)", as Descartes (!) is happy to express himself when describing the soul-body relation (see *Meditations* VI.13).

What has just been presented is the traditional Christian view of *resurrection*. Modern substance dualists, if they happen to believe in resurrection, could adopt this view almost as it stands, except that they should ascribe only a *non-natural, divinely induced* purely psychological immortality to the psychological person, *not* a natural one, and (as will be seen) should opt for a *non-literal* understanding of *numerically the same body as the one that died* being reconstituted in resurrection. But the view, whether in its *old traditional* or in its proposed *modernized* form (though still called "traditional", it will henceforth always be taken in its *modernized* form), does not have many friends today, not even among believers in the Resurrection. Its central element – the purely psychological immortality of the psychological person, *without* metempsychosis, to boot – is rejected by most people today. Against this very common metaphysical dislike, it is of no avail that the purely psychological immortality of the psychological person is nowadays conceived of (by those who have sympathy for it) as non-natural and divinely induced.

Other views of resurrection are in much greater favour, for example, the "wholly dead" view. According to this view, the death and non-existence of the body coincides with the death and non-existence of the psychological person: they die *together* – and *together* they become alive again. The problem with the "wholly dead" view is this: On its basis, it does not only remain doubtful whether the person at the Resurrection is the same person as the person who died, there is also no conceivable ontological basis that could make sure that it is the same person. Resurrection according to the "wholly dead" view is indistinguishable from the creation of a new person. That view offers no reason why the person that God calls into existence at the Resurrection is indeed *me*. It offers no reason why God, when the Day comes, could not create several simultaneously existing persons, each with my memories, character, and outward appearance, each claiming to be me. Which of them would *be* me, the

same person who once existed and died? Perhaps *none* of them? The “wholly dead” view of resurrection has nothing to say in response to these questions – except, perhaps, that God would not do such a thing as to create several simultaneously existing persons on Resurrection Day, each with my memories, character, and outward appearance, each claiming to be me. But the problem just raised for the “wholly dead” view of resurrection does not consist in the claim that God *might* do such a thing; the problem is that he *could* (and *can*) do such a thing (presupposing, of course, that he exists) and that if he did, we would still have to call it – according to the “wholly dead” view – “the resurrection of U.M”.

Before moving on, an important conceptual point needs to be made. Part of the logical content of the concept of the resurrection of a person is this: the resurrected person is *dead* previous to her resurrection; in other words, there is a moment of time, *t*, before her resurrection which is such that the person’s psychological person or the person’s body (or both) does (do) not exist at each of the *several* moments between *t* and her resurrection.¹⁶ Hence the idea that a person – body and soul – is on the occasion of her “death” *immediately* resurrected (or rather: transfigured) into a new life (in the Beyond) is not a proper conception of resurrection at all: because the person is *not dead* previous to this “resurrection”.¹⁷

If a *resurrection* of a person occurs, then it is preceded by an interval (stretch) of the non-existence (deadness) of that person. In some way or other the identity of the person must bridge this interval of non-existence (it does not matter whether the interval is long or short: the ontological problem stays the same); for if it cannot bridge it, then one has no good reason to regard what happens after the interval as a *resurrection*. It would be entirely arbitrary to regard it as such. This is so because “resurrection” certainly means: resurrection of *numerically the same person* as the person who died.

The only way to bridge *the interval of non-existence* before the resurrection is the *continued partial existence* of the person. Continued partial existence is excluded by the “wholly dead” view, and this exclusion makes the view inadequate. If the continued partial existence of a person is not excluded, then there are two conceivable ways of it, each of them latching onto one of a person’s two ontological sides, each being used as the basis of a conceivable solution to *the identity problem of resurrection*. One of these two solutions is the traditional solution, the solution which is part of the traditional Christian view of resurrection (described earlier):

- (A) Though the person, taken as whole, does not exist at any time in the interval of non-existence (because the body is non-existent all through that

interval), the psychological person – the soul – does exist at every time in it and is the carrier of personal identity.

The *other* solution to the identity problem of resurrection is this:

(B) Though the person, taken as whole, does not exist at any time in the interval of non-existence (because the psychological person – the soul – is non-existent all through that interval), the body does exist at every time in it and is the carrier of personal identity.

It may seem obvious that (B) cannot be true. Is it not obvious that the body of a dead person does no longer exist? It ceased to exist when the heart – or, according to present opinion, the brain – stopped its activity. Although usually the degree of a body's non-existence – the degree of its decomposition – is at first, just after death, low (but *not* 0), that degree is normally getting higher very quickly. In fact, in *cosmic* perspective, the complete dissolution of a body is *always* the matter of a moment. Thus, it seems, (B) is obviously false. Unfortunately, (A) does not seem to fare any better: Is it not obvious that the psychological person – the soul – of a dead person no longer exists? Isn't there overwhelming *evidence* that the soul dies (falls into non-existence) when the person dies, and indeed without leaving any (immediate) relics of it behind (in contrast to the body, whose relics can exist for thousands of years)? Therefore, both (B) *and* (A) seem obviously false, and the "wholly dead" view of resurrection seems the only way out – which view, however, is not acceptable because it offers no solution to the identity problem of resurrection. Can this trilemma be resolved?

It is interesting that the traditional view of what happens to *the soul* at death, at some time before the Resurrection, does not deny *the evidence*. It does not deny the occurrence of the intersubjectively observable death-phenomena just now alluded to, but interprets them in a way that is friendly to (A). According to the traditional view, the soul does not die when the person (as a whole) dies, and those phenomena are not evidence of the soul's non-existence; the soul merely separates itself from the body and *goes away* – whereas *the body* does begin its spell of non-existence at the very moment of separation.

But may not *the evidence* be interpreted in a *structurally analogous* way, one that is friendly to (B)? It may. But such an interpretation does not recommend itself by verisimilitude. According to a highly non-traditional view of what happens to the body at death, at some time before the Resurrection, the body does not die when the person dies, and the death-phenomena are not

evidence of the body's non-existence; the body merely separates itself from the soul and *goes away* or *is spirited away*¹⁸ – whereas *the soul* does begin its spell of non-existence at the very moment of separation. Clearly, this latter reading of what is going on at death is very hard – just about impossible – to believe; for with a fresh corpse in view, we are overwhelmed by the impression that the body has *not* gone away but has mutated into *this thing*, the body's first relic, the first stage of its non-existence.

Thus, position (A) and the traditional Christian view of resurrection seem to be vindicated. There is a worry, however. Wouldn't position (B') that results from (B) by replacing in it "the body" by "*a relic of the body*" also be a solution to the identity problem of resurrection, and a much more plausible one than (B)? But although a relic of the body can exist much longer than the body itself (consider a skull), it, too, will eventually fall into non-existence. In fact, the bodies of most human beings who died have dissolved without leaving any traces behind. Hence neither these bodies themselves nor any relic of them can serve as the carrier of personal identity until Resurrection Day.

But could one not take the portion of *prime matter* that was in the person at the time of her death as the carrier of her personal identity? A portion of prime matter, certainly, could plausibly survive until Resurrection Day. True, it is dubitable whether there are portions of prime matter, but a collection of elementary particles which remains in existence no matter how scattered its members become seems to be a good substitute for a portion of prime matter. Such a collection of particles, however, cannot be a relic of a body (just as a portion of prime matter cannot): In order to be a *relic* of a body, it must be intrinsic to the collection to which body it once upon a time belonged, and, of course, this is *not* intrinsic to it: *considered in itself*, a particle-collection (on the level of protons, neutrons, electrons) which once belonged to a body could have belonged to some *other* body, or to *none*.

But couldn't a particle-collection be the carrier of personal identity *none-theless*? Consider the collection of elementary particles that were in the person at the time of her death. True, that collection is not a relic of the body of that person; yet it is in agreement even with the traditional Christian view of resurrection (as mentioned earlier) that *this material* be reconstituted by divine miracle at the Resurrection into *numerically the same body as the one that died*. The problem (pointed out – and solved in his own way – by Peter van Inwagen in "The Possibility of Resurrection") is that almighty God could do the same *at the same time* also with a rather different collection of elementary particles, say, with the particles that were in the person – who died at the age of 95 – at noon on her seventh birthday.¹⁹ Suppose he did.

The resulting body also seems to be numerically the same body as the one that died, only at a much younger age: with more than 88 years of life still ahead of it. But obviously the *two simultaneously existing* bodies – both reconstituted in glory – cannot *both* be identical to the body that died, i.e., to the body of the person who died. Which of the two is *that body*, and hence, according to the traditional view, also the body of the resurrected person? The answer is this: *none* of the two bodies is literally identical to the body that died; *that* body is just gone forever.

But if the question is merely which of the two bodies – *the death-at-95-body* or *the 7th-birthday-body* – is identical to the body of the resurrected person, then the answer is clear – *if* the person's soul endured until Resurrection Day: the death-at-95-body must be the person's resurrection-body, because only *this body* fits *this soul* (being, so to speak, *coeval* with it). And in a non-literal, *analogical* sense, the death-at-95-body is also *the body that died*: though not (literally) identical to it, it is still the best representation of the latter body. If, however, the person's soul did not endure until Resurrection Day, then the answer to the question asked at the beginning of this paragraph is rather less clear.

The upshot of these considerations is that a particle-collection cannot well be *all by itself* the carrier of personal identity until Resurrection Day. And therefore, all things considered, the traditional solution to the identity problem of resurrection – solution (A) – stands vindicated.

Resurrection and Substance Dualism

Substance dualism as codified by SUBDUA & ADD is compatible with every single one of the conceptions of resurrection considered in the previous section. It is also compatible with the non-occurrence of resurrection, just as it is compatible with the non-occurrence of personal immortality. There is, however, a natural affinity between the traditional Christian view of resurrection and substance dualism. This is due to the fact that substance dualism contains an assertion which must be true if the traditional Christian view of resurrection is to be true. This assertion is (what I called) *the second independence assertion of substance dualism* (see SUBDUA and note 5):

IND2

It is God-possible that the psychological person exists while the body does not exist.

The traditional Christian view of resurrection cannot be true without IND2 being true. *The negation* of ADD, in contrast, need not be true if that view is true – because that view is here to be taken in its *modernized* form (as stipulated in the previous section). The (modernized) traditional view of resurrection is compatible with ADD, and with SUBDUA; in fact, people who have that view may accept ADD, IND2, and the remainder of SUBDUA beyond IND2, and no logical conflict will arise from this. Indeed, SUBDUA & ADD – modern substance dualism – fits comfortably with the (modernized) traditional Christian view of resurrection, although only IND2 (a mere conjunct of SUBDUA) is strictly entailed by it.

There *is*, therefore, a religious motivation for substance dualism, even though substance dualism can very well stand on non-religious feet (see sections “Justifying Substance Dualism” and “The Achilles Heel of Substance Dualism”). That motivation is rational – *relative*, of course, to pre-adopted religious belief – since the traditional Christian view of resurrection is much more reasonable (given belief in the Resurrection) than it is nowadays made out to be (see section “Conceptions of Resurrection”). It is true that Thomas Aquinas, who held the *old*, not the *modernized*, traditional Christian view of resurrection, *sometimes* (not always) did deny *substantiality* to the soul²⁰ (the self, the psychological person). But he did so *on negligible grounds* which have nothing to do with the concept of substance here employed: the soul was not to be a substance because, in its *normal* state of existence, it had the imperfection of parthood, being *normally* a part of an *entire* person. But by the same token also the entire person would have to be excluded from substantiality, since a person, in her entirety, is in her *normal* state of existence a part of the *biosphere*.

Notes

1. Regarding the three title-page inscriptions that have been quoted, see Descartes (1986), *Meditationes/Meditationen*, p. 22.
2. Translation: U.M. The original text: *Meditationes/Meditationen*, p. 218: “Pour ce que vous dites, que je n’ai pas mis un mot de l’Immortalité de l’Âme, vous ne vous en devez pas étonner; car je ne saurais pas démontrer que Dieu ne la puisse annihiler, mais seulement qu’elle est d’une nature entièrement distincte de celle du corps, & par conséquent qu’elle n’est point naturellement sujette à mourir avec lui, qui est tout ce qui est requis pour établir la Religion; et c’est aussi tout ce que je me suis proposé de prouver”.
3. It is not a good idea to require a *maximal degree* of ontological independence for being a substance. If one did require it, very few items would be a

substance: only God (at best) would be a substance – which is a consequence only Spinozists can relish.

4. This is the *first* independence assertion of substance dualism.
5. This is the *second* independence assertion of substance dualism.
6. In the practice of hyperbolic scepticism (which is Descartes's method for finding the absolutely indubitable) it is a small step from allowing that automata could be under the hats and clothes of people walking by in the street (see *Meditations* II.13) to allowing that there could be *imitatively perfect* automata under those hats and clothes – that is, human bodies that act like human beings *but are not human beings*: because the corresponding psychological persons do not exist.
7. Another thing that follows (with some plausibility) is this: the doubter – the psychological person – is a non-physical being. The argument to this conclusion goes like this: If the doubter can (in the weakest metaphysical sense of “can”) exist without the external world existing, then the doubter can exist without anything physical (in the realist sense) existing. Hence he can exist and not be physical. But if the doubter is a physical being, then he cannot (in the strongest metaphysical sense of “cannot”) exist and not be physical; for *physicalness* is an existence-essential property of everything that is *physical*. The doubter, therefore, is a non-physical being.
8. In the concrete instances of radical Cartesian doubt, the doubters vary, and with them the psychological persons.
9. If you are not aiming to convince others, you do not have to worry about burden of proof.
10. *A Treatise of Human Nature* I, p. 302 (Hume 1962).
11. As far as Parfit (1984) and Metzinger (2003) are concerned, see the entries in the list of references. Impressive quotations from Lichtenberg and Nietzsche (in the original German) can be found in Großheim (2002), *Politischer Existentialismus*, pp. 52 – 54. For William James, see James (1950), *The Principles of Psychology* I, chapter X.
12. Compare: James, *The Principles of Psychology* I, pp. 138 – 141.
13. I have defended this view in many publications, beginning with my book of 2004, *The Two Sides of Being*.
14. Eternal youth is what the Cumaean Sibyl forgot to ask for when she asked Apollo for eternal life (that is, eternal life *in the body*) and was granted what she asked for. The consequences can be gathered from the epigraph to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.
15. Is the mortality of the body natural or non-natural? Regarding this question, there is a certain ambivalence in traditional Christian doctrine. *On the one hand*, the mortality of the body is seen to lie in the (original and divinely intended) nature of *matter*, and is therefore considered to be *natural* – an (Aristotelian-Thomistic) view which finds further confirmation in the obvious fact that death has a positive function in nature. *On the other hand*, the

mortality of the body is seen as a punishment by God for the sin – the disobedience – of Adam and Eve, and is therefore considered to be *non-natural* (a divinely induced permanent breach of the laws of paradisiacal nature). The modern view is that the mortality of the body is natural because it is due to the laws of nature; God, usually, does not enter into the picture at all.

16. There are infinitely many such moments if time is *continuous*, and if time is continuous, then there must be *either* a last moment of death, *or* a first moment of resurrected life.
17. In normal cases of such a “resurrection” (not Enoch’s, not Mary’s case), it would seem to common experience that *a corpse* is left behind. Is only the soul being “resurrected” (normally)?
18. This view has actually been proposed: by Peter van Inwagen in “The Possibility of Resurrection” (1978).
19. It is a well-known fact that there is no overlap between the two collections. Let it be supposed (in order to avoid peripheral complications) that both collections, and all parts of them, are at no time in any other person.
20. See *Summa theologiae* I, q. 29, a. 1, and q. 75, a. 2 (Aquinas 1988). For a contrary Thomasic statement, see *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, s. 29 (Aquinas 1954).

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