

Hick on the resurrection

PHIL 20208

Jeff Speaks

November 14, 2006

Hick begins by noting that the main historical arguments for life after death were based on the view that human beings are simple, indivisible immaterial souls. But he notes that this view of the mind has come under pressure in the 20th century, and that, in any case, the idea of the continued existence of an immaterial soul is not the picture of life after death that is most readily suggested by the Judao-Christian tradition:

“The religious difference between the Platonic belief in the immortality of the soul and, and the Judaic-Christian belief in the resurrection of the body is that the latter postulates a special divine act of re-creation. . . . Hence, in the Jewish and Christian conception, death is something real and fearful. It is not thought to be like walking from one room to another, or taking off an old coat and putting on a new one.” (238)

But, as Hick notes, this change in view raises a problem for the Christian: “A major problem confronting any such doctrine is that of providing criteria of personal identity to link the earthly life and the resurrection life.” Why this is a problem for the view Hick sketches, but not for the dualist.

He attempts to solve this problem via the story of John Smith (238-9). The view which emerges seems to be that life after death is a matter of being re-created by God; and the being that God re-creates will be identical to us if it is, physically and psychologically, enough like us.

Is this view convincing? Can you think of any objections to it? How does Hick respond to Parfit-style objections in the Postscript? What does it mean that identity here is a ‘matter for decision’?