

*The Idea of Immortality.* The Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh in the year 1922. By A. SZTŦ PRINGLE-PATTISON, LL.D., D.C.L., Fellow of the British Academy, Emeritus Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in the University of Edinburgh. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1922. Pp. 210.

"SOME ONE," says Dr. Pringle-Pattison (p. 91), "has wittily remarked that the customary conception of man treats the human being as 'a mechanical union of a corpse and a ghost,'" and he agrees with the implication in the quotation that such a description is incorrect.

A corpse and a ghost cannot here mean, as they mean in ordinary language, a body which is not connected with a self, and a self which is not connected with a body. For the two are said to be in a union with one another. The meaning must be that the body is capable of existing when not in union with the self, and that the self is capable of existing when not in union with the body. The rather vague phrase "mechanical union" presumably refers to the same fact—that the body could, under other circumstances, exist without the self, and the self without the body, or at any rate that one of the two could exist without the other.

It seems to me that this is clearly the right account of the relation between the self and the body. But there are, no doubt, arguments—though they seem to me insufficient—for adopting other views. One thing, however, seems to me to be absolutely beyond dispute, and that is, that unless the self is a "ghost," and its union with the body is "mechanical," it is quite impossible that the self should be immortal. It is quite certain that the body, in every case, ceases to be a body—whether, as some people would hold, at the moment of death, or, as I should prefer to say, in the course of decomposition. The self cannot, therefore, be immortal unless it can exist independently of the body, when the latter has perished, and unless, therefore, it is what was called a ghost. And if the self can part company with the body, and yet remain a self, the union must be what is meant by mechanical.

This view, however, Dr. Pringle-Pattison rejects, mainly, as it would seem, on the ground that it involves the substantiality of the soul. He defines substance (p. 70) as "'id quod per se stat,' a concretely existent thing as distinguished from qualities or attributes which are conceived as existing *in alio*, i.e., as the attributes or activities of some real being". With this definition, I believe that most thinkers who accept the conception of substance would agree.

But he regards it as dangerous to speak of the soul as substance, since it will betray us into "a thinly disguised materialism". For the original and natural application of the term was to material bodies, and so, if we think of a soul as substance, we shall think of it on the analogy of a material thing. "The ordinary idea of such a thing implies an ultimate core of reality which remains unchanged

throughout the changes of its more superficial states or qualities; and the soul-thing or soul-substance is similarly conceived as a perfectly simple and absolutely self-identical somewhat, which persists unchanged throughout the flux of our mental experience . . . a changeless unit" (p. 73).

Now the idea of substance may have been originally applied to matter, and the idea of material substance may be what Dr. Pringle-Pattison says it is—I am not competent to discuss either point. But he seems to me utterly wrong, as a matter of history, when he says that the soul as a substance is conceived as unchangeable in time. Of course those philosophers who thought that nothing was really in time, thought that selves were not really in time, and therefore were unchangeable. But those philosophers who thought that there was time and change have always accepted the fact that substances changed, while preserving their identity through change.

The two greatest modern philosophers who accepted the reality of time and held the self to be a substance, were Leibniz and Berkeley, and it is beyond doubt that they both held that every self, except God, changed in time. It is true that they both declared the self to be simple and indivisible. But if we look at their treatment of the subject, it is clear that they meant that it was simple and indivisible in the dimension of simultaneity, and that they did not assert it to be simple and indivisible in the dimension of succession. I do not think, indeed, that when they asserted it to be simple and indivisible in the dimension of simultaneity, they meant that it had no parts in that dimension, but only that, unlike material compounds, it had no parts which could exist, previously or subsequently, without being parts of the self. If they had maintained more than this they would have fallen into an inconsistency so great as to be extremely improbable, since they both held cognitions to be parts of the selves. And they did not want to maintain more than this, since their only interest in the simplicity of the self was to argue from it, in the manner which was refuted by Kant, to the immortality of the self. And for this purpose it would have been sufficient to show that the self could not break up into parts which could continue to exist after the self had perished.

But whether they held that selves were or were not simple in the dimension of simultaneity, they both believed that non-divine selves changed in the dimension of time. And I think that most, if not all, other writers who have believed that time was real and souls were substances, have followed them. The view that a substance must be "an ultimate core of reality which remains unchanged throughout the changes" seems to have no place except as something which Locke believed that other people believed. And, if Locke understood anything clearly, it was certainly not the philosophy of other people.

Dr. Pringle-Pattison, having rejected the possibility that the self should be a substance, has to give another theory of its nature. He adopts Aristotle's remarkable view that "the soul is the entelechy

or fulfilment, the complete account of the living body" (p. 70). "The human embryo in question is born with the potentiality of reason, and . . . this particular body is the means appointed for its realisation" (*ibid.*). "The soul, it has sometimes been said, weaves itself a body. From the point of view I am at present emphasising, we might rather say the body grows itself a soul" (*ibid.*). "The organism in common with the environment is the medium in which the soul comes into being" (p. 71). "We might almost speak of the body growing a soul" (p. 102).

These passages, taken by themselves, would suggest that the self is an activity of the body, and that the brain produces thought as the liver produces bile—which would be a materialism without even a thin disguise. But Dr. Pringle-Pattison is not a materialist. (Indeed, he tells us (p. 80) that materialism is "hopelessly out of date," which he seems to regard as one of the severest condemnations which can be passed on any theory of the universe.) His reason for rejecting it is to be found, I think, on page 104 where he tells us that the conscious self "shaped by all its experiences, and resuming them in an intense and characteristic unity," is felt by the ordinary man "to possess a reality to which the facts of the animal life on which it is reared appear merely accessory; he is ready to agree with Socrates and Plato that *this* is his 'true self,' not the body which he carries about with him". In this Dr. Pringle-Pattison agrees with his ordinary man. The result, so far as I can see, is that the self is produced by the body, but that, when produced, it is neither a part nor an activity of the body, but something other than the body. Since the theory is Dr. Pringle-Pattison's, I must not presume to call it a substance, though that is what it seems to me to be, but perhaps entity may be considered a sufficiently neutral word.

In this view there is nothing contradictory. It may be an ultimate causal law that, when a human body is in a certain state and acting in a certain manner, a self will come into existence which has certain characteristics. But the union of two entities by an ultimate causal law can scarcely escape the charge of being a "mechanical union," if any sort of union is mechanical. And it was implied in the quotation with which I began my article that the union between body and mind was not to be mechanical.

And the situation becomes still more difficult when we remember that Dr. Pringle-Pattison, after all, believes in immortality. "The body, ceasing to be a living body, may relapse into its elements when it has 'fulfilled' itself, while the true individual, in which that fulfilment consisted, pursues his destiny under new conditions" (p. 105). One of the new conditions is that he will be no longer united to his body. What is he then, except that ghost which the author will not allow us to call him?

The relation which the author considers to exist between body and mind is thus rather obscure. It is not made simpler by a remarkable attempt which he makes to discriminate very decisively

between organisms and inorganic matter. "The parts of an organism are so much members one of another and of the whole which they constitute—they are so interpenetrative in their action—that it is hardly a paradox to say that organism qua organism is not in space at all" (p. 93). That the members of organisms should be members of one another is simply impossible. That they are members of the whole is very true—so are the parts of a pebble. That they form a more vital unity than the parts of a pebble may be true. But how does this make them less spatial? Let us take these four statements "my body occupies more than a cubic inch," "the waters of the Atlantic occupy more than a cubic mile," my brain is within my skull," "Etna is within Sicily". In what sense can it be said that the first and third are less true than the second and fourth? And, if they are equally true, in what sense can it be said that organisms are not in space?

We have seen that, if selves are to be immortal, it will be necessary for them to be the ghosts, in mechanical union with their bodies, which Dr. Pringle-Pattison has said that they must not be. But, waiving this difficulty, what are his positive reasons for supposing that selves are in any case immortal? The argument is to be found at the beginning of Lecture 10 (p. 190). The author first summarises very briefly the grounds for supposing that there is a God, and that such a God finds the fruition of his nature in love, "not in any shallow sentimental sense, but the self-giving Love which expands itself for others, and lives in both their joys and sorrows"—in other words, I should venture to comment, not love at all, but benevolence. "And if so, the value of the finite world to the Spirit of the universe must lie, above all else . . . in the spirits to whom he has given the capacity to make themselves in his own image. The spirits themselves must be the values to God, not simply the degrees of intelligence and virtue, abstractly considered, which they respectively realise. They are not made then—we seem justified in concluding—to be broken up and cast aside and to be replaced by relays of others in a continual succession."

It would be irrelevant to our present purpose to consider whether Dr. Pringle-Pattison's argument for the existence of a beneficent God is valid. But, even assuming its validity, the argument from the existence of such a God to human immortality is fallacious. Like all arguments from the existence of a beneficent God to any particular form of good, it is refuted by the existence of evil. That there is some evil is not to be denied. No such God would desire any evil. Therefore either there is no such God, or his desires are not always fulfilled. And if they are not always fulfilled, how can we be certain that they will be fulfilled in any particular case? There is no God such as to preserve me always from a headache. How can I be sure that there is a God such as to preserve me always from annihilation? It is true that I might—personally, I am confident that I should—lose much more by

annihilation than by a headache, and that, therefore, a beneficent God would desire that the former should be avoided more than the latter. But that does not exclude the possibility that the former should be impossible to avoid.

It is to be noticed that Dr. Pringle-Pattison does not think that it can be demonstrated that all selves are immortal. "People talk as if the being of a soul were something which almost defied annihilation, which at any rate could be brought to an end only by a special fiat of the Deity. But surely it is quite the other way. It is but a relaxing of central control, and a process of dissociation begins at once" (p. 197). Immortality may be gained, we are told, by moral qualities without any intellectual excellences, but not by intellectual excellences apart from moral qualities (p. 198). The reason for this distinction does not seem evident.

I have spent so much of my space on Dr. Pringle-Pattison's main argument that I must omit any notice of the historical part of his work, and even of his most interesting discussion as to the relation of eternity to the present and the future. As to the latter, I will only quote his conclusion. "The attempt to discard the durational form becomes in the end an affectation, which betrays us into a negative position actually false (I have contended) than the popular crudities against which it is a protest" (p. 205). This seems to me to be a warning which is absolutely correct, and which is badly wanted.

I have to thank Dr. Pringle-Pattison for some courteous criticisms on my own work. Most of them turn on ultimate judgments of value, and do not admit of argument. I can only repeat that I am still clear that, under certain conditions, immortality without memory might be both real and valuable. There is, however, one point on which I do not think that he has judged me correctly. He says (p. 123) that my metaphysical argument rests entirely on my definition of the self. And he says, just above, that it rests on my statement that the self is "a substance existing in its own right". It would seem, then, that he thinks that I defined a self as a substance existing in its own right. I do not think that I ever did *define* a self in such a way. I certainly have failed to find the definition in looking through my books. And in *Studies in the Hegelian Cosmology* I endeavoured to *prove* that a self was a substance existing in its own right, and that this involved, for reasons which I give, that each self exists through all time. I do not now consider the line of argument which I then adopted as valid, though I think that I have found better reasons for the same conclusion, which I hope some day to publish.

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