

Immortality

INTRODUCTION

THE mortality of man defines by contrast the immortality which some men hope for, some men fear, some men scoff at, but no man ever fails sooner or later to consider. The life of man, like that of other animals, moves through a normal span of years between birth and death. Legend tells of certain heroes upon whom the immortal gods bestowed immortal life, gracing them with an aspect of their own divinity. Jewish and Christian faith holds that Adam, with all his posterity, would never have suffered disease or death if he had refrained from sin. But according to the theologians, the imperishability of the bodily frame of man in a state of grace is a preternatural condition. Except, then, for the miraculous or the supernatural, death follows birth and life, that which comes to be passes away, all things of flesh and blood perish.

The proposition "All men are mortal" has been repeated during centuries of lessons in logic. Its truth has never been seriously challenged even by those who have criticized the syllogism which reaches the conclusion that since he is a man, Socrates is mortal. But throughout the same period, the great books of poetry and religion, of philosophy and theology, have recorded the qualifications which men have placed upon this truth.

Man dies in the flesh to be reborn in the spirit. Man, composite of soul and body, perishes as do all things which are subject to dissolution; but the soul itself, a simple spiritual substance, is immortal, living on after its union with the body is dissolved. The immortal soul is sometimes conceived as having many incarnations, inhabiting now this body, now that, in an endless pilgrimage through endless time; and sometimes, as in the Christian faith, each

soul has only one embodiment on earth. It is specially created by God to inform the body of a human being. It is destined to be his immortal spirit in a future which belongs to eternity rather than to time.

Except for the form it takes in the doctrine of reincarnation, or the transmigration of souls, the idea of immortality is usually attended by conceptions of an afterlife in another world—the life of the shades in the Elysian Fields or in Hades, the life of the blessed in heaven or of the damned in hell. The afterlife is never merely a continuation of the life begun on earth. The other world is not just an abode for the disembodied soul. It is a place of judgment, of rewards and punishments, in which the soul realizes the good, or pays the penalty for the evil, toward which its earthly career inclined. The connection of immortality with rewards and punishments appears even in the theory of reincarnation, for as the soul passes from one embodiment to another, it enjoys or suffers the consequences befitting its previous existence.

STATED AS A speculative problem, the question of immortality is traditionally formulated as a question about the soul or the spirit of man: whether it exists by itself either before or after its conjunction with a human body; and if so, in what manner it subsists. For those who affirm the soul's separate existence, there seems to be no question about its everlasting endurance, either without beginning at all or from the moment of its creation. But the manner of the soul's subsistence leads to speculation concerning an afterlife or an other-life in a world of spirits, or in realms as far apart as heaven and hell.

We shall presently consider to what extent such speculations have been submitted to argument and to what extent they have been matters of religious belief. But in both these modes of consideration, the theme of immortality is never merely a matter of speculative interest, never merely a question of spiritual substances and their subsistence. It is always a problem for the moralist.

Is this earthly life and its brief temporal span enough for the aspirations of the human spirit, and for its striving toward a perfection of knowledge, of love, and of repose? If external sanctions are needed to support the voice of conscience, are earthly rewards and punishments—either humanly dispensed, or capriciously distributed by chance or fortune—sufficient sanction for the moral law? Can perfect justice be done unless there is a divine law and a divine judge, a judge who can see beyond the acts of men into their hearts, from whose judgment no one escapes, and whose rewards and punishments are supernaturally established states of blessedness and misery for the soul?

Whether or not God, freedom, and immortality are, as Kant suggests, the three great objects of speculative thought, they do seem to form the basic triad of religious beliefs. In the religions of the west, these beliefs take various forms, but the belief in immortality is seldom if ever found separate from belief in a supernatural order, in gods or a God to whom man owes certain duties and before whom man stands to be judged as a responsible moral agent who was free to obey or disobey the divine commands. But, this fact admitted, the question remains whether the principles of morality can be adequately stated, or made effective in the regulation of human conduct, without a religious foundation, or at least without reference to God and immortality.

On this the moralists disagree. The argument in Plato's *Gorgias*, for example, about whether it is better to do or suffer injustice, ends with a myth which tells of the soul standing naked before its divine judge after a man's death, showing no marks of the evil the individual has suffered during his life, but only of the evil he has done. The reader who

thinks the myth is necessary to complete the argument concerning justice and punishment takes one position on the question. He adopts the view that without the judgment of souls in an afterlife justice cannot be done.

The preoccupation with immortality in a great many of Plato's dialogues is not always based upon moral considerations. It appears as frequently in discussions of the relation between the soul and the objects of its knowledge. If, to be proper objects of knowledge, the Ideas must be eternal, the soul which knows them must also be immortal. But when the discussion of immortality involves a comparison of this life and the life to come, it usually turns on considerations of goodness rather than of knowledge and truth. For Kant, if not for Plato, immortality is almost entirely a moral matter; and where the Platonic myth deals with just rewards and punishments in an afterlife, the Kantian argument is concerned with the achievement of moral perfection.

In his *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant affirms immortality, along with the existence of God and the freedom of the will, as necessary practical postulates—indispensable conditions of the moral life. "The perfect accordance of the will with the moral law," Kant writes, "is *holiness*, a perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment of his existence . . . It can only be found in a progress *in infinitum* towards that perfect accordance . . . It is necessary to assume such a practical progress as the real object of our will." The realization of happiness, or the *summum bonum*, Kant concludes, "is only possible practically on the supposition of the immortality of the soul."

The opposite view appears to be taken in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and J. S. Mill's *Utilitarianism*. The *summum bonum* is a temporal happiness, a perfection attainable on earth and by purely natural means. In those passages in which Aristotle defines happiness in terms of contemplative activity, he also speaks of it as a godlike life and therefore one which has a touch of immortality. Man is able to lead such a life, he writes, only "in so far as something divine is present in him." To lead the life of reason, which is divine in

comparison with any other mode of human life, we must, he says, "so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us."

But to be immortal in this way seems to mean the possession of a godlike quality in this life rather than the promise of a life hereafter. Aristotle demands only "a complete term of life" as a necessary condition for "the complete happiness of man." He passes lightly over the question whether "the dead share in any good or evil." So far as he considers a *blessedness* which the gods can add to human happiness, it does not belong to an afterlife, but consists rather in the good fortune which the gods grant to some men and which increases and secures their happiness beyond that which is attainable by virtue alone.

The moral issue concerning immortality is more explicitly faced by Mill in his examination of the need for religious or supernatural sanctions. While he does not admit their indispensability, neither does he deny their utility. "There is evidently no reason," he declares, "why all these motives for observance should not attach themselves to the utilitarian morality, as completely and as powerfully as to any other." Yet he himself stresses "the possibility of giving to the service of humanity, even without the aid of belief in a Providence, both the psychological power and the social efficacy of a religion."

Mill does not go as far as Lucretius in regarding the belief in immortality, with the attendant possibility of everlasting torment for the soul, as itself an immoral doctrine. For Lucretius it is a nightmare which haunts the waking hours of men, filling them with false fears and putting future pains in the way of present pleasures. "The fear of Acheron/Must, first and foremost, be dismissed," he writes. "This fear/Troubles the life of man from its lowest depths,/Stains everything with death's black darkness, leaves/No pleasure pure and clear."

Where others see in man's fear of death his natural desire for immortality, Lucretius thinks it is the dread of immortality which causes man's fear of death. "In our death we have no cause for fear," he says, if death is the end. "We cannot be wretched in non-existence."

IN THE GREAT POEMS of antiquity we find the imagery and detail of the pagan conception of the life hereafter. Both Odysseus and Aeneas visit the underworld. They see the shades of the departed heroes; all that is visible to the bodily eye are shimmering wraiths. They talk with the departed, listen to their memories, or hear them speak prophetically of the future. From Anchises, his dead father, Aeneas learns his destiny; and Ulysses hears in Hades what has befallen his companions at Troy and his family at home during his years of wandering.

Yet there is a striking difference between Virgil's poem and Homer's with respect to the afterlife. The division which Virgil makes between Elysium and Tartarus corresponds much more closely than anything in Homer—or for that matter in the other Greek poets—to the Christian distinction between heaven and hell. Though Elysium and Tartarus both belong to the underworld, one is the abode of the blessed, the other a place of torment for sinners.

In the sixth book of *The Aeneid*, the Sibyl explains the topography of the underworld to Aeneas. There is a place "where the way forks," she says:

The right-hand leads beneath the battlements of
great Dis,
And is our route to Elysium; the left-hand takes the
wicked
To Tartarus, their own place, and punishment
condign.

Tartarus, the abode of the condemned, is surrounded by "a flaming torrent—Hell's river of fire," and is filled with the noise of punishment. Elysium, on the other hand, is

The Happy Place, the green and genial
Glades where the fortunate live, the home of the
blessed spirits.
What largesse of bright air, clothing the vales in
dazzling
Light, is here! This land has a sun and stars of
its own.

Its inhabitants, in sharp contrast with the unfortunates in Tartarus, seem to pass their time in peace and pleasure.

Homer makes no such sharp division between the realm of the blessed and the realm of the condemned. Plutarch speaks of "the isles of the blessed celebrated by Homer," but

the reference cannot be substantiated. In one passage in *The Odyssey* Menelaus is promised that he will be taken "to the Elysian Field," which is at "the limits of the earth, where fair-haired Rhadamanthys [Rhadamanthus] is, and where there is made the easiest life for mortals, for there is no snow, nor much winter there, nor is there ever rain." But even this seems to describe a different life rather than an afterlife.

So far as the underworld is described on the occasion of Ulysses' descent into "the house of Hades and of revered Persephone," we are told that the Theban prophet Teiresias alone has his "senses stay unshaken." Persephone "has granted intelligence . . . after death" to Teiresias alone, while all other souls in Hades are "flittering shadows." The shades of good men and bad alike languish in the domain of darkness. Tityus, Tantalus, and Sisyphus are subjected to special punishments for their grievous sins and transgressions, but all the shades—even of those men whom the gods loved and honored—seem to be in a state of misery. Though they are not all beset with torments and agonies, none seems to be overcome with joy or to have reached contentment.

Those whom the gods love do not join the deities on Mount Olympus. When they enter the somber realm of Pluto—the deity of the underworld—they, like all the other shades whom Charon ferries across the river Styx, are more remote from the gods than are mortal men on earth. The only exception perhaps is Heracles, whom Odysseus meets in Hades, or rather "his image, that is . . . he himself among the immortal gods enjoys their festivals, married to sweet-stepping Hebe, child of great Zeus and Hera."

The general attitude of all who dwell in the underworld is summed up by Achilles when he tells Odysseus: "never try to console me for dying. I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on, than be a king over all the perished dead." And the mother of Odysseus describes the condition of the dead in Hades as one in which "the sinews no longer hold the flesh and the bones together, and once the spirit has left the white bones,

all the rest of the body is made subject to the fire's strong fury, but the soul flitters out like a dream and flies away."

Among other ancient peoples such as the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Persians, Herodotus found other views of immortality than those which prevailed in Greece. He reports, for example, the doctrine of transmigration or reincarnation—a doctrine which also appears in the myth of Er at the end of Plato's *The Republic* and is alluded to elsewhere in the Platonic dialogues. "The Egyptians," Herodotus writes, "were the first to broach the opinion that the soul of man is immortal, and that, when the body dies, it enters into the form of an animal which is born at the moment, thence passing on from one animal into another, until it has circled through the forms of all creatures which tenant the earth, the water, and the air, after which it enters again into a human frame and is born anew."

Herodotus, however, seems more interested in the effect of such beliefs on the practices of the living, especially their funeral rites and other devotions, than he is with the truth of conflicting theories of immortality.

"The doctrine of a future state," according to Gibbon, "was scarcely considered among the devout polytheists of Greece and Rome as a fundamental article of faith." Before the time of Christ, "the description of the infernal regions had been abandoned to the fancy of painters and of poets, who peopled them with so many phantoms and monsters who dispensed their rewards and punishments with so little equity, that a solemn truth, the most congenial to the human heart, was oppressed and disgraced by the absurd mixture of the wildest fictions." Lacking an acceptable or satisfying belief, yet inclined to believe in, as men are inclined to hope for, a better life, the pagan world, Gibbon thinks, could not long resist the appeal of Christian teaching. "When the promise of eternal happiness was proposed to mankind on condition of adopting the faith, and of observing the precepts of the Gospel, it is no wonder," he declares, "that so advantageous an offer should have been accepted by great numbers of every religion, of every rank, and of every province in the Roman empire."

THE ARGUMENTS for personal immortality which Christian theologians draw from the nature of the human soul do not differ essentially from the proofs offered by philosophers without recourse to religious faith. This applies to arguments advanced before and after Christianity by Plato and Plotinus as well as to those developed by philosophers like Descartes and Locke who belong to the Christian community. The exclusively theological aspects of the Christian doctrine of immortality are those matters which, since they are beyond the reach of reason, belong to faith alone.

The doctrine that the individual soul is created and that it has a unique affiliation with one human body, is not capable of being proved or defended by reason against the quite opposite theory that the soul has always existed and inhabits any number of bodies in the course of many reincarnations. The existence of hell, purgatory, and heaven as supernatural states of the soul; the time, place, and manner of the Last Judgment; the resurrection of the body and the difference between the bodies reunited with the souls of the blessed and the damned; the joy of eternal happiness and the misery of eternal damnation—these dogmas of Christian orthodoxy go far beyond all merely philosophical attempts to prove the soul's immortality or to consider its life apart from the body.

The great theologians undertake to do more than expound these articles of faith. Reason asks questions which the man of faith must try to answer, defending his faith, not by proof, but by overcoming doubts, by answering objections, by making dogmas intelligible. Yet the great theologians admit an irreducible core of mystery. The joy of the soul united to God in the beatific vision surpasses temporal understanding. The mysteries of hell are perhaps even greater.

The preacher in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, dwelling on the spiritual torments of hell, declares that "of all these spiritual pains by far the greatest is the pain of loss . . . a torment greater than all the others. Saint Thomas, the greatest doctor of the church . . . says that the worst damnation consists in this, that the understanding of

man is totally deprived of divine light and his affection obstinately turned away from the goodness of God." The accompanying spiritual pains are "the pain of conscience" and "the pain of extension," but the "last and crowning torture of all the tortures of that awful place," the preacher concludes, "is the eternity of hell."

The deprivation of God's love and exclusion from His presence constitute a spiritual misery comparable to the beatitude of beholding God and being within the circle of the divine light. One is an infinite anguish of frustration and loss; the other, an infinite rest of peace and fulfillment. But the theologians also teach that the damned suffer the pains of sense in hell, as well as the pains of deprivation. "That hell, which also is called a lake of fire and brimstone," Augustine says, "will be material fire and will torment the bodies of the damned." When hellfire and the expiatory punishments of purgatory are not merely symbols for the imagination, they raise extraordinarily difficult questions, as both Augustine and Aquinas admit.

Dante asks us to read the descriptions he gives of hell, purgatory, and paradise in *The Divine Comedy* in a strictly literal sense as well as in several symbolic meanings, such as the moral and the allegorical. But he explains in his own commentary on the poem that the literal meaning also involves symbolism, insofar as the things that the words refer to when taken in their literal sense are themselves the symbols of other things. In any case, the poet may be more successful than the theologian in making intelligible through symbol and metaphor what in its literal significance is strictly unimaginable. The imagery of darkness, sultriness, noise, and heaviness, which grows more intense as the descent proceeds in the *Inferno*, does more than the anguished outcries of the damned to convey the reality of hell.

The metaphors of music and agility express the harmony of heaven. But it is especially the symbolism of light which captures the invisible in terms of vision, except perhaps when it reaches a climax in the blinding effulgence at the end of the *Paradiso*. As Dante moves

upward in the realm of love, where courtesy prevails in every speech and charity suffuses every will, he sees the mystic rose of heaven entirely through reflected light. The saints, and especially those glorious spirits who instruct his progress, become pale mirrors of the ineffable vision which they themselves behold.

Milton too pictures heaven and hell, but in *Paradise Lost* the destiny of the immortal soul remains a prophecy, a consequence of the earthly immortality which Adam lost. Except for the Prologue, hell and heaven are offstage in Goethe's *Faust*, though they are the main implications of the wager Faust makes with Mephistopheles, which puts his immortal soul in the balance.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL issue concerning immortality cannot be separated from issues concerning the existence and nature of man's soul. The various arguments for immortality seem to rest not merely on the reality of the distinction between soul and body, but more precisely on the immateriality of the soul. Lucretius, for example, does not deny the existence of soul, nor does he fail to differentiate the soul from the body wherein it is located. The soul, according to Lucretius, like everything else in the universe, consists of atoms. These differ from those of the body by their roundness, smoothness, and mobility. They are "much smaller than those which form the body's substance,/ But they are also fewer, here and there/At wider intervals throughout the framework."

On this view of the soul as material in nature and as constituted of many quite separable parts, the soul is necessarily as perishable as the rest of the body. Lucretius writes,

When time's dominion shakes the body,
When limbs react with dull ungainliness,
Then the mind limps, tongue is a babbler, mind
Is palsied, all is failure, all is loss.
So spirit's quality must dissolve like smoke
Into the air aloft . . .
Its birth, its growth, its aging, and its death
Are one with ours.

It should be observed, however, that it is not the materiality of the soul, but rather its divisibility into parts, which accounts for its mortality. The atoms after all are material, but since

as the ultimate units of matter they are simple bodies and so are absolutely indivisible, they cannot perish. Only the simple is imperishable.

The *imperishability of the simple* (i.e., of that which has no parts) occurs as a premise in one of the great arguments for the immortality of the soul. In Plato's *Phaedo*, which formulates this argument as immortality is discussed in the prison cell where Socrates awaits his execution, two assumptions seem to be made: first, that the soul is the principle of life in animate bodies, for, as Socrates says, "whatever the soul possesses, to that she comes bearing life"; and second, that as an immaterial being, the soul must be simple, for only bodies are "composite" and "changing."

From the first of these assumptions, the argument proceeds in terms of what it means for bodies to be alive or dead. Socrates argues from examples. "If any one asks you," he says, "what that is, of which the inherence makes the body hot, you will reply not heat . . . but fire . . . Or if any one asks you why a body is diseased, you will not say from disease, but from fever." So if any one asks, "what is that of which the inherence will render the body alive?" the answer is not life but "the soul." As the principle of life itself, the soul "will never receive the opposite of what she brings," namely, death. Therefore the soul is immortal.

On the second assumption, the endless duration of the soul follows from its simplicity as an immaterial and immutable being. "The compound or composite," Socrates says, "may be supposed to be naturally capable, as of being compounded, so also of being dissolved; but that which is uncompounded, and that only, must be, if anything is, indissoluble." When the soul leaves the body, for which it has been both motor and pilot, the body ceases to be alive and perishes in the manner of material things; the soul lives on, freed from temporary bondage to the body, its prison house. It "departs to the invisible world—to the divine and immortal and rational."

The argument from simplicity, as repeated in Moses Mendelssohn's *Phädon*, is criticized by Kant. Admitting that a truly "simple being cannot cease to exist," Kant contends that the *knowable* soul—which is for him the empiri-

cal ego or consciousness—may have intensive, though it lacks extensive, quantity. It would therefore be capable of diminution in reality; and so it “can become less and less through an infinite series of smaller degrees.”

With regard to the soul as an immaterial and simple substance (*i.e.*, the transcendental ego), Kant is willing to affirm that immortality necessarily belongs to such a nature. But he denies that we can have any knowledge of the soul except as a phenomenon of experience. There can be no valid theoretical argument for immortality precisely because there can be no scientific knowledge of the nature of transcendental objects—beings beyond all possible experience. What Kant calls “the paralogisms of rational psychology” are offered to show the dialectical futility of proofs or disproofs of immortality, in the same way that “the cosmological antinomies” attempt to expose the untenability of arguments for or against the infinity of time and space, the infinite divisibility of matter, the existence of a free will and of God.

Without deciding whether Kant’s theory of experience and knowledge is true, this much we can learn from him about the issue of immortality. Those philosophers who, like Descartes and Locke, think they have grounds for affirming the existence of the soul (or mind or spirit) as an immaterial substance, also have grounds for affirming its immortality. Those who, like Lucretius and Hobbes, think they have grounds for denying the existence of anything except material particles, also have grounds for denying either the existence of the soul or its having a permanence not possessed by other material wholes. And those who, like Hume, think there are no grounds for affirming the existence of any kind of enduring substance, material or spiritual—even to the point of doubting personal identity from moment to moment—can admit no grounds for affirming a substantial, much less an immortal, soul.

ONE OTHER POSITION remains to be considered. Though it does not fall outside the foregoing alternatives, Aristotle’s theory represents an important variation on one of them. As against Hume or Kant, Aristotle holds that

substances exist and are knowable. The sensible, material things of experience are such substances. But, according to Aristotle, these substances are not *exclusively* material. They are composed of two principles, matter and form, neither of which is a substance capable of existing by itself. As the exposition of this theory (in the chapters on FORM and MATTER) tries to make plain, form and matter exist only in union with one another. It is the composite substance resulting from their union which exists in and of itself.

The form which enters into the composition of a substance can be called its “substantial form.” In relation to the matter with which it is united, the substantial form is the actualization of the potentiality in matter to exist as a substance of a certain kind. Not all substances are of the same kind. Some are alive; some inanimate and inert. In the case of living substances, the substantial form, according to Aristotle, confers upon matter not only the act of existing as a substance, but also the act of being alive. Because it thus differs from the form of an inanimate substance, Aristotle gives a special name to the substantial form of a living thing. Because the word “soul” has long been used to designate “the principle of life in living things,” Aristotle feels justified in using it as the name for the substantial forms of plants and animals as well as men.

This theory and its principal opposite (which regards the human soul as a complete substance, not a substantial form) are more fully discussed in the chapter on SOUL. Here we are concerned only with the consequences of Aristotle’s theory for human immortality. If, as he seems to hold, substantial forms exist only insofar as they exist in the substances of which they are the forms, then when a composite substance perishes through the decomposition of its matter and form, the form perishes also. Souls—the substantial forms of living things—would seem to be no exception. “The soul,” Aristotle writes, “is inseparable from its body, or at any rate certain parts of it are (if it has parts)—for the actuality of some of them is nothing but the actualities of their bodily parts. Yet some may be separable because they are not the actualities of any body at all.”

The exception which Aristotle seems to have in mind is that part of the human soul which is the intellect. It differs from other powers of the soul, he suggests, as the eternal from the perishable. "It alone," he says, "is capable of existence in isolation from all other psychic powers." He argues that "in so far as the realities it knows"—or at least some of them—"are capable of being separated from their matter, so is it also with the power of the mind."

What is the significance, for the immortality of the human soul, of the supposed ability of the intellect to act independently of the body? Aristotle answers in terms of the principle that "if there is any way of acting or being acted upon proper to soul, soul will be capable of separate existence; if there is none, its separate existence is impossible." If we consider nutrition, sensation, and emotion, there seems to be, he admits, "no case in which the soul can act or be acted upon without involving the body." The one possible exception may be thinking, but Aristotle adds at once that "if this too proves to be a form of imagination or to be impossible without imagination, it too requires a body as a condition of its existence."

Later, when he is discussing the power of thought, Aristotle flatly insists that "the soul never thinks without an image" and that "no one can learn or understand anything in the absence of sense," for "when the mind is actively aware of anything it is necessarily aware of it along with an image." According to his own principles it would seem to follow that since thinking proves "to be impossible without imagination, it too requires a body as a condition of its existence." Hence the intellect is not separable from matter, nor is the human soul, of which the intellect is the highest power.

Nevertheless, Aristotle declares, in a passage which has become famous, that mind as the active power of thinking "is separable, impassible, unmixed"; and with this declaration of the intellect's separability from matter, he seems to affirm immortality, at least for the intellectual part of the soul. "When mind is set free from its present conditions," he writes,

"it appears as just what it is and nothing more: this alone is immortal and eternal."

THE PASSAGES QUOTED have been subject to conflicting interpretations. The Arabic commentators on Aristotle, notably Averroës, find in them no basis for the immortality of the individual human soul. The texts, according to their view, support the theory of a *single* active intellect which exists apart from the minds of individual men—almost a divine principle in the universe which, acting on the rational souls of individual men, enables them to think and understand. Aquinas argues against them to the opposite conclusion.

Against the Averroists Aquinas contends that if the individual man, Socrates, can be said to think, then whatever powers are required for thinking must belong to his individual nature. The powers required for thinking are, according to Aquinas, twofold: an active intellect, able to abstract the intelligible forms of things from their material representation in sensory images; and a possible or potential intellect, capable of receiving these forms when separated from matter by the act of abstraction.

The theory of knowledge and thought which this involves is discussed in the chapters on FORM, IDEA, MIND, and UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR. Here we are concerned only with the point which Aquinas makes, that since thinking involves universal notions, and since forms can be universal only apart from matter, the intellect which abstracts and receives abstractions must itself be immaterial. The intellectual powers do not operate through a bodily organ, as the power of nutrition operates through the alimentary system or the power of vision through the eye. The brain, in other words, is not the organ of understanding or thought, but rather, along with the external sense organs, it is the material organ of perception, memory, and imagination.

The argument for the immortality of the human soul then proceeds on the premise that that which can *act* apart from matter can also *exist* apart from matter. "The intellectual principle which we call the mind or the intellect has an operation *per se* apart from the

body. Now only that which subsists can have an operation *per se*, for nothing can operate but what is actual; wherefore a thing operates according as it is." Hence Aquinas concludes that "the human soul, which is called the intellect or mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent." The attribution of subsistence to the human soul means that although it is the substantial form of the human body, it is also capable of existing in and of itself as if it were a simple substance.

Unlike angels, which as spiritual substances are by their very nature *separate* forms, not forms of matter, human souls are substantial forms which, having a certain degree of immateriality, are also to that degree separable from matter. But the reverse is also true. To the extent that the soul's powers, such as sensation and imagination, require corporeal organs, the soul is inseparable from the body. Since, furthermore, Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that every act of understanding or thought involves imagination, he faces the difficulty of explaining how the soul can function in any way when separated from the body after death.

"To solve this difficulty," he says, "we must consider that as nothing acts except as it is actual, the mode of action in every agent follows from its mode of existence. Now the soul has one mode of being when in the body, and another when apart from it . . . The soul, therefore, when united to the body, has consistently with that mode of existence, a mode of understanding by turning to corporeal images, which are in corporeal organs; but when it is separated from the body, it has a mode of understanding by turning to simply intelligible objects, as is proper to other separate substances." Nevertheless, Aquinas adds, it is not natural for the soul to understand in the latter way, for it is not by nature a separate substance. Therefore, "to be separated from the body is not in accordance with its nature."

THIS LAST POINT has both philosophical and theological significance. Philosophically, it may be easier to prove the immortality of the soul if one starts, as the Platonists do, with the proposition that the soul is a purely spiritual principle or substance which does not

depend upon the body. But then, according to Aquinas, you prove the immortality of the soul at the expense of destroying the unity of man, for if the soul is a substance rather than a form, the individual man, composed of body and soul, consists of two distinct substances.

Theologically, Christian faith believes in the resurrection of the body after the Last Judgment and the end of the world, as well as in the soul's separate existence immediately after death. From the point of view of a theologian like Aquinas, a philosophical proof of immortality must corroborate both of these dogmas. In his judgment a proof which rests upon the proposition that the soul has a nature akin to that of an angel (*i.e.*, a purely spiritual substance), makes the Christian dogma of the resurrected body unintelligible or even abhorrent.

If the immortal soul were a complete and separate substance, it would have no need for its body in the life hereafter. It has that need only if its nature is that of a substantial form, partly immersed in matter and partly separate therefrom. Then, because of these two aspects of its nature, it can be said, not only that "the human soul retains its proper existence when separated from the body," but also that it has "an aptitude and a natural inclination to be united to the body."

The incompleteness of the soul without the body and, even more, the dependence of man's mind upon his bodily senses and imagination raise, as we have seen, the difficult problem of how the soul exists and operates when separated from the body by death and before it is reunited to a resurrected body. It may even raise the question whether the reasoning of Aquinas constitutes a valid philosophical argument for the actual existence of the soul in separation from the body, or merely suggests the possibility of such existence. But the facts which create these difficulties are the very facts to which Aquinas appeals in his "Treatise on the Resurrection," in order to explain the basis in nature for the miraculous reunion of the body with the soul.

THE ARGUMENTS FOR and against immortality so far considered are couched in the form of

proofs or disproofs which aim at certainty. All except one are, moreover, theoretical or speculative in the sense that they proceed in terms of observations, assumptions, and inferences about the nature of things—about atoms and substances, matter and form, extension and thought, inert bodies and living organisms. The one exception, already mentioned, is Kant's practical argument based on the moral necessity of an immortal life.

There is still another argument, both speculative and practical in character, which does not aim at certainty nor take the form of a proof. It is the proposal of a wager concerning the equally unknown alternatives of oblivion after death and eternal life. Supposing no rational evidence to favor the truth of either alternative, Pascal weighs the probability of gain and loss which is consequent upon living according to each hypothesis. The probability, he thinks, vastly preponderates on the side of those who choose to forego the worldly life because, to take the chance of gaining the whole world during the short term of earthly life, they would risk the loss of eternal happiness for their immortal souls.

Locke engages in the same type of calculation. "When infinite happiness is put into one scale, against infinite misery in the other; if the worst that comes to the pious man, if he mistakes, be the best that the wicked can attain to, if he be right, who," Locke asks, "can without madness run the venture? Who in his wits would choose to come within the possibility of infinite misery; which if he miss, there is yet nothing to be got by that hazard? Whereas, on the other side, the sober man ventures nothing against infinite happiness to be got, if his expectation comes to pass." If, wagering on immortal life, "the good man be right, he is eternally happy"; but "if he mistakes"—if death ends all—"he is not miserable, he feels nothing."

ALL THESE THEORIES, including Kant's postulate and the wager proposed by Pascal and Locke, are clearly concerned with arguing for personal immortality or individual survival. Among those who deny the survival of the individual human spirit, some—Hegel and

Spinoza, for example—conceive an impersonal type of immortality.

For Hegel it is Spirit itself which is immortal. "The successive phases of Spirit that animate the Nations in a necessitated gradation," he writes, "are themselves only steps in the development of the one Universal Spirit, which through them elevates and completes itself to a self-comprehending totality." In considering the history of the world, he regards everything as the manifestation of Spirit; and because of this, even when we traverse the past, we have, he says, "only to do with what is *present*; for philosophy, as occupying itself with the True, has to do with the *eternally present*. Nothing in the past is lost for it, for the Idea is ever present; Spirit is immortal; with it there is no past, no future, but an essential now. This necessarily implies that the present form of Spirit comprehends within it all earlier steps . . . The grades which Spirit seems to have left behind it, it still possesses in the depths of its present."

What Spirit is for Hegel, Nature is for Spinoza. Spinoza, however, conceives a kind of immortality for the individual man, which is achieved through his participation in the eternity of Nature. The body of the individual man, according to Spinoza, belongs to the infinite matter of Nature. It is "a certain mode of extension actually existing." The individual human mind is similarly "a part of the infinite intellect of God." In one sense, both the body and the mind are temporal things which, like all other finite modes of God or Nature, have a fixed and limited duration. Furthermore, the personal memories and thoughts of the individual man depend on the coexistence of his mind and body. "The mind can imagine nothing, nor can it recollect anything that is past," Spinoza writes, "except while the body exists."

But Spinoza also maintains that "only in so far as it involves the actual existence of the body, can the mind be said to possess duration, and its existence be limited by a fixed time." Of every individual thing—whether it is a finite mind or a finite body—there exists in the infinite and eternal essence of God a conception or idea. "To conceive things under the form of eternity," Spinoza writes, "is to

conceive them in so far as they are conceived through the essence of God." Because he holds that the human mind can have adequate knowledge of God, he holds that the mind can conceive "itself and its body under the form of eternity." Hence through knowing God, or the eternal truth about temporal things, the mind participates in eternity.

Imagination and memory may belong to time, but not the intellect, which is capable of knowing God. To explain why we feel "that we are eternal," Spinoza points out that "the mind is no less sensible of those things which it conceives through intelligence than of those which it remembers." Although we cannot *imagine* or *remember* that "we existed before the body," we can *know intellectually* something about mind and body which belongs to eternity; because, in addition to conceiving them as "existing with relation to a fixed time and place," we can conceive them as "contained in God" and as following "from the necessity of the divine nature." Since it "pertains to the nature of the mind to conceive the essence of the body under the form of eternity," Spinoza concludes that "the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal."

Such immortality is, in a way, enjoyed in this life, for it is a present participation in eternity through the mind's knowledge of God. There is also the impersonal immortality which men enjoy through contemplating the perpetuation of the species, or more particularly the persistence of an image of themselves in their offspring. In the *Symposium*, Socrates reports a conversation with Diotima in which she explains to him that in procreation "the mortal nature is seeking as far as is possible to be everlasting and immortal." Men hope that offspring "will preserve their memory and give them the blessedness and immortality which they desire in the future." But if procreation through the pregnancy of the body is a

way of achieving immortality, artistic creation through a kind of pregnancy in the soul, Diotima argues, is even more so. "Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets," she asks, "would not rather have their children than ordinary ones? Who would not emulate them in the creation of children such as theirs, which have preserved their memory and given them everlasting glory?"

Such impersonal immortality belongs to the leading characters in the great works of fiction—to Shakespeare's Hamlet and to Cervantes' Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. As Pirandello says in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, "The man, the writer . . . will die, but his creation does not die."

One need think "only of the ambition of men" and what they will do "for the sake of leaving behind them a name which shall be eternal," to realize how deeply "they are stirred by the love of an immortality of fame." Even deeper, according to Diotima, is their love of the good, or more precisely, their desire for "the everlasting possession of the good" which leads all men necessarily to "desire immortality together with the good."

Whether it is to be attained through the perpetuation of the species, through survival in the memory of mankind, through knowledge of God, or through the subsistence of the soul, the desire for immortality seems to express man's dread of disappearance into utter nothingness. Yet, facing death, Socrates faces the alternatives with equanimity. "Either death," he declares, "is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another." Either it is like a dreamless and undisturbed sleep or it opens a new world to which the good man can look forward with hope. On either alternative we can be of good cheer, he tells his friends, if we believe that "no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death."