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REINCARNATION, CLOSEST  
CONTINUERS, AND THE THREE CARD  
TRICK: A REPLY TO NOONAN AND  
DANIELS<sup>1</sup>

I. PRELIMINARY POINTS

In *Religious Studies* xxvi (1990) Harold W. Noonan and Charles B. Daniels severally take issue with my ‘Reincarnation and Relativized Identity’.<sup>2</sup> Both make valuable points but both, I think, have somewhat missed the point of my original article. In that paper I singled out five different views on the possibility of life after death: (1) that we are reincarnated in the self-same body we had in our pre-mortem state;<sup>3</sup> (2) that we are reincarnated in *another* – in a *different* – body; (3) that we continue to exist (with or without a temporal gap) in a disembodied form, which may or may not culminate in re-embodiment;<sup>4</sup> (4) that pre-mortem life is a dream from which post-mortem life is the awakening; (5) that none of the above holds: there is no life after death.

The first position I take to be, or at least to be consistent with, simple orthodoxy. I did not discuss it at all. The last position also went undiscussed, though I mentioned in passing that I believe it to be true. There is, I suggested, no good argument against the general case envisaged in (4), though it is not, I think, particularly popular. It has been suggested, though perhaps not more than that, by thinkers as otherwise diverse as Keats and Kant.<sup>5</sup> Much of my paper was devoted to showing that, given that we reject

<sup>1</sup> I have benefited considerably from conversations with my colleague, Ali Kazmi, while writing this reply.

<sup>2</sup> Harold W. Noonan, ‘The Possibility of Reincarnation’, *Religious Studies*, xxvi (1990), 483–91 (hereafter Noonan); Charles B. Daniels, ‘In Defence of Reincarnation’, *Religious Studies*, xxvi (1990), 501–4 (hereafter Daniels); J. J. MacIntosh, ‘Reincarnation and Relativized Identity’, *Religious Studies*, xxv (1989), 153–65.

<sup>3</sup> I take this position to be consistent with texts such as 1 Corinthians 15:35–44 and Philippians 3:21–2: a body may be altered without ceasing to be the *same* body.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to distinguish this position from that held by, for example, St Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas the soul (somewhat mysteriously) survives bodily death, but is *not* identical with the deceased person. Geach sums the matter up clearly: ‘Aquinas ... says in his commentary on 1 Corinthians that my soul is not I, and if only my soul is saved then I am not saved nor is any man. Even if Christians believe there are “separate souls”, the Christian hope is the glorious resurrection of the body, not the survival of a “separated soul”’ (P. T. Geach, *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 40).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream’, asked the young Keats in 1814:

(3) as a possibility,<sup>6</sup> we cannot consistently accept (2), for reasons that were, I suggested, familiar in the literature on identity, though less discussed than they should be in the literature on reincarnation.

The point of writing the paper was to note that these familiar objections might seem inapplicable if identity were relativized, and to show that in fact, even when identity is relativized, the objections still obtain. Thus the scope of the paper was explicitly limited to one particular view of reincarnation: that reincarnation could consistently be claimed to occur even when there was a temporal and causal gap between the original person and the putative reincarnatee.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the authors discussed were in agreement that were there to be two equally plausible candidates for the identity title, neither would succeed to it. They were not discussing things such as the so-called

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I

Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream,  
And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?  
The transient pleasures as a vision seem,  
And yet we think the greatest pain's to die.

II

How strange it is that man on earth should roam,  
And lead a life of woe, but not forsake  
His rugged path; nor dare he view alone  
His future doom which is but to awake.  
(*The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed H. W. Garrod (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 539.)

Though clearly not without his doubts on the matter ('I long to believe in immortality,' he wrote to Fanny Brawne in 1820), he returned to this theme shortly before his death: 'Is there another Life? Shall I awake and find this all a dream? There must be we cannot be created for this sort of suffering' (Keats to Charles Brown, 30 Sept. 1820, *The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821*, ed. H. E. Rollins (2 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958), II, 302).

<sup>6</sup> That (3) should be rejected is argued for vigorously in Terence Penelhum's *Survival and Disembodied Existence* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), and Kant was at least *suspicious* of its possibility 'matters of opinion are always Objects of an empirical knowledge that is at least intrinsically possible ... To assume rational inhabitants of other planets is a matter of opinion; for if we could get nearer the planets, which is intrinsically possible, experience would decide whether such inhabitants are there or not; but as we never shall get so near to them, the matter remains one of opinion. But to entertain an opinion that there exist in the material universe pure unembodied thinking spirits is mere romancing – supposing, I mean, that we dismiss from our notice, as well we may, certain phenomena that have been passed off for such' (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), Part 2, §30 (91), p. 467). Nowadays, of course, the rejection of (3) is a philosophical commonplace. For an interesting discussion of the way in which this has come about see U. T. Place, 'Thirty Years On – Is Consciousness Still a Brain Process?', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, (1988) 208–19.

<sup>7</sup> Terence Penelhum has suggested more strongly that in the presence of large numbers of people who in some sense satisfied our reincarnation intuitions it would be 'ridiculous' not to agree that they were identical with the pre-mortem people with whom we would supposedly be inclined to identify them. He continues: 'It would be wholly irrational, if such events took place, to retain the naturalistic conception of the person if one had had it previously, or to continue to hesitate about adopting the Christian conception of the person if one had been hesitating. The only reason why it is not irrational to do either of these things now is that these events have not happened, and are still in the future even on the Christian view' (*Butler* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 145–6). Reincarnation and similar thought experiments are skewed if we concentrate on how *nice* it would be to survive. For a case where identity *matters*, and so it is important that the closest continuer is *not* identical with the original see A. J. Budry's novel *Michaelmas*.

‘brain transfer’ cases. They were not discussing the Ship of Theseus. They were not discussing amoebae. They were discussing cases where, without postulating any entity which persisted from the pre-mortem to the post-mortem state, we could nonetheless identity a post-mortem putative person with a pre-mortem person.<sup>8</sup>

There are a number of unclarities about this claim, but two main features stand out. One is that the apparently reincarnated person,  $R_1$ , let us say, is *relevantly similar* to some dead person,  $O$ . This relevant similarity is grounded in  $R_1$ 's possession of a set of characteristics,  $C$ , which is in some sense congruent with  $O$ 's set of characteristics.<sup>9</sup>

The set of characteristics is not assumed to *contain* the property ‘=  $O$ ’, which would render the claimed identity somewhat uninteresting, nor does it contain a uniqueness clause, since our authors typically add on such a condition. We may think of the set, perhaps, as containing only genuinely monadic predicates, with mental state predicates having pride of place. Precisely what does, and what does not, go into this set seems to me to be a difficult matter. It is also, I think, a matter for those who claim that this type of reincarnation is a possibility to settle. I am willing to allow, for the sake of argument, that the reincarnationists can delineate such a list, though I would not care to undertake the task myself. Minimally, however, such a set will contain predicates that are relevant both to cross-temporal and to cross-world identity claims.

Assuming the death of  $O$  to have occurred at  $t$ , and the apparent first (or re-) appearance of  $R_1$  to have occurred at a later time  $t'$  the set of characteristics  $R_1$  has at  $t'$  (or perhaps shortly thereafter) should on this account have the required relation to the set of characteristics  $O$  had at  $t$  (or shortly before). Its having this relation will be a *prima facie* consideration in favour of the identification of  $R_1$  and  $O$ . Let us symbolize this required relation (whatever it may be) as

$$C(R_1, t') \approx C(O, t).$$

It is clear that the relation ‘ $\approx$ ’ is not *sufficient* for identity, since clearly we have the possibility

$$C(R_1, t') \approx C(O, t) \ \& \ \exists x(C(x, t') \approx C(O, t) \ \& \ x \neq R_1).$$

There must, then, be something else involved. The authors I have been discussing opt for the absence of a competitor. Granted, they suggest, that when there are two equally qualified candidates neither of them is identical with the original, nonetheless if there were only *one* apparently reincarnated person *that* person would (or could – the views vary slightly

<sup>8</sup> For the reason behind the qualification ‘putative’ see §6, ‘Yet Another Problem’.

<sup>9</sup> It is usually assumed that there should be some strong qualitative *similarity* between  $R_1$ 's q-mental-states and those of  $O$ . Following Nerlich (‘On Evidence for Identity’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, xxxvii 1959), I argued in ‘Reincarnation and Relativized Identity’ that the assumption that such similarity is relevant needs, but does not receive, support.

here) be identical with the pre-mortem person in question.<sup>10</sup> Writing 'Ex@t' for 'x exists at t', and generalizing:

$$\forall x \forall y \forall t \forall t' ((Ex@t \ \& \ Ey@t' \ \& \ C(x, t) \approx C(y, t') \ \& \ \forall z ((Ez@t' \ \& \ C(x, t) \approx C(z, t')) \rightarrow z = y)) \rightarrow x = y).$$

That this condition cannot be a necessary as well as a sufficient condition for identity may be seen by considering the cases of new-born identical twins, just produced clones, etc., where we have identity without uniqueness of resemblance.

Looking at this conditional we see the strength of Nerlich's point that the set of characteristics which supposedly ground the identity stands in need of justification. For what is doing all the work here is the uniqueness condition

$$\forall z ((Ez@t' \ \& \ C(x, t) \approx C(y, t')) \rightarrow z = y).$$

The set of conditions, C, in terms of which we set up the relation could be literally anything at all: 'is possessed of a deep voice and believes in leprechauns', for example. Saying that we have identity with some original if something satisfies this condition *and nothing else does* gives us the uniqueness identity requires by *fat*: but then we have the task of showing why just this set of properties is relevant. Since the uniqueness condition is tacked on, and does not follow from other factors as it does in the normal identity case, the claim begins to look somewhat vacuous.

And even so, a problem remains, for the following are clearly possibilities:

$$C(R_1, t') \approx C(O, t), \ C(R_2, t') \approx C(O, t), \ R_1 \neq R_2.$$

But now we have, in the possible world where  $R_1$  is the only contender for identity,  $R_1 = O$ , whence  $\diamond (R_1 = O)$ . In the possible world where  $R_2$  is the only contender for identity, we have  $R_2 = O$ , whence  $\diamond (R_2 = O)$ . And in the possible world where both  $R_1$  and  $R_2$  have the property ' $\approx$ ', we have  $R_1 \neq R_2$ , i.e.  $\diamond (R_1 \neq R_2)$ .

However, modalities before identity signs may be dropped or added without loss or gain, given some fairly unproblematic assumptions.<sup>11</sup> But dropping the signs of modality above gives us

$$R_1 = O \ \& \ R_2 = O,$$

whence

$$R_1 = R_2$$

and also

$$R_1 \neq R_2.$$

Even the unique contender clause is not enough to save the identity claim.

Since the views of Hick and Penelhum are theologically influential it seems worthwhile to point out an apparent inconsistency in their position. Now, let us see what is on offer by way of defence.

<sup>10</sup> Notice that this is not merely a matter of *us* having *evidence* for the identity. It is the case that fulfilment of the conditions yields identity.

<sup>11</sup> See 'Reincarnation and Relativized Identity' for details. The general case is discussed in Brian F. Chellas and Krister Segerberg, 'Modal logics with the MacIntosh rule', *Auckland Philosophy Papers*, 1991.3.

## II. NOONAN

It was the above view, put forward by Hick, Penelhum, and others, including at one time myself,<sup>12</sup> that I suggested was logically impossible, and it was this that I referred to throughout that paper, as I shall throughout this, when I spoke unqualifiedly of reincarnation. Elsewhere Noonan himself has expressed dubiety about this sort of reincarnation,<sup>13</sup> but in his present note he couples the fact that many people have believed that reincarnation occurs<sup>14</sup> with an apparent feeling of unease about the notion that the (putative) reincarnation I discussed might be *logically* impossible.<sup>15</sup> However, I am unrepentant on both these counts. Richard Swinburne has remarked:

Many societies have believed that present persons are their dead ancestors reincarnated. The fact that the society does hold that view about personal identity has no tendency to show that this view is true...<sup>16</sup>

Nor, I would add, has it any tendency to show that such a view is possible. Many things that people believe and have believed are logically impossible. In 1867 'a bill for an act introducing a new mathematical truth' was introduced into the Indiana State Legislature,<sup>17</sup> one consequence of which was that  $\pi = 16/5$ . The Lower House passed the bill by a vote of 67 to 0, but despite the unanimity of the legislators,  $\pi \neq 16/5$ . As Arthur Prior remarked after proving that, *logically*, certain things are unbelievable, 'It is one of the uses of logic that it brings these hard truths home to us.'<sup>18</sup> Of course, I may be *wrong* about this type of reincarnation being logically impossible, but I see nothing strange about the notion that logical considerations are relevant to such matters.

Noonan considers two defences to my charge.<sup>19</sup> He notes that neither

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Terence Penelhum's already cited *Survival and Disembodied Existence*, as well as his later *Butler*; John Hick, 'Theology and Verification', in *Theology Today*, xvii (1960), as well as chapter 15 of *Death and Eternal Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Bruce Langtry ('In Defence of a Resurrection Doctrine', *Sophia*, 21.2, 1982), J. J. MacIntosh, 'Memory and Personal Identity', in S. Coval and J. J. MacIntosh, eds, *The Business of Reason* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.) The general point is discussed in Eli Hirsch (*The Concept of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), and has been the subject of an interesting recent article by Daniel Kolak and Raymond Martin ('Personal Identity and Causality: Becoming Unglued', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, xxiv (1987), 339-47).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g. H. W. Noonan, *Personal Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 15 and pp. 205-6, where Noonan stresses the need not only for a causal connection but for the *right kind* of causal connection.

<sup>14</sup> Noonan makes this point in his first paragraph, getting us off to a false start straightaway, for it is simply not the case that 'It has been supposed by many' that the kind of reincarnation I was discussing occurs.

<sup>15</sup> Noonan, p. 483. Noonan also characterizes it as a 'mere appeal to logic' (p. 491); but why should an appeal to logic be 'mere'?

<sup>16</sup> 'Richard Swinburne's Reply', in Sydney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne, *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> For a fuller account of this strange case see N. T. Gridgeman, 'Circumetrics', *The Scientific Monthly*, lxxvii (1953), 31-5. Unhappily the bill was delayed long enough for adverse publicity to mount, and it was defeated in the Senate.

<sup>18</sup> A. N. Prior, *Objects of Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 88.

<sup>19</sup> These are essentially the views discussed in ch. 7, 'The Reduplication Problem', of his already mentioned *Personal Identity*.

defence squares particularly well with our common sense notions concerning identity but points out, quite correctly, that all that is required of them is that they be themselves logically possible, not that they be common-sensical or even correct. Indeed it is clear that he himself does not accept their truth. Here, however, he is arguing simply for their possibility.

The position is, however, somewhat more complicated than Noonan suggests. His points apply to the kinds of cases typically considered in the literature on personal identity. My paper concerned a most *atypical* case: a case where we lack precisely the kind of continuity that is guaranteed by context in those cases. Thus we cannot simply appeal to the standard manoeuvres in this case.<sup>20</sup>

There are two points to notice at the outset. One is that what counts as evidence for a given position should not *fail* to count as evidence in another context *merely* because it is inconvenient: there must be some reason for dismissing it other than the fact that allowing it upsets a favoured and otherwise unsupported theory. The second is that we should not, in general, accept unargued for implausibilities. Someone may *say* it is fairies who have soured the milk, but in the absence of argument we may be excused for dismissing this possibility:

‘Listen to this Watson. Vampirism in Hungary. And again, Vampires in Transylvania.’ He turned over the pages with eagerness, but after a short intent perusal he threw down the great book with a snarl of disappointment.

‘Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It’s pure lunacy.’

‘But surely,’ said I, ‘the vampire was not necessarily a dead man? A living person might have the habit. I have read, for example, of the old sucking the blood of the young in order to retain their youth.’

‘You are right, Watson. It mentions the legend in one of these references. But are we to give serious attention to such things? This Agency stands flatfooted upon the ground, and there it must remain. The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply.’<sup>21</sup>

The first point, concerning consistency, I take to involve a logical requirement, the second, Ockhamist, point may or may not. Whether either requirement is *called* ‘logical’ may be merely terminological: the important thing is to notice the unacceptability of manoeuvres that violate either. With this in mind let us look at Noonan’s two defences.

### III. THE CLOSEST CONTINUER THEORY AND SOUL-LESS REINCARNATION

The first ‘line of thought’ Noonan picks out by reference to the writings of Shoemaker, Parfit, and Nozick. There are certainly points worth considering

<sup>20</sup> For a well-argued suggestion that they are infelicitous even in the standard case see L. N. Oaklander, ‘Shoemaker on the Duplication Argument, Survival, and What Matters’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, LXVI (1988) 234–9, as well as ch. 7 of Noonan’s *Personal Identity*.

<sup>21</sup> A. Conan Doyle, ‘The Sussex Vampire’, in *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

in connection with my claim in the writings of these authors, but for present purposes we should note at once that they are *not* defending a position inconsistent with mine. The position they are defending involves a claimed identity when there is a clear *causal* connection.<sup>22</sup> In its absence identity is not only not claimed, it is explicitly denied. Nozick, for example, considering the following case

As you die, a very improbable random event occurs elsewhere in the universe: molecules come together precisely in the configuration of your brain and a very similar (but healthier) body, exhibiting complete psychological similarity to you.

continues:

This is not you; though it resembles you, by hypothesis, it does not arise out of you. It is not any continuer of you. In the earlier cases, by *psychological continuity* I meant ‘stemming from’ and ‘similar to’.<sup>23</sup>

This is not mere exegesis, since Noonan is picking out a view meant to show a logical possibility: but Nozick’s cases, even if we accept his claims about them, do not affect my argument. For that argument deals with a supposed reincarnation in the absence of a causal connection. The point is that the cases offered by Hick, Penelhum, MacIntosh *et al.*, are cases where there is no reason to suspect continuity *except for* the qualitative similarity involved. But, as I pointed out earlier, qualitative similarity is, in the absence of other factors, not even an *indicator* of identity. Moreover, because it allows the possibility of competitors, it is clearly not a *sufficient* condition of identity. Cross-temporal qualitative similarity by and of itself need not involve a causal connection.

Noonan runs together two quite different cases: the case in which there are clear grounds other than cross-temporal similarity for claiming continuity, and the case in which there are no such grounds. It was with the second that I was explicitly and exclusively concerned, but it is to the first that his arguments and examples refer.

As noted above, it has recently been argued<sup>24</sup> that writers such as Nozick are inconsistent in their refusal to go the whole hog in this matter and accept a version of the closest continuer theory in which the causal connection is absent. It is, however, noteworthy that they did not do so, and since Nozick’s is the view picked out by Noonan, the point stands that the original argument is untouched. This is one reason among others why the literature concerning so-called brain transplants is not relevant to this discussion: there relevant causal connections are built into the discussion *ex hypothesi*, here they are importantly absent.<sup>25</sup> With this in mind, let us look at a standard type of diagram.

<sup>22</sup> Noonan in fact thinks that the kind of causal connection required by Parfit is too weak (*Personal Identity*, p. 205), but a causal dependence that is too weak is still a causal dependence.

<sup>23</sup> R. Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 41. That this entity ‘exhibit[s] complete psychological similarity’ is controversial. See §6, ‘Yet Another Problem’.

<sup>24</sup> By Kolak and Martin.

<sup>25</sup> It is worth emphasizing that ‘brain transplants’ are *not* brain transplants. What is important to the



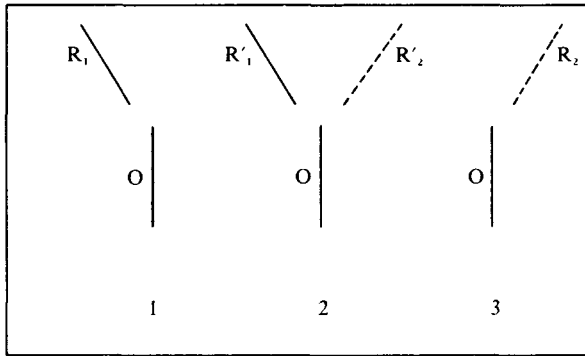


Figure 1

Figure 1 represents three possible worlds. In each O is a person (the *same* person in all three) whose life apparently ended at some time  $t$ , while  $R_1$ , etc. are persons whose existence apparently began at some *later* time  $t'$  such that there is a temporal gap between  $t$  and  $t'$ .<sup>26</sup> O has a certain set of descriptive characteristics C of the type referred to earlier, as do  $R_1$ ,  $R'_1$ ,  $R'_2$ ,  $R_2$ . Their relational properties differ, since the three scenarios describe three different possible worlds (all of which are branchings from the world in which O occurs). As before, these sets of characteristics are such that, in the absence of another equally qualified contender, possession of them by one of the subsequent people is sufficient either to entail or to allow an identification of the subsequent person with the original.  $R_1$  and  $R'_1$  have the *same* set of characteristics C, as do  $R_2$  and  $R'_2$ : the only reason for the different labelling is to avoid any appearance of question begging.

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continuing identity of mammals is their central nervous system (CNS). A 'brain transplant' is really a cranium, limbs, and torso transplant, a CLT transplant, not a CNS transplant. As Parfit notes: 'When I am given someone else's heart, I am the surviving recipient, not the dead donor. When my brain is transplanted into someone else's body, it may seem that I am here the dead donor. But I am really still the recipient, and the survivor. Receiving a new skull and a new body is just the limiting case of receiving a new heart, new lungs, new arms, and so on' (*Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 253) It is important to resist such turns of phrase, as it also to resist idioms such as Noonan's 'the person occupying Robert's body', since they import unacceptable assumptions about the nature of human persons into the discussion. Our language is thoroughly infected with Cartesian dualism, and so it may feel quite natural to speak of having a brain, or having a body. But there is something strange here. There is a sense in which we have our CLT (for we could, in principle, lose it), but there is no such sense in which we have our CNS. (And it is the CNS that is the animal.) *We* have a body just in the sense in which lizards or cows have bodies. If the locution strikes us as strange in those contexts (I think it should) then we owe ourselves an explanation if it doesn't strike us as strange when human animals are being discussed. On this matter see further D. Long, 'The Philosophical Concept of a Human Body', *Philosophical Review*, LXXIII (1964), and 'The Bodies of Persons', *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXI (1974), as well as B. Williams, 'Are Persons Bodies', reprinted in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973)

<sup>26</sup> Closest continuer theorists sometimes write as if it were important whether or not the gap is *large* in terms of human sensibilities. Let it, then, be large



In the diagram we have the following conditions fulfilled:

$$\begin{aligned} C(O, t) &\approx C(R_1, t') \\ C(O, t) &\approx C(R'_1, t') \\ C(O, t) &\approx C(R'_2, t') \\ C(O, t) &\approx C(R_2, t') \\ C(R_1, t') &= C(R'_1, t') \\ C(R_2, t') &= C(R'_2, t') \end{aligned}$$

Now we see the problem for the closest continuer theorists. They want to allow that, in the absence of a competitor, the fact that  $C(O, t) \approx C(R_1, t')$  yields  $O = R_1$ , but they must also deny – as Noonan correctly and explicitly points out<sup>27</sup> – that the *stronger* relation,  $C(R_1, t') = C(R'_1, t')$ , yields  $R_1 = R'_1$ , despite the fact that in this case too there is an absence of equally qualified competition, since we may assume  $C(R'_1, t') \neq C(R'_2, t')$  without loss of generality. They grant that possession of relevantly similar sets of qualities allows identity in the case of cross-temporal similarity, but deny this in the case of cross-world similarity. Now, what is the reason offered to tempt us to accept this apparent inconsistency? Well, if we don't, the closest continuer theory will be unacceptable. Yes, indeed, but what is the non *ad hoc* reason? Is there an *independent* argument available to tempt us into the closest continuer camp?

Such arguments are remarkably scarce. They are notably absent in the writers I criticized in the original article (Penelhum, Hick, myself). Noonan writes 'Nozick's version of the theory is the most sophisticated in the philosophical literature',<sup>28</sup> but Nozick's presentation is striking for its lack of argumentative support.

He offers two argument-like moves, but they are not very convincing. The first has to do with the fact that the reaction of the characters within the film, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, as well as the reaction of the audience both times Nozick saw the film, are not reasonable reactions if the closest continuer theory is false, but are understandable and indeed reasonable, Nozick claims, if the correct account of identity is the closest continuer theory. Thus he writes,

The closest continuer theory is able to account for and explain the character's response in the film, and the audience's response to it, and also the response both would have if the film were altered as imagined, so that the pod person no longer was the closest continuer. Since it is difficult to see how any other theory could do this, this supports the closest continuer theory.<sup>29</sup>

This is a strange sense of 'support'. It's the sense of 'support' in which

<sup>27</sup> Noonan, pp. 487–8.

<sup>28</sup> Noonan, p. 486.

<sup>29</sup> *Philosophical Explanations*, p. 59n

other films ‘support’ the vampire theory, or the possession theory, or the devil theory. With support like this, what theory needs detractors?<sup>30</sup>

After further discussion, Nozick says, *à propos* Kripke’s claim that identity holds necessarily if it holds at all, “It appears... some counterexample should emerge...”.<sup>31</sup> Again, this is hardly an argument. It is, in fact, as Nozick in effect allows, an act of faith. More interestingly, though not more plausibly, Nozick, pointing out, quite correctly, that

It is a remarkable fact that for many of the cases or examples about personal identity, we can say with reasonable confidence which if any of the resultant beings is us. We can say that without being told of the movement of a soul-pellet or any similar item. concludes

We answer the question about which person, if any, we would be by applying a general schema of identity, the closest continuer schema, to our own case.<sup>32</sup>

But first, even if true, this is no guarantee of the correctness of that schema. Secondly, there is no particular reason to think that this is the schema ‘we’ use: I do not believe it is the one I use. And, at any rate, the one most people use is likely to be so imbued with the kind of seventeenth century dualism which has petrified into ‘common sense’ that their reactions can hardly be to the point in this area.<sup>33</sup>

On the face of it then closest continuer theorists are guilty of an inconsistency. What is at issue is not – as Shoemaker and Noonan have suggested – whether or not a phrase such as ‘the person occupying Charles’ body’ is a rigid designator: no doubt it is not, though leaving the matter there does scant justice to the possibility of *introducing* rigid designators in such contexts.<sup>34</sup> But the matter of rigid designators is really a red herring. What is at issue is the question of why a set of characteristics that suffices for identity in one ‘no competitors’ case does not do so in another. Noonan is prepared to say mildly that denying identity in the second case is merely counter-intuitive: I suggest rather that it is inconsistent.

What one should say here is perhaps unimportant, perhaps, indeed,

<sup>30</sup> Penelhum’s point, noted earlier, about how people would react in the presence of large numbers of apparently reincarnated people, seems to me to be substantially, even if more temptingly, the same sort of point. People *can* be wrong in large numbers as well as on their own.

<sup>31</sup> *Philosophical Explanations*, p. 659 n. 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Philosophical Explanations*, p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> Compare Penelhum: ‘The second source of our instinctive preference for saying that our heroes have changed bodies rather than experienced some radical upheaval in their memories is more familiar. It is the deep commitment of most of us in our interpretative thinking to psychophysical dualism. We seem to believe in an independently identifiable purely psychical entity which inhabits the body and can leave it and go to another. An examination of our story and our identification practices shows that such a concept is not coherent and not borne out by the imaginary events’ (*Survival and Disembodied Existence*, p. 87).

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g. David Kaplan, ‘On the Logic of Demonstratives’, *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, viii (1978), 81–98. On Shoemaker’s defence *via* non-rigid designators see the exchange in *Inquiry* between Andrew Brennan and B. J. Garrett (A. Brennan, ‘Best Candidates and Theories of Identity’, *Inquiry*, xxix, 423–38; B. J. Garrett, ‘Best-candidate Theories and Identity: Reply to Brennan’, *Inquiry*, xxxi, 79–85; A. Brennan, ‘Reply to Garrett’, *Inquiry*, xxxi, 87–92).

undecidable. However, even if it is merely counter-intuitive, that fact should weigh more heavily than it does with holders of a theory whose support depends mainly on intuition, not argument. Elsewhere Noonan has remarked that the closest continuer theorists would be ‘committing [themselves] to self-evident absurdities’<sup>35</sup> if they accepted the position he now calls ‘highly counter-intuitive’. I think that it is something more than ‘highly counter-intuitive’ since the closest continuer theorist must accept a certain kind of similarity as grounds for identity in one case and deny it in another without any reason being available for the denial save that, without it, the closest continuer theory will be inconsistent. It may be that this is something more than what Noonan calls a ‘mere’ appeal to logic: but if so it isn’t *much* more.

#### IV. MULTIPLE OCCUPANCY

Noonan’s second line of defence comes from the possibility of adopting a ‘multiple occupancy’ theory concerning certain kinds of entities. Consider the case of a flatworm, say, or a starfish, or any other animal with similar regenerative powers. If one half of it is destroyed, the remaining half can regenerate.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, certain species of starfish are fissiparous, and can reproduce by splitting.<sup>37</sup> Thus, if we destroy the right half, the left half is sufficient for the starfish’s survival; similarly, if we destroy the left half, the remaining right half is sufficient for survival. Suppose now we do not destroy either half, but simply cut the starfish in two. Both halves may regenerate. We will then have two starfish where before we had but one. Clearly they are not identical with each other. So at most one of them is identical with the original. Or, if both are, then there were, despite appearances, two originals. Here I trust no one will be tempted to say that perhaps one of them is *really* the original while the other merely resembles the original.

We seem to have one scenario in which the original, O, is identical with one continuing side, L; another in which the original, O, is identical with the other continuing side, R; and still another in which O is identical with neither L nor R. But then, as before, we seem to have achieved a contradiction, for we have:

1.  $\diamond O = R$
2.  $\diamond O = L$
3.  $\diamond L \neq R$

<sup>35</sup> *Personal Identity*, p. 159

<sup>36</sup> This is true in general, but particular conditions give rise to a great variety of differing results. For example, flatworms that readily regenerate whole worms from quite small fragments may die as the result of a small wound. See further Rosine Chandebis, *Histogenesis and Morphogenesis in Planarian Regeneration* (Basel: S. Karger, 1976).

<sup>37</sup> For further details see, e.g., L. H. Hyman, *The Invertebrates: Echinodermata, The coelomate Bilateria*, iv (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), ch. 15.7, ‘Class Asteroidea’, pp. 245–412.

from which we may deduce, given the irrelevance of modality to questions of identity,

$$4. L = R \ \& \ L \neq R.$$

There are three possible escape routes. First, we could challenge the above argument on grounds of logic. This has been suggested, but as neither Noonan nor Daniels wishes to dispute the correctness of the logical principles involved I shall not discuss it here.

This leaves us with two possibilities. Neither is without its difficulties. The first is that, despite the appearances, in our first scenario,  $O \neq L$ , and in our second,  $O \neq R$ . The second is that, despite the appearances, there is not one  $O$  but two (or more), so that the true account of scenarios one, two, and three is:

$$1. O_1 = L$$

$$2. O_2 = R$$

$$3. L \neq R$$

which, clearly, does not lead to contradiction.

It is this solution which Noonan offers as the second main escape route from my charge that soul-less different body ‘reincarnation’ is logically impossible.<sup>38</sup>

Now, this possibility is of considerable interest in itself, but it is surely not relevant here. In the standard cases of real entities such as amoebae, planaria, or the asteroidea, there may be grounds for saying that  $L$  and  $R$  multiply occupied  $O$ . But in the case where there is no causal connection whatever, and there are an infinite number of possible ‘occupants’ the theory becomes considerably less attractive. I do not know that it is in fact held in this context by any holder of the multiple occupancy view. It should be noted, however, that if it is held then it holds equally well in the case where there are two *actual* claimants to the identity title, in which case each would be identical with *one of* the original occupants. Thus the writers with whom I was disputing – who explicitly agree that in such a case there is no identification to be made – cannot consistently fall back on the multiple occupancy theory.

I conclude that neither the closest continuer theory nor the multiple occupancy view offers a way out for someone adopting the position under consideration.

#### V. DANIELS

Daniels raises a different and important concern: that my argument incorporates an unacceptable slide from epistemology to ontology. Though he is too polite to say so, there is a suggestion that the ghost of verificationism has

<sup>38</sup> This option is discussed in detail in Denis Robinson’s subtle and ingenious paper, ‘Can Amoebae Divide Without Multiplying?’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, LXIII (1985), 299–319. Robinson points out one interesting result: assuming this solution, in the ordinary course of nature the number of amoebae in the world can only diminish, never increase.

not been laid. The points he makes are interesting and independently important, but I think that they do not touch the case I made against Hick *et al.* Daniels begins with a point about philosophers and people:

When a philosopher argues to the necessary falsehood of what millions of people take to be contingently true, it suggests to me that the philosopher is not thinking about the same thing they are.<sup>39</sup>

This seems to me to be either wrong or, if true, misleading. It would be misleading if it were grounded on the fact that people's thoughts are often too confused to secure reference (what *do* people mean when they talk about a 'soul?'); it is, I think, wrong otherwise. I am at one with the theologians who claim that God exists necessarily if God exists at all, that God's dominion extends over *possibilia* if it extends at all.<sup>40</sup> But this is to say that if the millions of people who believe that God exists are mistaken, what they believe is not only false, but necessarily false. *Mutatis mutandis* the same point holds for atheists: their belief, if false, is necessarily false. Equally, if the agnostics' *may* in 'God may exist, but also may not' is the *may* of logical possibility, then their belief too is necessarily false. Similar points may (perhaps) be made (with progressively smaller numbers of believers involved) about Cartesian souls, time travel, absolute simultaneity in our universe, the squaring of the circle, and a variety of mathematical propositions.

However Daniels does not, I think, put much weight on this argument *ad populum*. His two main points are (1) that I indulge in an illicit 'slide from epistemology to ontology', that my arguments shows what *we* could or could not *know*, nor what could or could not be the case, and (2) as an explicit *ad hominem*, that an argument formally similar to mine will show that bodily continuity does not provide evidence for identity, and hence that my arguments undercut their own basis.

(1) *The illicit slide*

Here I shall argue that there is no illicit slide involved, though clearly I expressed myself infelicitously, and I am grateful to Daniels for bringing out this unclarity in the way I stated the argument. Even after that is cleared up, however, his points are independently interesting. Let me put these claims in context. Daniels writes:

Behind this slide from epistemology to ontology seem to lurk two (very dubious) assumptions:

(A) Given two incompatible situations *P* and *Q*, if there is no conclusive test which permits us (humans) to tell whether *P* or whether *Q*, it is impossible to know that *P* (and ditto *Q*). If there is no test which permits me to tell whether I'm awake or whether I'm dreaming, it is impossible for me to know that I'm awake.

<sup>39</sup> Daniels, p. 501.

<sup>40</sup> I have discussed this matter at greater length in 'Theological Question Begging', *Dialogue*, forthcoming.

(B) Given two incompatible situations  $P$  and  $Q$ , if it is impossible for us to know that  $P$  and impossible for us to know that  $Q$ , then  $\sim P$  and  $\sim Q$ .

Daniels continues:

Since I believe it possible for me to know that I'm awake, I conclude that (A) is false. I do agree: any test that one can propose, one can dream one's applying and getting the result that one's awake. Despite that fact I still think I can know I'm awake. Knowledge that  $p$  doesn't imply the ability to test or to verify whether  $p$ .

Nor does (B) look convincing to me. Why should our inability to know whether Charles or Robert is Guy Fawkes *imply* that neither is? Furthermore, I fail to see why, if there were no Robert, we couldn't *know* Charles to be Fawkes. Certainly the *mere possibility* that somewhere in the universe there exists a Guy Fawkes-like candidate does not prevent us from knowing Charles to be Fawkes. If, on an analysis of knowledge, the *possibility* of counterevidence, of mistake or even non-knowledge implied non-knowledge, that, to my mind, would constitute a *reductio* of the analysis.<sup>41</sup>

Let us take this last point first. Daniels is certainly right about the general case. The doctrine that the *possibility* of my being wrong destroys, in general, my ability to make a correct knowledge claim is certainly wrong, even though both Plato and Descartes seem to have been tempted by it. What, in general, the possibility of my being wrong shows is that it is *possible* that I don't know the things I claim to know,<sup>42</sup> not that I don't know them. However, though this is true for the general case, there is more to be said in the case of propositions which, if true at all, are necessarily true. In such cases, if it is *possible* that I am mistaken, then I am mistaken. If, for example, it is possible that I am mistaken in my belief that  $2 + 2 = 4$ , i.e. if  $\Diamond(2 + 2 \neq 4)$ , then  $2 + 2 \neq 4$ , and, of course I can't *know* that  $2 + 2 = 4$ , either. Where propositions of this kind are concerned, the possibility of mistake *is* relevant to the correctness of a knowledge claim.<sup>43</sup>

What about the more specific points that Daniels makes? Are assumptions

<sup>41</sup> Daniels, p. 502.

<sup>42</sup> Ockham argued that this is true even for a necessarily omniscient knower (*Tractatus de Praedestinatione et de Praescientia Dei Respectu Futurorum Contingentium*, Q2, art 4 in *Opera Philosophica*, II, 530, ed. Philotheus Boehner, (New York: St Bonaventure, 1978), translated M. Adams and N. Kretzmann as *William Ockham: Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1969), p. 87). We might, however, note Calvin Normore's word of caution: 'This seems plausible where X [the knower] is a fallible creature but less plausible where X is God' ('Future Contingents', in N. Kretzmann *et al.*, eds, *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 372).

<sup>43</sup> To be mistaken is to believe  $p$  when  $p$  is not the case:  $(Bp \ \& \ \sim p)$ . The *possibility* of being mistaken concerning one of your beliefs believing something that logically may be false, whether or not it is in fact false:  $(Bp \ \& \ \Diamond \ \sim p)$ . In the range of cases under consideration we are dealing with propositions which are necessarily true if true at all:  $(p \rightarrow \Box p)$ . But then we have:

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| (1) $(p \rightarrow \Box p) \rightarrow (\Diamond \ \sim p \rightarrow \sim p)$   | taut       |
| (2) $(\Diamond \ \sim p \rightarrow \sim p) \rightarrow ((Bp \ \& \ \Diamond \ \sim p) \rightarrow (Bp \ \& \ \sim p))$ | taut       |
| (3) $(p \rightarrow \Box p) \rightarrow ((Bp \ \& \ \Diamond \ \sim p) \rightarrow (Bp \ \& \ \sim p))$                 | 1, 2, syll |

I.e. for the class of propositions under consideration, if it is *possible* that you are mistaken in your belief, then you *are* mistaken. The result follows equally, of course, if we interpret the possibility of being mistaken in one of our beliefs as  $(Bp \ \& \ \Diamond (Bp \ \& \ \sim p))$ , since this entails  $(Bp \ \& \ \Diamond \ \sim p)$ .

(A) and (B) as dubious in the case under consideration as he claims? Certainly (B) is in general completely unacceptable. If, for example, we accept, with Aquinas, that it is impossible to know by demonstration whether the world is finite or infinite in past time, it certainly would not follow, even in the absence of revelation, that neither was true.

About (A) I am genuinely uncertain. Daniels' example is a nice one, but despite my acceptance of the (generalized) Kantian dreaming case as a possibility, I am less certain than he is that we don't have tests for being awake, even if we would find it difficult to make these explicit.<sup>44</sup>

However I do not think it is necessary to confute or defend either (A) or (B) since I do not think the argument involves the slide from epistemology to ontology they are supposedly required to support. Daniels fastens on the fact that I presented the argument in terms of evidence and the establishing of conclusions. This was, perhaps, infelicitous, for the point was *not* meant to be an epistemological one. This way of speaking was a (quite possibly misleading) shorthand way of pointing to the fact, already mentioned in the discussion of Noonan, that the identity is meant to flow – whether we know it or not – from the sets of characteristics, C, that O and R<sub>1</sub> possess. I agree that what is important is whether R<sub>1</sub> = O, not whether I, or R<sub>1</sub>, or even God, *knows* that R<sub>1</sub> = O. But the argument doesn't depend on my or anyone's using the relevant facts as evidence: speaking of evidence was a device – not a very good device, I now agree – to highlight the difficulties involved. However, as the earlier discussion has, I hope, shown, it is a dispensable device. Thus I think Daniels' points concerning epistemology and ontology, while interesting in themselves, do not touch the case being made.

(2) *The three card trick*

Daniels concludes with an analogy concerning an ordinary and a super magician. Just as a worker of the three card trick can deceive most of us every time, so that we cannot follow the cards on their spatio-temporally continuous path, so 'maybe the Magician shuffles *us* from one body in one location to another in another location as He alternately works His trick in each location'.<sup>45</sup> Here again, I think the counterexample misfires. Discounting the hint of dualism implicit in 'the Magician shuffles *us* from one body... to another', it is *us* the super Magician is shuffling, so it is *we* who are transported. However if *we* are transported, then we have a continuous spatio-temporal path whether we know it or not: but the relevant case is the case where continuity is lost (whether we know it or not).

<sup>44</sup> Compare Austin: 'dreams are *narrated* in the same terms as waking experiences: these terms, after all, are the best terms we have; but it would be wildly wrong to conclude from this that what is narrated in the two cases is *exactly alike*' (J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 49).

<sup>45</sup> Daniels, p. 504



## VI. YET ANOTHER PROBLEM

Finally, that this may be not simply a rehash of previous arguments which were apparently not made out as clearly as they might have been, let me mention a quite different kind of problem for the reincarnation camp.<sup>46</sup> If we are anything we are intentional systems. But what are the grounds for treating the 'reincarnated' 'persons' as intentional systems? If we treat them as having q-(mental)-states on the basis of their behaviour we are already assuming that we can make the move in their case from behaviour to mental states just as we can in the normal case: but what is the justification for this assumption?

Putnam has familiarized us with the notion that what (if anything) our words mean is in part at least a function of our history: we use 'water' to label H<sub>2</sub>O and not XYZ because we are terrestrials and not twerrestrials.<sup>47</sup> So our belief that water is wet is a belief about H<sub>2</sub>O while the belief our twins have when they are in exactly similar neurophysiological states is a belief about XYZ. Semantics depends on biography. Donald Davidson suggests a different thought experiment:

Suppose lightning strikes a dead tree in a swamp; I am standing nearby. My body is reduced to its elements, while entirely by coincidence (and out of different molecules) the tree is turned into my physical replica. My replica, The Swampman, moves exactly as I did; according to its nature it departs the swamp, encounters and seems to recognize my friends, and appears to return their greetings in English. It moves into my house and seems to write articles on radical interpretation. No one can tell the difference.

But there *is* a difference. My replica can't recognize my friends; it can't recognize anything, since it never cognized anything in the first place. It can't know my friends' names (though of course it seems to), it can't remember my house. It can't mean what I do by the word 'house', for example, since the sound 'house' it makes was not learned in a context that would give it the right meaning – or any meaning at all. Indeed, I don't see how my replica can be said to mean anything by the sounds it makes, nor to have any thoughts.<sup>48</sup>

To mimic Brown, the problem is this: no history, no semantics; no semantics, no intentionality; no intentionality, no person.

<sup>46</sup> Thanks to Deborah Brown for bringing the relevance of this point to my attention by way of her 'Swampman of La Mancha' (Canadian Philosophical Association Meetings, May, 1991). See further: Donald Davidson, 'Knowing One's Own Mind', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, LXIII (1987), 441–58, and Stephen Stich, 'Autonomous Psychology and the Belief-Desire Thesis', *The Monist*, LXI (1978), 571–91.

<sup>47</sup> Those unfamiliar with the liquids of Twin Earth should consult in the first instance Putnam's 'The Meaning of Meaning', reprinted in H. Putnam, *Philosophical Papers, II: Mind, Language, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). Briefly: the inhabitants of Twin Earth resemble us exactly: they have qualitatively indistinguishable mental histories and current states. However, what they call 'water' is not H<sub>2</sub>O, but a complex chemical which Putnam abbreviates as XYZ, whose behaviour in all relevant respects duplicates that of water. Before the eighteenth century at least, terrestrial and Twin Earthian neuro-physiological states would have been identical when the belief 'water is wet' was uttered. But the terrestrial beliefs would have been beliefs about H<sub>2</sub>O, while the Twin Earth beliefs would have been about XYZ.

<sup>48</sup> 'Knowing One's Own Mind', pp 443–4.

On the face of it what we have in the ‘reincarnation’ case is one or more newly created entities with certain neurophysiological states. We are asked to assume a connection between the apparently linguistic behaviour of these entities and their ‘beliefs’ (etc.) or, ultimately, between their neurophysiological states and their ‘beliefs’, etc. Why should we? To assume that they have developed in the normal human way (which *would* license such a connection) is to beg the reincarnation question; not to assume this is to leave unanswered the question: why treat them as intentional systems, and in particular, why treat them as already encountered intentional systems?

I shall not pursue this further. But I note in conclusion that leaving these questions unanswered, or assuming that they do not need an answer, amounts to a further begging of the question in favour of the possibility of reincarnation. It won’t do to say we would all *assume* that they were speaking a language, had the relevantly associated beliefs, etc., for we would all *say* of a Twin Earthian whose background was unknown to us that s/he believed water was wet, but we would nonetheless be mistaken, since what would be being believed would be that twater was wet.

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