



Death as Finality in Bertrand Russell's Philosophy: A Critique

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ABSTRACT

Immortality of the human soul has been, like other problems in philosophy, an unresolved and perennial problem. Over the years, solutions to this problem have proven inadequate as a result of the varieties of modes of philosophizing; philosophers' theories or views; as well as the logical tenacity of these theories. A materialist, who is logically consistent with the tenets of materialism, cannot accept the existence of any spiritual reality. Bertrand Russell denied the immortality of the soul on the basis that man, instead of being made up of substances that is body and soul, is composed of events. He believes that death brings the human *event* to an end. Since there is a difference between "being", and "acting", we can argue that the existence (being) of a soul that survives death could be logically defended. The human soul exists, though it is not explicitly graspable. It is, ontologically independent of the body. In fact the soul accounts for the boringness of the body. Though the soul and the body unite essentially in man, their union does not in any way deprive the soul of its uniqueness. Thus, at their separation, the soul retains its properties and nature viz: being, substantiality and spirituality. Thing being this way, this research is aimed at refuting the claim that the soul ceases to be when the body is gone. In other words, the human soul, being spiritual and subsistent, as well as the cause of life in the human person, is immortal. So, however convincing Russell's argument against the doctrine of immortality of the soul may be, we must not lose sight of the truth that life is larger than logic. This study will employ the expository, hermeneutical and analytical method of philosophy.

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Introduction

An outstanding feature of metaphysics is its basic concern about the ontology of realities. In other words, metaphysicians first establish the ontology of realities before attempting any discourse on them. All those who have criticized metaphysics failed to appreciate this fact.

As regards the immortality of the soul, which is the concern of this work, it would be necessary to find its fundament, since it is a metaphysical doctrine. Logically, its fundament is that there is a *unique* and *spiritual* principle that defies death in man, the *soul*.

For some philosophers, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is one of the metaphysicians' superstitions. Some others uphold it as tenable and true; still some are indifferent towards it. Most of those who reject it, like Bertrand Russell, held that it emerged as a result of the fear held of death.¹ Also, some of them implicitly deny it by rejecting the basic tenet of the doctrine: the reality of the human spiritual soul.

In the following discourse, I am going to demonstrate, with the help of the ideas of different thinkers, that the immortality of the human soul is not only a possibility, but also a reality.

First, chapter one shall be a general introduction of the work and my intention of writing on the topic as well as how I intend to achieve my objectives. Chapter two shall be the

articulation of the views of different philosophers before Russell on the core issues concerning the topic under consideration. In chapter three, I shall present Russell's view on immortality, death and the fate of man, thus, his denial of the immortality of the soul. I shall also attempt to criticise Russell's views and simultaneously demonstrate the immortality of the soul. Chapter four shall be a look at the main argument for the immortality of the soul and some subordinate concepts that point towards the credibility of the immortality of the soul.

Finally, in chapter five, I shall make a retrospective evaluation of the two stands enumerated above, i.e. the reality of immortality of the soul and the denial of it. This shall be followed by the conclusion that immortality of the human soul is far from being a superstition. Rather, it is rationally and *naturally* tenable.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) upholds death as the final event of self and thereby, denied the immortality of the soul on the basis that man is a composite of *events*, rather than of substances, i.e. body and soul; that immortality arose out of the fear of death; and that immortality could only be reasonable if and only if memory and consciousness survive death.

I intend, in this work, however, to refute Russell and at the same time demonstrate the immortality of the soul, with the aid of the views and thoughts of different thinkers from the classical era to the present day.

On another note, this project is not arguing for the immortality of *man*, as that presupposes incorruptibility of the body.

¹B. Russell, "What I Believe" in *Bertrand Russell: Why I Am Not a Christian*, edited by P. Edwards, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1975, p.46

Also, I shall employ such concepts like reincarnation, metempsychosis, and the practice of the incantation and manipulation of the dead in Igbo mystical praxes, in establishing the reality of immortality of the soul.

Finally, this project does not in any way encompass all the ideas of both the proponents and antagonists of immortality of the soul. It made use of little of these to establish what it intended, i.e. the immortality of the soul. However, this project being a philosophical work is not dogmatically conclusive.

This work will be useful not only to those in the field of philosophy but also to all scholars who delight in discovering more about in a general term, what the concept of death entails and with regards the views of Bertrand Russell. It will equally, help in contributing to the academic knowledge of metaphysics under which the topic under consideration lies.

The method of qualitative research will be employed in this work. In line with the afore-stated method, data for the study will be collected from books, journals, articles, biographies and internet sources. An analysis of the data gathered would be done with the aid of philosophical analysis/exposition. Bertrand Russell's view on death as the final event of the self and the critique of his position will be analysed with philosophical exposition.

Russell on Death and Immortality

While metaphysicians hold that man is the sum of two essentially distinct and united elements (soul and body), Bertrand Russell holds otherwise. He, in fact, denied that these elements exist.

In a logically consistent manner, Russell attempts to trash the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. He first attacked headlong the pivot (the fundament) upon which this doctrine stands, i.e. the existence of the human soul.

It is worthy to point out that Russell is keen on attacking the teaching of Christianity, especially as it regards the immortality of the soul. Hence we hear him say, "In countless ways the doctrine of personal immortality in its *Christian form* has had disastrous effects upon morals..."² [emphasis mine]

In the subsequent sections, we are going to survey Russell's contentions with regard to the notion of the human person (made up of the immaterial soul and the corporeal body), and the immortality of the soul.

Russell's Conception of the Human person

As a result of the unfilled chasm created as a result of the Cartesian bifurcation of the two constitutive elements of the human person as separate substances, there arose various theories intended towards proffering solution to the paradoxical dilemma, i.e. the mind-body problem. One of these theories is the Neutral Monism of Bertrand Russell. Here, Russell argued that the apparent problem created by Descartes was not a problem at all if we should realize that there are no such things like 'spirit' and 'matter', rather, *events*.

Russell argued that the Christian doctrine of the individualization of the soul arose, like that of the Stoics, as a result of the circumstance of the early Christian community. This community being faced with political frustration and hopelessness resorted to emphasizing the priority and supremacy of personal life (moral) over and above the public

(social). Russell held that it was this dichotomization, i.e. of moral and social life, that later culminated into the separation between soul and body, which has survived in the Christian metaphysics and in the systems derived from Descartes.³

For Russell, everything in the world (including man) is composed of events. He contended the beliefs of the believers in immortality that the soul and body are disparate, and that the soul is something quite other than its empirical manifestations through our bodily organs.⁴ Hence he said: "Mind' and 'matter' alike are for certain purposes convenient terms, but are not ultimate realities".⁵ He stressed that in a complicated science the words 'mind' and 'matter' would both disappear, and would be replaced by causal laws concerning events.⁶

From all these postulates of Russell, we can see his attempt to eliminate the Cartesian paradox, as well as his categorical rejection of mind (soul) and body as the constituents of the human person. Russell did this because, according to him, these two elements do not last from day to day; the matter of the body for instance, is continually changing by processes of nutriment and wastage.⁷ As regards the mind, Russell denied that there was a bare entity which suffers the occurrences we attribute to the mind, i.e. thoughts, feelings and actions, rather, 'the mental continuity of a person is a continuity of habit and memory....'⁸ Thus Russell brought in the issue of personal identity.

Also, Russell argued that from the consideration of conception, gestation, and infancy, one cannot seriously believe that the soul is any indivisible something, perfect and complete throughout this process. The soul 'grows like the body'; hence, 'it derives from the spermatozoon and from the ovum, so that it cannot be indivisible'.⁹ He emphasized that his position is not materialism, rather, '... the recognition that everything interesting is a matter of organisation, not of primary substance.'¹⁰

We can infer that, like David Hume, Russell anticipated the mind (soul) to be observable, hence he said, 'We think and feel and act, but there is not, in addition to thoughts and feelings and actions a bare entity, the mind or the soul, which does or suffers these occurrences.'¹¹ Since this cannot be found, the idea of the soul (a *substantial* entity), for him is not tenable.

He equally argued that the human person is 'a series of experiences connected by memory and by certain similarities of the sort we call habit.'¹² With this view, Russell believes he has trashed the fulcrum of the doctrine of immortality, as well as resolved the problem posed by the Cartesian dualism.

Russell's Concept of Death vis-à-vis the Fate of Man

In an attempt to show that the religious doctrine of immortality is as a result of religion *dignifying* fear, Russell commented, "I believe that when I die I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive.

³ Ibid. p.33

⁴ B. Russell, "What I Believe", op. cit., p.45-46

⁵ Ibid. p.46

⁶ B. Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, London: Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1970, p. 292

⁷ B. Russell, "Do We Survive Death?", op. cit., p.70

⁸ Ibid. p.70

⁹ B. Russell, "What I Believe", op. cit., p.46

¹⁰ Ibid.46

¹¹ B. Russell, "Do We Survive Death?", op. cit., p.70

¹² Ibid.70

²B. Russell, "Has Religion Made Useful Contribution to Civilisation?" in *Bertrand Russell: Why I Am Not A Christian*, edited by P. Edwards, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1967, p.34

I am not young, and I love life. But I should scorn to shiver with terror at the thought of annihilation.”¹³

From this statement, we can gather Russell’s view on death as the total annihilation of the human person. In other words, he has a nihilistic conception of death. Just like the Epicureans’ teaching that at death ‘there is no sensation, since the atoms that make up both the body and mind come apart, so there is no longer this particular body or mind ...’¹⁴, Russell believes that death brings the human *event* to an end. He equally sees death as inevitable though according to him we can often delay it.¹⁵

Russell’s Denial of immortality of the Soul

Immortality of the soul, for Russell, differs from survival of bodily death which may only mean a postponement of psychical death.¹⁶ The doctrine of the immortality of the soul according to Russell was to enjoy hereafter endless bliss or endless woe according to circumstances.¹⁷

In his work, *Do We Survive Death?*, Russell argued that part of the doctrine concerning the present life is pretty certainly false. He hinged the possibility of this doctrine on the condition that that which constitutes the human person (which for him are memories and habit) ought to continue to be exhibited in a new set of occurrences.¹⁸ If this is not so, one cannot say that there is immortality once the being emerging after death is not able to remember his feelings for example.

Having posited that memory and habit are the criteria of personal identity, Russell from thence, ‘dislodged’ the doctrine of immortality thus;

Our memories and habits are bound up with the structure of the brain.... But the brain, as a structure, is dissolved at death, and memory therefore may be expected to be also dissolved.¹⁹ Similarly, in *What I Believe*, Russell contended thus;

What we call our ‘thoughts’ seem to depend upon the organisation of tracks in the brain in the same sort of way in which journeys depend upon roads and railways. The energy used in thinking seems to have a chemical origin.... We also cannot suppose that an individual’s thinking survives bodily death, since that [i.e. physical death] destroys the organization of the brain, and dissipates the energy which utilized the brain tracks.

... We know that the brain is not immortal, and that the organised energy of a living body becomes, as it were, demobilised at death, and therefore not available for collective action. All the evidence goes to show that what we regard as our mental life is bound up with brain structure and organised bodily energy. Therefore it is rational to suppose that mental life ceases when bodily life ceases.²⁰

It then follows, from Russell’s line of thought, that when the brain, being the receptacle bearing the yardstick of the

human person, goes out of existence at death, the whole person is gone.

Russell, also argued that the reason for the emergence of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is fear (emotion) of death. In his words, “If we are not afraid of death, I do not believe that the idea of immortality would ever have arisen”.²¹ For him, therefore, the belief in immortality is only an antidote devised to remove the terror of death.²²

Russell also pointed out that another emotion that gave rise to belief in immortality is the admiration of the excellence of man. Seeing the marvellous inventions and capabilities of man, some people come up with the conviction that it will be unintelligent (on the part of the Intelligent Agent) to let man perish. Russell replied that nature is indifferent to our regards. As such, man dances to the tune of nature.

In another work, *Seems, Madam? Nay, it is*, Russell contended against immortality on the basis that the world of reality the [afterlife] will be comfort and consolation for the disasters and ills encountered in this world of Appearance (world of ills); that the experiences of these two worlds differ. Russell contended thus:

All experiences, therefore, for aught that philosophy can show, is likely to resemble the experience we know – if this seems bad to us, no doctrine of a Reality distinguished from Appearances can give us hope of anything better.²³

Also, in continuation,

But if the result of our purely ideal construction [i.e. the world of Reality] turns out so very different from the world we know - from the real world, in fact - if, moreover, it follows from this very construction that we never shall experience the so-called world of Reality, except in the sense in which already we experience nothing else - then I cannot see what, as concerns comfort for present ills, we have gained by all our metaphysicising.²⁴ [emphasis mine]

The Implications of Russell’s Views

In this section, I intend to see what will be the case should we go by Russell’s view. In other words, the logical extension of Russell’s thought.

Ontological implication: with his contention that man is a bundle of experiences linked by memory, we can imply that man has no supremacy over other realities in the universe. This can be affirmed from Omoregbe’s work, *The Philosophy of Mind* “everything in the world (including man) is composed of events.”²⁵ Also, man cannot be said to be the author/subject of these experiences because that will connote an entity that experiences the experiences.

Identity and legal implications: we may say that no one has an identity. Following Russell’s statement that what constitutes a person is a series of experiences connected by *memory* and by certain similarities of the sort we call habit²⁶ [emphasis mine], we can argue that one’s identity is conditional.

¹³ B. Russell, “What I believe”, op. cit., p.47

¹⁴ S. E. Stumpf, *Philosophy: History & Problems*, 5th ed., N Y: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994, p.111

¹⁵ B. Russell, “What I believe”, op. cit., p.46

¹⁶ Ibid. p.45

¹⁷ B. Russell, “Has Religion Made Useful Contribution to Civilisation?”, op. cit., p.34

¹⁸ B. Russell, “Do We Survive Death?”, op. cit., p.71

¹⁹ Ibid. p.71

²⁰ B. Russell, “What I Believe” op. cit., pp.44-45

²¹ Ibid. p.46

²² Ibid. p.47

²³ B. Russell, *Seems, Madam? Nay, it is*, op. cit., p.76

²⁴ Ibid. p.76

²⁵ J. Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction to Philosophical Psychology*, Lagos: JERP, 2001, p.18

²⁶ B. Russell, “Do We Survive Death?”, in op. cit., p.70

Hence, no person's identity has constant guarantee. For example, no one can claim that he is the same with himself before the age of reason.

Also in the case of the elderly people who, infected with Alzheimer's disease, lose their memory, so long as they are unable to remember their past, they are not same with their former selves. For instance, assuming Osama Bin Laden would be captured by the US at old age, and may be affected with Alzheimer's disease. Going by Russell's idea, the old Bin Laden is not the same with the later, hence should not be convicted for the crime of the 'former' Bin Laden. What of the case where one is affected with paramnesia? Can the memory criterion clear any possible ambiguity therefrom? We may reply that the memory criterion cannot help matters.

With regard to immortality, Russell's denial implies that man has nothing spiritual in him. In other words, his fate/destiny is comparable to that of a fowl killed during occasions. Therefore, human burial is all about removing something that has the potency of filling a place with bad odour; nothing more. Human life can be equated to that of an ant. In fact, Russell meant there is nothing like spirit.

In the social sphere, going by Russell's argument, the purpose of behaving rightly will be optional. One can think that since there is no after-life, or God, Hitler could have gone ahead with the Jewish massacre so long as he is deriving joy from it. Therefore, man could do what he deems right since nature cannot cut his days short on account of his actions, or God (who for Russell does not exist) to judge him after his death.

Russell argued that the universe was not created, nor man; that everything comes by muddle and accident. Hence there is no purpose in reality. So, from this, we may say that the streamline figure of a fish for example, is purposeless. Likewise the ability to stand erect in man; there being male and female humankind; or even the human genitals, is purposeless. Also, the imperfection in man that makes him seek for the company and help of others (the basis for which the society is formed), is purposeless.

We can equally imply from Russell's argument that those qualities in man that merited him such names like "Homo sapiens", "Homo erectus", "Homo volens", "Homo loquens", etc., were *accidentally* human properties/qualities.

Critique of Russell and Demonstration of the Immortality of the Soul

Having seen Russell's contentions as regards the human person, the human soul and its immortality, and the logical implications of his views; let me attempt a critique on them in order to show their shallowness and vacuity.

Critique of Russell's Concept of the Human Person and His Fate

As for the human person, Russell held that man is a composite of events, and not of matter (body) and mind (soul) as was held by metaphysicians and theologians. But Mondin tells us that man is not a bundle of phenomena. In his words:

Thus, *homo faber* implies *homo volens* and *homo sapiens*; *homo ludens*, in turn, implies *homo volens*... Therefore, we already have here the indicator of a unity in the human being, a unity that prevents us from considering him a bundle of phenomena, assembled by chance.²⁷

Russell's argument that man is a composite of "events" can be rejected on the grounds that every experience

necessarily presupposes a subject who experiences it. In other words, every experience is the experience of a subject. Now Russell told us that the human person is series of experience connected by memory. But it is not valid to say that the subject of an experience is part of the experience.²⁸ As such, man cannot be his experience or the consciousness of experiences. But Russell sees man as an effect rather than cause which is not ad rem/correct.

As for the changing attitude of the bodily manifestations of the soul; the Aristotelian notion of subject and predicate could help to refute Russell's argument. The soul is the subject while its bodily manifestations are its predicates. So, the changes of the latter do not imply the changes of the former.

Still, Aquinas made it clearer when he pointed out that the substance of the soul is distinct from its activities and powers otherwise it would mean that the being of the soul is its operation, then, the soul exists only when it is in operation. It then follows that, one should not argue that the soul is susceptible to changes because its bodily manifestations are changeable.

While Russell was opposing the advocates of immortality who emphasize that the soul is something other than its empirical manifestations through our bodily organs, he failed to tell us how these manifestations can go along with his conception of man composed of events.

Russell, like David Hume, dismissed the existence of the soul on the ground that there is no empirical perception of it. To this, Omoregbe reacted:

The ego, otherwise known as the self, the soul or spirit in man is a supra-empirical entity which is the subject of experience but not part of the experience itself, the perceiver but not part of its field of perception or objects of perception. Therefore Hume's denial of the existence of the soul, self, ego, mind, or spirit, in man on the ground that he does not perceive it empirically inside himself is *absurd*,...²⁹ [emphasis mine]

Russell failed to recognise the connotation of spirituality: that, that which is described as spiritual, by the fact that it is spiritual, defies empirical perception.

Russell argued that personal continuity is a matter of the continuity of memory and habit. So, a person cannot be the same if he cannot consciously connect his past experiences. But, in as much as we appreciate the involvement of memory as one of the criteria of personal identification, we must know that a person who, as a result of accident or illness, is unable to consciously connect his past experiences, is still the same person prior to the accident or illness. In other words, a person may be *functionally* not the same (i.e. when he cannot remember - memory failure), still that does not imply that he is *ontologically* not the same. Also, we must know that the issue of personal identification has not been finalized. A fortiori, nothing can be gained by swallowing the glib implication of this Russell's sedulous argument.

Russell argued that the so called 'mind' is bound within the brain structure. Though he did not explicitly tell us that the brain is the mind or that the mind is the faculty of the brain, rather he used the word 'bound' so as to adduce that with the dissipation of the brain, survival (immortality) would be impossible.

²⁷Mondin, B., *Philosophical Psychology*, Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1985, p.218

²⁸Omoregbe, J., *Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction to Philosophical Psychology*, Lagos: JERP, 2001, p.57

²⁹Ibid. p.57

But this notwithstanding, the word 'bound' implies locality which is not compatible with spiritual realities.

Russell reduced that which we call 'soul' to memory and consciousness. But memory as we know it is not the essential character of man³⁰. The same applies also to consciousness. In fact Russell, as William James cited, said:

Whatever may be the correct definition of consciousness, consciousness is not the essence of life. Nor we can think any longer of it as being a kind of substance or primordial stuff, out of which the world is made. We cannot even think of it as an world is made. We cannot even think of it as an entity or quality of being in itself.³¹

Though the soul is not an entity, it is, however, distinct from memory and consciousness. In fact, memory and consciousness are the manifestations of one of the faculties of the soul (the intellect). For Sharma, consciousness is "a distinct feature of that total thing that we call mind or soul."³² [emphasis mine]

Memory, we can argue is a mental phenomenon seen as the conscious act of remembering past experiences. It cannot be said to be dissipated at the death of the brain. If the argument of Kant, that morality connotes the immortality of the soul, holds true, the soul cannot be said to be devoid of the mental ability of recalling. On the same note, Royce pointed out that besides sense memory; there is intellectual memory:

The capacity to retain intellectual knowledge parallels the functions of imagination and memory at the sensory level. Once the *knowing power* has been actuated by an impression, it is evidently capable of retaining this impression and reviving it for future use.³³ [emphasis mine]

There is no evidence that this memory is a sensation, or dependent on the body for its existence. Russell cannot be right in saying that memory, "bound within" the brain structure, dissipates with the end of the brain, in which case, the soul not able to recall, cannot be said to survive death.

We can, from what we have seen above, say that Russell's whole conception of the human person is erroneous; this is why he failed to acknowledge the fundament of the doctrine of immortality.

The Significance of Immortality of the Soul

Though immortality of the soul is a metaphysical issue, it is however, not devoid of any practical and existential significance. Having said that man towers above other animals by virtue of his rational soul, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul points out that man is a unique being. He has something spiritual in him: the soul, the seat of reflexive consciousness. This distinguishes him from brutes. Not only does he possess that which other animals do not possess, he also has the privilege of being the author of his actions, and of enjoying an eternal *non-sensible* existence after this life.

³⁰ Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, bk. 1, ch. 1, Aristotle implied that memory cannot be man's specific difference.

³¹ W. James, "Does Consciousness Exist?", *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, Science and Maths*, Vol. ii, pp. 447-91

³² A. P. Sharma, *The Meaning to Know Thyself*, Delhi: Pustak Mahal, 2001, p.11

³³ Royce, J., *Man and His Nature*, N. Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961, p.123

Immortality also points that the human life is sacred and has dignity. It is regrettable that for some people, pets are par to man. This could be seen in the case of bestiality, where a prostitute is paid to have carnal relation with an animal. But no matter how a pet is trained, in so far as it is an animal, it is incomparable to a human being. The doctrine also implies that the human life is sacred. This reinforces the argument that man should not be used for an experiment of unknown result. No one's life should be taken intentionally.

Another significance of immortality of the soul is in acknowledging the reality of the existence of God. Some thinkers, especially the theologians, asserted that immortality is as a result of divine providence. Hence, for them, God granted the soul immateriality. So, for you to argue that there is immortality of the soul, you have to establish first the existence of the immaterial soul. This soul cannot have been generated. It is rather created by God. God made it the way it is.

Then to argue that immortality is, without acknowledging that God is, would be to accept that the soul came to be either through chance or any other means other than creation.

We can also derive that there is purpose in nature, especially as it concerns man and his fate, i.e. his *terminus ad quem*. Man is endowed with reason, but no other animal has this; why is it so? We can say that whatever that exists, exists for a reason. As such, that there is purpose in the universe even when this is not immediately evident could be true. St Augustine appreciated this with regard to man when he said: "...for you *made us for yourself*, and our hearts are restless until they *rest in you*."³⁴ [Emphasis mine]

Kant used morality to argue for the immortality of the soul. This is also supported by Wallace. This suggests that there is a connection between morality and immortality. Even if we cannot prove sufficiently that immortality is derivable from morality, the belief that there is a connection between them can make people to seek doing good or being moral. In other words, immortality of the soul can act as 'Cerberus' to man's moral conduct. This finds support in the words of Royce, "If the grave is the end of everything for him (man), every moment and every decision will be different than if there is a life beyond."³⁵

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul can also be said to enhance judicial affairs. This is inferable from the stand that though the soul's bodily manifestations can change, it does not imply that the person is not the same after the bodily changes. If the other case is taken, i.e. that the person is not the same, jurisprudence would have been like a *toothless Bulldog* without significant effect in the society since no defaulter would be regarded to be the same person who previously defaulted.

Arguments for the Immortality of the Soul

The immortality of the human soul had been serious defended by thinkers of different origin and era. They were each convinced of the truthfulness of the immortality of the soul. Each of them has different reasons for believing as well as proving this. Some philosophers hold that immortality is not meant for everyone, rather for some individuals; while for others, it is for everyone. But the immortality we are discussing here is that of *every* human soul in so far as it is a human soul.

³⁴ Augustine, *Confessions* trans. by H. M. Helms, Mass achusetts: Paraclete Press, 1986, p.13

³⁵ J. Royce, op. cit., p.322

The philosophers who supported and defended the immortality of the human soul include Plato, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Kant, among others.

PLATO (427-347BC): he offered several proofs to show that the individual human soul is immortal.

First, he held that the soul is absolutely simple, and like the gods, immortal. As such, the soul is indivisible since it does not comprise of parts which are likely to separate. This quality is similar to that of the gods who are simple in nature, i.e. not composed of parts. Therefore the soul, for Plato, must outlive the death of man.

Secondly: the argument based on *ex-contraries*. Plato held that the soul is life and it is impossible that life can become not-life. In other words, the soul cannot be life and not-life at the same time as that is incompatible with the laws of reason (i.e. the law of identity, and that of excluded middle). Hence, the soul which is life cannot be thought to be without life. To do so would be a contradiction.

Thirdly: the argument based on *ex-remiscentia*. The soul, according to him, was not originally meant to unite with the body. Having found itself in the body, the soul must do all it can to release itself from the body, and return to its proper abode. To support the argument of the pre-existence of the soul, Plato holds that knowledge is reminiscence/recollection. That is, the soul remembers what it has encountered in the Ideal world which as a result of its union with the body, it could not remember clearly again. Since the soul and the body do not have the same origin or *mission*, it will not be tenable to say that both are doomed at the face of physical death.

ST. AUGUSTINE (AD 354-430): he stated that the soul is the subject of science which is eternal. This science (*disciplina*) if it exists, does so anywhere, and is itself eternal, i.e. unchanging. It can exist only in that which lives and yearns to learn. Now, the human mind, he maintains, if it exists and reasons rightly, must do so with science. Hence science, for him, is in the mind of man.

Again, he holds that *the mind is life, and thus, it cannot lack life*. Augustine maintained that there is nothing that lacks itself. Life cannot be argued to lack life. The mind, he argues, is a certain life; it animates, and is not animated. So, the mind cannot be said to be dead. In fact, Augustine identified the mind as that which when it deserts a living being, the being is said to be dead. It is absurd, therefore, to say that life abandons itself. In other words, we cannot say that the mind dies.

THOMAS AQUINAS (1224/6-1274): he argued that the soul is not an accident. It has its existence *per se*. Though united essentially with the body, the soul is independent of the body in its being and in those operations essential to it. He argued for the immortality of the soul thus:

Now it is impossible for any substance to be generated or corrupted accidentally, that is, by the generation or corruption of something else. For generation and corruption belong to a thing, just as existence belongs to it, which is acquired by generation and lost by corruption. Therefore, whatever has existence "per se" cannot be generated or corrupted except "per se"; while things which do not subsist, such as accidents and material forms, acquire existence or lost it through generation or corruption of composite things. The

human soul... could not be corrupted unless it was corrupted "per se".³⁶

Aquinas attributed corruption to those things that are subject to contrariety. He argued that there can be no contrariety in the intellectual soul, since it receives according to the manner of its existence.

Also, from the natural desire of the intellectual substance, hence he said,

Moreover we may take a sign of this from that everything naturally aspires to existence after its own manner. ...the intellect apprehends existence absolutely, and for all time; so that everything that has an intellect naturally desires always to exist. But a natural desire cannot be in vain. Therefore every intellectual substance is incorruptible.³⁷

IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804): he affirmed (though on the level of presumption) that the human soul is immortal when viewed in the light of practical reasoning. He derived immortality as a *postulate* of morality.

Since all men are obliged to do right, to reach perfection, which according to Kant, is impossible in the present life; and given that there is reward or punishment commensurate with right or wrong action in the present life, Kant maintained that these may not be achieved in the present life. Then there will most likely be the afterlife where these will be met.³⁸

Subordinate Concepts in Appraisal of Immortality of the Soul.

There are some concepts that point to the validity of the doctrine of immortality, though some philosophers and religions do not see some of these concepts as tenable. As such, they see their use in proving the immortality of the soul as doing the doctrine harm than proving it true. These are reincarnation, metempsychosis and incantation of the dead.

Reincarnation: the Igbo paradigm

'Reincarnation' is derived from the verb 'reincarnate' which is contextually a combination of two words "re" (again) and "incarnate" (to be in human form). Therefore, taken together, "reincarnation" is 'taking or being in human form again'. It is a concept that cuts across many cultures and places. But we shall look at it from the Igbo perspective.

Iroegbu sees reincarnation as 'the (progressive) return of a person (soul, character, traits) after death into this world'.³⁹ For Abanuka, "reincarnation (*ilo-uwa*) literally means a return to this worldly existence."⁴⁰ Arinze pointed out, "that return from the spirit world could be in the form of *ilo-uwa*, or *ogbanje* (repeaters). That 'reincarnation' is associated with the former."⁴¹

Reincarnation is a welcomed and credible concept in African *Weltanschauung*. It entails the return of the ancestors to the land of the living.

This return could be continuous and diverse in the sense that an ancestor could continue reincarnating in his family, and in a number of children. Being a reality embedded in the mind of the Africans, especially the Igbo, at the birth of a child, the parents go to a diviner (*dibia afa*) to ascertain via

³⁶ T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, 75, 6

³⁷ Ibid.1, 75, 6

³⁸ I. Kant, *Elements of Pure Practical Reason*, bk. II, ch.2

³⁹ P. Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: the Kpim of Philosophy*, Owerri: International University Press Ltd. 1995, p.81

⁴⁰ B. Abanuka, *Philosophy and the Igbo World*, Onitsha: Spiritan Publications, 2004, p.56

⁴¹ F. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Traditional Religion*, Onitsha: St. Stephen's Press, 2008, p.31

divination, which of their ancestors has reincarnated in their child.”⁴²

We can say that reincarnation presupposes that the human soul is not annihilated alongside the body at death. For the Igbo, the human soul whether of a baby or of adult, never dies. It comes back to this world as either *ogbanje* (children); or as hovering wicked human spirit [*akalogeli* (worthless person or a simpleton), and youths]; or in reincarnation (elders).

Metempsychosis

This is the transmigration of souls from one body to another when the former body with which the soul unites dies. Though, it was initially promulgated by Pythagoras and his school, Plato is known as its serious defender.

Metempsychosis is etymologically derived from the Greek verb ‘metempsychousthai’ which is the combination of two words ‘meta’ (after), and ‘empsychos’ (animate). So, taken together it means ‘to be animated after’. Metempsychosis is then the passing of the soul into another body at the death of the present body with which it unites.

Having argued that the soul was imprisoned in the body (against its will), as a punishment for a fault the soul committed in the real world, Plato sees it as an onus for the soul to free itself from the imprisonment of the body in order to return to its proper abode (real world); or the state of *nirvana* for the Buddhists. But if the soul is not able to liberate itself at once, it will transmigrate into another body till it achieves liberation/nirvana/enlightenment. In a sense, transmigration is what awaits a soul that is not liberated from the imprisonment of the body when the latter fades away.

For the fact that the soul transmigrates (at the death of the body with which it unites), presupposes that the soul does not die along with the body when the latter dies. In the Platonic version, the soul, when it must have achieved purification after transmigrations, depending on how it devotes towards achieving it, returns to the permanent and real world. To that effect, the soul is immortal.

Incantation and Manipulation of the Dead

The reality of this practice in African and Jewish worlds is not something to be debated. It is believed in both cultures that the dead are not completely annihilated, though the dissipation of the body at death is not denied. Through this practice as we shall see below, the ‘dead’ could be consulted for counselling, helping, or for information which is not accessible to the reason or sensation of the living human person.

The Biblical paradigm

This practice can be exemplified with the biblical story as we have it in 1 Samuel 28: 3 -19. When King Saul and all Israelites were under great terror for fear of the Philistines, and having lost God’s favour, Saul sought for a woman who is a medium, to help out consult the prophet Samuel who was as of then dead. On meeting her at Endor, Saul asked her, “Consult a spirit for me, and bring up for me the one whom I name to you.”⁴³ When the woman has done as Saul demanded, Samuel came up and said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?”

From this incident, we can adduce that Samuel, was alive, and was conjured. He could be said to be different from the Samuel who had died. This is because he was conscious (not sensibly) of all that was happening to Israel, aware of whom Saul was, of Saul’s actions and fate, such that

Russell’s criterion of continuity is met here. Therefore we cannot argue justifiably that the Samuel conjured differs from the one who was once alive.

The Igbo paradigm

In the same vein, the Igbos believe and some of them indulge in the practice of mysticism (medium practices). This is extra-ordinarily evident when there is a sudden and untimely death of a hard working youth or a personality. The relatives of the deceased may decide to consult a diviner (specialist in conjuring the dead) to know the cause of the death.

Evaluation and Conclusion

As it is customary of all philosophical discourses/write-ups, the evaluation comes towards the end of the write-up to assess the logic of the subject matter so as to ascertain both its validity and veracity, and finally, to infer therefrom, a conclusion on the issue under discussion.

This work intends to refute Russell’s denial of immortality and synchronously prove the immortality of the soul with ideas from some philosophers and a little contribution of mine. Let me attempt a critical evaluation of the ideas used so far on their consistency and efficacy in bringing the doctrine of immortality to a convincing and reasonable standpoint.

Evaluation of the logic of immortality

Immortality, we held, is only applicable to the spiritual component of man, the soul. The soul, we argued, is conceptually and ontologically different from the body and from man i.e. it does not exist or get vivified from its union with the body. Also, some of this soul’s activities are independent of the body. As such, these activities could continue in spite of the soul’s separation from the body. Copleston puts it thus;

When death occurs, then the human soul is capable of continuing in being after its separation from the body because it is intrinsically independent of matter, it does not rely on body for its existence.⁴⁴

Also, its relationship with its activities is like that between the Aristotelian subjects and their predicates. Aquinas did well to point out that the soul is distinct from its features so that we would not think that the soul exists only when its features are there.

The doctrine of immortality states that the soul survives the death of the body and continues to live independent of the latter. The soul, as it is (i.e. by its nature), cannot die. It also states that each soul is unique and distinct (i.e. individuated).

We equally see the phenomenon of death; defining death as the absence of the vivifying principle in living beings. Since the soul is identified as the vivifying principle in man, Plato and other philosophers are right in arguing that the vivifying principle cannot be validly thought to be without life. In a parallel line of thought, it is not possible to see darkness in the phenomenon of light, or cold in the phenomenon of hot; otherwise this would be a contradiction of the principle of identity. So, it is either that something is or is not. It then follows that the soul which is life cannot be dead or conceived of without life. Copleston clears it more, thus, “The soul participates in life holding its being and essence from a principle which admits no contrary, as the being which the soul receives from the principle is precisely life, it cannot die”.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Bk 1 vol.ii, New York: Image Books, 1985, p.79

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.79

⁴² B. Abanuka, op. cit., p.59

⁴³ cf. 1 Sam. 28 v. 8

Kant and some other philosophers were convinced that immortality could be arrived at through morality. But this can only be affirmed if truly there are repercussions for actions which are distinct from the actions themselves, such that when the actions are accomplished, the repercussions still await the actors. The argument based on the simplicity of the soul, held that the soul is immortal on the ground that it is simple and not composed of parts. Therefore, it cannot be thought of to die. Though this argument sounds right but recent discovery in nuclear physics has nullified it. It was discovered in nuclear physics that an atom is not dead when its components are blown up. The arguments of reincarnation, metempsychosis, and the incantation and manipulation of the dead are not *logically* and *rationally* credible enough to prove, or defend the doctrine of immortality of the soul. As for reincarnation, Mondin had pointed out that “it is not confirmed by any experience and is intrinsically inadmissible; be it through the place we would have in another being of the species, or through the place we would occupy in beings inferior to man”.⁴⁶

Metempsychosis can also be rejected on the ground that it is not logical to argue that the soul pre-existed the body with which it unites to form the human person. Mondin argued that the soul was created alongside the body, its fellow component in the human person. Therefore, to accept that the soul came through creation already nullifies metempsychosis. With regard to medium practices, Royce stated that it does cause the doctrine of immortality more harm than good with their illogical and unscientific ventures.⁴⁷ As such, it is not logically sufficient to refute or prove the validity of immortality.

Given that there are activities that belong to the soul as such without the mediation of the body, it will not be valid to argue that the soul cannot survive and continue to live, after the death of the body, when viewed from a functional or operational perspective.

Since the soul is argued to be the principle by which the body is animated, it will be logically valid to argue that its separation with the body will in no way imply that the soul itself will lack or lose life since it is life itself which vivified the body in the first place. This would be appreciated if we understand that the life of man is not a distinct reality from the soul, otherwise it will be the case that there are three components in man instead of two.

Augustine’s argument: that the soul is the bearer of science which is eternal in man, also points to the validity of the doctrine of immortality. This is because we cannot say that the intellect which is a faculty of the soul is material. By bearing something that is eternal points to the fact that it transcends materiality. So by bearing science which is eternal, it is itself eternal.

We must know that logic is not the most and surest means of determining the *veracity* of an argument which may be logically valid (as is the case with Russell’s arguments here). We can from the rational analysis of the arguments outlined above, or from the pragmatic practices of mysticism (though it is not rationally convincing) or from the application of extra-sensory perception, come to the stand that the doctrine of immortality is true.

In a nutshell, from what we have seen above, the logic of the immortality of the soul is such that is consistent; not contradicting itself. Hence, I will say that ‘the human soul, for the fact that it is spiritual, ontologically and functionary independent of the body, being the source of life for the human person, the bearer of science (which is eternal), and having being created by God to be in this way, is immortal.’

Evaluation of Russell’s Denial

This evaluation is going to take two shapes: first, based on the argument’s logical validity, and secondly, based on its logical veracity.

Logical validity: Russell has the kudos for being logically consistent in his argument against the immortality of the soul; especially in his “non-sentimental” arguments.

The consistency of Russell’s argument is evident from his primal stand as regards the fundament of the doctrine of immortality, i.e. the existence of a spiritual soul.

To make sure there is no room for the soul, Russell puts up the theory of Neutral Monism, which denied the reality of body and soul, presenting in their stead, events as the true reality. To rule off the possibility of immortality, Russell devised the principle of memory and habit as the necessary and sufficient criteria of personal identity and continuity. So, to convince Russell of the reality of immortality, one must first establish that *post-mortem* Mr A’s soul is *the same* with Mr A’s *ante-mortem* soul, using the above principle. For Russell, this is not possible because, the criteria of personal identity and persistence are lost and gone at death.

Logical veracity: Russell clearly missed the mark in this regard. First, his Neutral Monism was far from solving the ‘Cartesian Paradox’. He failed to recognise the reality of the body and soul; he rather muddled them up or replaced them with “Events”. But in man, the reality of corporeity and spirituality are indubitable. In fact, we cannot deny them in order to solve the ‘Cartesian Paradox’. Secondly, that the memory is bound within the brain structure is another blunder on the side of Russell. This is so because there is the intellectual memory besides sense memory. The intellectual memory is part of the intellect which is a faculty of the soul. The existence of the intellectual memory answers Russell’s contention - that memory is dissipated of when man dies so that even if posthumous Bertrand Russell appears, in so far as he cannot recall consciously the activities and habit of the ante-mortem Bertrand Russell, that he, on that ground, cannot be said to survive death.

Though his idea of memory and habit as criteria for personal identity are welcomed, they are, however, not final. They are, taken together, not enough to be the sole yard stick for personal identity and continuity, or in extension, as Russell applied them, the proviso for arguing for or denying immortality.

The conclusion in logic, by rule, cannot be true when either of the premises is false. Russell’s argument (his notion of the human soul) is such that will inevitably lead to his conclusion, i.e. agnosticism towards the soul. His conception of the soul led to his conception of death as the total end of man and of all pertaining to man’s being. That is why Russell was convinced that rot is what inescapably awaits man. Nothing of man can escape rot not even the metaphysicians’ “soul”.

Russell, being a logician, could be applauded for being logically consistent, and thereby arguing validly. But Russell’s *point de depart* is faulty. Therefore he needs a modification that would grant his consistency rational credibility. In terms of veracity, Russell cannot be applauded because he despised and under-emphasized metaphysical

⁴⁶B. Mondin, *Philosophical Psychology*, Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1985, p.277

⁴⁷J. Royce, *Man and His Nature*, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961, p.322

truths and its connotations, upholding tenaciously and blindly the doctrine and principle of positivism.

Conclusion

The immortality we have argued for pertains only to the spiritual part of man, i.e. the soul not the whole man. Russell and likewise other philosophers arguing against the immortality of the soul might have done so owing to their interchange of the term 'mind', or 'self', with the 'soul'.

Also, it is important to note that the doctrine of immortality advocated in Christianity is not diametrically different from that of philosophers. So, when Russell said that he is against that of Christianity, we should know that he intends the 'objective notion' of immortality. Having seen that man is a being of corporeity and spirituality, with the corporeity ending up at the face of physical death, the spiritual continues to live in a different mode. This is because the soul is ontologically independent of the body. To the Christian thinkers who reject immortality on the ground that it contradicts biblical revelation, I reply that it is not contradictory to biblical revelation because God may have made the soul to live in a disembodied manner till it re-unites with its body at the resurrection.

Since there is a difference between "being", and "acting", we can argue that the existence (being) of a soul that survives death could be logically defended (as we have done above). This is so because its existence could be analytically inferred, though we may not say anything about its acting (function) then. Although we may arrive at the existence of a reality from its actions, but metaphysically, the existence of realities is the primary and fundamental issue. So, as for the posthumous soul's activity, we may not justifiably argue on what it would be like, but we can argue about its being. As a metaphysical subject, the immortality of the soul cannot be denied on the ground that there is no evidence for it. This is justifiable with the argument of C. D. Broad, "Finding no evidence for a proposition is evidence against it only if the proposition be such that, if it were true, there ought to be some evidence for it,"⁴⁸

Russell would have been right if he had maintained that immortality is not possible with regard to man as a substance and not the soul. This is because the human soul, being spiritual and subsistent, as well as the cause of life in the human person, is immortal. So, however convincing Russell's argument against the doctrine of immortality of the soul may be, we must not lose sight of the truth that life is larger than logic.

In conclusion, we will say with Wallace that

Man is mortal, as is universally admitted, because his soul can be separated from its body; the human soul, on the other hand, is *immortal* and will endure forever regardless of biological death.⁴⁹

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⁴⁸ C. D. Broad, "The Mind and Its Place in Nature", in *Philosophy of Religion: a Book of Readings*, edited by G. Abernethy, & T. Langford, London: The Macmillan Company, 1968, p.538

⁴⁹ W. Wallace, *The Elements of Philosophy*, New York; Alba House, 1977, p.82

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