

The future beyond death essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

While Philosophy professor, Gretchen Weirob, suffers from injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident, she begins to question her personal identity and immortality. Weirob, embracing the idea of death, says to her old friend, Miller: " Simply persuade me that my survival after the death of this body is possible, and I promise to be comforted" (2). In other words, Weirob is saying that survival after death must offer her the comforts of anticipation that there will be an identical " Gretchen Weirob" in the future. She begins to inquire about what it is that gives people their identity over time.

Miller then argues that human beings are more than just a body, therefore after death, " what is fundamentally you is not your body, but your soul or self or mind" (6). Miller continues to say that the soul, self and mind are not three separate identities, but they collectively make up one's consciousness. To Miller, Weirob retorts that " to be conscious" is actually a verb, and every verb is partnered with a subject. In order " to be conscious," the subject of the verb that is conscious must be the body, the same body that will someday, after death, be immaterial. If one does not have a body, then one cannot have consciousness.

Therefore, Weirob claims that the body must maintain her identity. Miller rebuts by referencing Descartes, claiming that there is a distinction between the body and the mind, which he believes is immaterial. Miller restates his claim by saying: " You are a soul, it sees and smells, but cannot be seen or smelt" (7). Weirob, dissatisfied by that answer, uses a *reductio ad absurdum* argument to disprove his assertion. Having been to lunch together at a restaurant named Dorsey's in the past, Weirob attempts to falsify Miller's claim that people exist as their souls and not their bodies.

Weirob concludes that there are two consequences for Miller's view, if there are two souls and two bodies, then two separate people exist. However, if there is just one soul and two different bodies, then that is the same person inhabiting two different bodies. For instance, Weirob states: "The fact that the same body that now lies in front of you on the bed was across the table from you at Dorsey's – that would not mean that the same person was present on both occasions, if the same soul were not" (7).

She later questions Miller's claim that if her same soul were lodged into another body, perhaps even "Barbara Walters or even Mark Spitz," then "Gretchen Weirob" would still be Gretchen Weirob (8). After his first critique, Miller says, "I know that the same soul is connected with the body now that was connected with it before. That's how I know it's you" (8). For that, Miller reasons on the principle "same body, same self [soul]" (8). Weirob, uncertain of Miller's statement assumes that his justifications are illogical.

Curious as to how Miller confirms his assertion, "same body, same soul," she wonders how he knows a priori. Weirob concludes that Miller's principle is utterly groundless. He does not have any other means of establishing a connection between the two because he has had little to no experience with a soul. After a lengthy session of debate, Weirob offers Miller a piece of chocolate. He instantly picked up the chocolate with a characterized swirl on the top. Interested, Weirob asks Miller why he had chosen that particular piece.

In short he says, the marking indicates that it is a caramel. Through that correlation, Miller was able to see an analogy between the swirl and the

chocolate, and the body and the soul. He then continues to say: " We see the outer wrapping and infer what is inside" (11). However, Miller knew that the swirl on the chocolate meant that it was a caramel not a priori. Therefore, a relationship and connection had already been established. Consequently, Weirob argues that Miller still cannot prove that there is a correlation between body and soul because he has never experienced the soul.

If the soul " cannot be seen or smelt," according to Miller, then one cannot know it by experience. Therefore, once again, Miller's claim remains groundless. After yet another defeat, Miller modifies his view. He claims: " Similarity of psychological characteristics - a person's attitudes, beliefs, memories, prejudices, and the like - is observable" (12). If such characteristics are observable and directly correlated with both the body and the soul, then a correlation between body and soul can be established not a priori.

Therefore, Miller evades his previous critique and is back to his former principle, " same body, same soul" (8). Again with uncertainty, Weirob rejects Miller's principle. She then uses an analogy of the Blue River to easily depict her assertion. Weirob asks Miller how he would describe the Blue River. He comments on several characteristics of the water and says that he would be certain he were at the river if ever encountered with it. But Weirob goes on to say that the water in the Blue River consists of different water every time. Even though there might visibly be similar traits, the water will be different.

Consequently, Weirob says: “[T]he similarity of states of water, by which you judge the sameness of river, does not require identity of the water which is in those states at these various times” (14). In other words, just like the river, our souls are not static and are rather constantly changing. Even though Miller believes that the soul is immaterial, it could be replaced by another soul with very similar psychological characteristics as the one prior. And if one cannot have any knowledge of the soul with regards to sight or touch, then no one can know.

Weirob then claims that if Miller is so adamant that personal identity consists of the sameness of soul, then he would have no recognition of who she is. Ultimately, Weirob says that the sameness of body and psychological characteristics does not conclude that there is sameness in person. She then ends her argument with: “ I am saying that if you do know who I am then you are wrong that personal identity consists in sameness of immaterial soul” (15). With that, Miller and Weirob agree to disagree about the future and immortality of the soul beyond death.