Immortality: Remarker Versus Trotter-Cockburn

Within Atherton's Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period, Catharine Trotter-Cockburn defends Locke's Essay of Human Understanding. In this comment sheet, I will discuss some of Remarker's concerns and objections to Locke's view and present Trotter-Cockburn's responses that defend and advance Locke's view, and I will additionally argue that her defense of Locke's essay is sufficient.

The first objection the Remarker makes concerns the soul. It is assumed that the soul can sometimes be absolute without any kind of thought, and due to God's omnipotence, at any time he can give power to any system of matter to think and conceive ideas. With that said, the Remarker cannot establish proof for the immortality of the soul (Atherton, 1994, p. 129). In response, Trotter-Cockburn states that proofs for the immortality of the soul can cause an erroneous characterization of the soul on the basis that the soul is constantly thinking. Additionally, she claims that "it is ever so clearly proved, that thinking is necessary to the soul's existence, that can no more prove, that it shall always exist, than it proves that it has always existed" (Atherton, 1994, p. 129). Thus, Trotter-Cockburn expresses that even though we can identify that the soul is a thinking thing, it does not contribute or help in proving the immortality of the soul.

Throughout Locke's work there is no confirmed proof for the immortality of the soul in waking and sleeping conditions, and this elicits concern for the Remarker (Atherton, 1994, p. 130). In attempt to remove any concern, Trotter-Cockburn asserts that Locke's aim was not to propose a proof for the immortality of the soul anyhow, and she explains further that the Remarker is confused for thinking the terms soul, man and person have the same meaning, when Locke states that each term has a different meaning. With that said, Trotter-Cockburn makes it evidently clear that these terms have different meanings as she states "if Mr. Locke had understood by soul, man, and person, the same thing, he would never have made such a question, whether the soul thinking apart, what the man is not at all conscious of, were not a distinct person, from the man" (Atherton, 1994, p. 131). Further, a prominent concern held by the Remarker, is thinking that "all our thoughts perish in sound sleep, and we seem to have a new soul every morning" (Atherton, 1994, p. 134). The Remarker believes this from linking motion and the body with thinking and the soul, thus composing the idea that if one's body stops moving, only a new motion can be produced, likewise the same would occur for one's soul and its thoughts. Trotter-Cockburn rightly thinks this objection concerning Locke's work is nonsense, as it is absurd to think that each new thought would produce a new soul. Trotter-Cockburn refutes this objection with ease by merely stating that each day she does not have the same thoughts, yet each day she does not have a new soul.

Moreover, the Remarker has concerns that proof for the immateriality of the soul is weakened by Locke not knowing what the soul is comprised of. This concern arises from the notion that "God may give, or have given, for anything we know, to some systems of matter, a power to perceive, and think" (Atherton, 1994, p. 142). Locke expressed that it is not possible to know if God has provided certain systems of matter with the power to think and conceive ideas. However, with that said he did not attempt to argue for the immateriality of the soul. Trotter-Cockburn attempts to explain that an argument proclaiming that the soul is immortal due to its

immateriality would not adequately verify anything concerning the soul. Trotter-Cockburn further states that those “who had a notion of the soul’s being immaterial, did not believe it’s immortality on the foundation” (Atherton, 1994, p. 144), and “if the soul is not immaterial, there can be no certain proof that it is immortal” (Atherton, 1994, p. 146). Thus, Trotter-Cockburn has expressed that even if the soul were to be material, we cannot be certain of its immortality as there are somethings we cannot know about, though, acknowledging God’s omnipotence and power to make systems of matter think, God could give us the power to know.

Conclusively, I think Catharine Trotter-Cockburn defends Locke’s ideas adequately. Additionally, taking into consideration that it is challenging to defend God in Locke’s view, I would argue that Trotter-Cockburn advances Locke’s view through successfully explaining how God acts, and interacts with souls. Further, given that Locke’s essay contained several scriptural interpretations, Trotter-Cockburn presented a sufficient argument that defends Locke’s views.