

Dissertation

**On the coherence
of the notion of personal survival
after the death of the body**

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Roger Claxton

Dissertation Summary

This dissertation defends the position that the coherence of the notion of some form of personal survival after the death of the body is worthy of consideration. This is not to say that personal survival after the death of the body either has or has not been established but rather that there are sufficient reasons to at least warrant open discussion of the topic rather than to assert dogmatically one way or the other. Various forms of possible remains resulting from ante-mortem existence are discussed, together with the transitions that are required to transform these remains into a post-mortem being. Three types of post-mortem existence are then discussed. In particular, the importance of memory in this process is highlighted and what it means for the survival to be personal, which seems of some importance, is also covered in some depth. The conclusion is that there are a wide range of possibilities which even though beset by significant problems given our current understanding of the world, are not impossible nor unintelligible and therefore warrant serious consideration by both those who do believe that there is survival after bodily death and those who do not.

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1. Introduction

The question concerning whether or not there is any form of continued conscious existence after the death of the body is one of a small number of philosophical problems that will be resolved, certainly from a personal point of view, with no more than the passage of time, assuming that the same fate awaits all beings, or at least all humans. For if survival does occur then the survivor will find out the answer to the question, and if it does not then the question will no longer be of concern.¹ If there is survival in some form, and assuming there are some memories of the ante-mortem state, it can be said ‘Yes! There is life after death after all!’ and the surviving being will presumably go on to discover what form that life takes. But the task in this paper, in the space and time available, is to see how far the coherence of the notion of some form of personal survival after the death of the body can be tested *now*, while we are still alive. This is very much a journey into the unknown despite the huge amount of literature that has been produced on the subject. Almost everyone has a belief about life after death (LAD), in many cases founded on little or no examination of the subject and for many determined for them by their religious beliefs. The public interest in, and the evidence for, ghosts, spirits and paranormal occurrences in general must also be considered. Many of course believe that there is no such thing as a life after death, that death marks the end of our existence and there is nothing beyond. Because of these diverse views it is hard to adopt a neutral approach. Even those who profess to provide an objective view of the subject often have their own agenda.² Despite these difficulties, the present work seeks to provide as neutral an approach to the investigation as is feasible. Because an existence outside of known life on Earth is a possibility - or at least a topic for discussion - almost anything that is logically possible seems within scope. Furthermore, the truth about LAD could lie way beyond current comprehension. Appeals to the unlimited power of God could also be made in

¹ As per Lucretius 1951 page 121.

² Ducasse 1961 provides an example of this.

order to support almost any idea for how different forms of survival might be possible. But this would not really *explain* anything. And of course this paper is of limited length and it would perhaps be unhelpful to use some of it on such things, so the discussion in this paper is very much grounded in areas which are more familiar. For instance the more obvious alternative possibilities for LAD and the extent to which those possibilities stand up to a degree of scrutiny are investigated, such as in what ways they do or do not make logical sense.³

This paper therefore operates within a framework. Firstly there is a tentative assumption that some form of LAD is a possibility and it will be seen at the end to what extent that assumption holds up. This takes an agnostic approach to LAD. The findings should help to clarify both views in favour of some form of survival and views against any form of survival. Secondly, different types of both disembodied and embodied options for survival are discussed, although the treatment is not even. Some options seem more worthy of discussion than others, whilst some are certainly better understood than others. Thirdly, what is being considered is carefully defined and neutralised in an attempt to minimise confusion and bias. The word 'soul' for instance is almost totally absent given the preconceptions that immediately arise (but see Appendix B for some reflections on the distinction between the soul and the mind). And everything is discussed as far as possible on the basis that it is following standard physical laws as they are currently understood.

Even using the term LAD gives rise to problems. There is something contradictory in asserting life after death, given that death might be seen as the end of life. But the term as used here is of course referring to some way in which survival beyond the demise of one's physical body might be possible. It does highlight the importance of being clear about

³ Penelhum (1980) for instance, in his discussion of disembodied existence looks for intelligibility as a criterion.

terminology and so the discussion starts by providing some working definitions of terms that are used repeatedly through the dissertation.

Note particularly that the discussion is concerned with ‘survival’, i.e. some form of survival of a part of a living being beyond its earthly death. Ideally this is a *personal* survival such that enough of a being survives such that it would (assuming it is conscious) *recognise* that it had survived. What is important here is the *identity* of the survivor; the preservation of identity is what appears key to the success of a being’s personal survival and is fundamental to any belief in personal LAD. After all, survival that is not personal (in the sense that a person or a part of that person survives but they have no knowledge of their past life so they do not even realise that they are a survivor), would be of academic interest certainly, but would not be what most people would value in a survival hypothesis. Indeed, from a personal point of view, it would be virtually indistinguishable from a complete absence of survival, certainly of one’s preserved identity. Perhaps the only saving grace is that someone could find out that they had survived through someone else telling them, so they could come to *know* that they were a survivor (and this would be preferable to not surviving at all). Survival, of course, suggests that some part of a living being has continued unaffected by the death of that being. But there is also another possibility: that a *copy* or *replica* is taken of what is to survive and it is that which actually survives, with nothing of the original remaining. Depending on the definition of personal survival one accepts this may or may not count as successful personal survival.

Survival is usually associated with a dualistic approach to living things. That is, since it is known that the physical body decays on death, perhaps the only hope for some form of survival is in terms of something that is non-material. It may be felt that the mind provides this non-material something. If so a dualist view of living things has probably already been accepted: that a being consists of a physical body and a non-physical mind. In general,

rejection of the dualist view probably also implies rejection of any possibility of survival beyond death. But if the focus is on *whatever it is* that could survive the death of the body, or what it *needs to be* in order for survival to be meaningful regardless of its nature then the investigation should be able to proceed independently of any monist/dualist views. Such an approach need not assert that the mind is non-physical nor that it is distinct from the body. Some background information on the distinction between material and non-material objects and their spatiality will be found in Appendix A.

In the main, survival is considered as a future occurrence that follows the current life on Earth. But some important notions of survival involve repeated cycles of life either with or without gaps in between. Hence there could be an ante-natal period as well. This gives rise to the possibility that what survives has existed previously, perhaps has evolved over a long period of time and continues to exist, whereas other notions of survival suggest that what survives has been created anew with the birth of the being on Earth.

2. Definitions

It is important to clarify some of the terms that are used in the detailed discussion within this paper. This will assist in their consistent use and this consistency together with the clear separation between terms will help to break the problem down into its constituent parts.

- **Being** - an organism capable of life.
- **Self** or **Person** - That part or essence of a **Being** that constitutes its identity, whatever that consists in. This is what might be considered to be what needs to survive the death of the physical body in order to say that the **Being** has survived.
- **Living Being** - a **Being** that has experienced and/or is experiencing life. For the current purposes the focus is on animals including human beings. Plants are left out of account. By animals here are included anything that can perceive and respond to its environment whether or not consciousness might be imparted to it and it can thus include quite simple organisms.⁴ Inevitably the discussion tends to be anthropomorphic but, unless stated otherwise, what is said applies equally to animals in general.
- **Ante-mortem existence** - normal existence of a **Living Being** on Earth, as it would commonly be understood.
- **Ante-mortem self or person** - the **Self** or **Person** during **Ante-mortem existence**.
- **Post-mortem existence** - continued existence of the **Living Being** after its death on Earth, in *whatever form* and to *whatever extent*.
- **Post-mortem self or person** - the **Self** or **Person** during **Post-mortem existence**.

⁴ Such as the single celled organism, the paramecium (see Penrose 1995 p357-361), which does not have a brain but it does have a cytoskeleton. It may not be conscious in a human sense but it can perfectly well cause itself to move around etc. in an intentional and therefore effectively conscious way. And it has no brain at all, but it does have microtubules, which are also present in the neurons in human brains.

- **Survival** - the *process* whereby a **Being** with an **Ante-mortem existence** continues in some form into a **Post-mortem existence**.
- **Personal Survival - Survival** where the **Post-mortem self or person** identifies with and recognises itself as continuous with its **Ante-mortem self or person**. There may be looser or stricter criteria applied depending on one's view of what 'continuous' means.⁵

⁵ Discussed in Section 7 below.

3. Perspectives on Identity and Survival

An individual's identity and successful survival can look very different depending on the perspective from which they are viewed. In this section these topics are considered from two types of perspective. Firstly from the subjective/objective perspective (here called the first and third person views), and secondly from the past/future perspective (here called the retrospective and anticipatory views). Although introduced here, these perspectives are central to the issue of survival and so will arise at various points in later sections.

3.1. First and third person view of survival

The question of survival, especially *personal* survival, can be looked at from both the first and the third person point of view. The distinction is illustrated in figure 1 below.

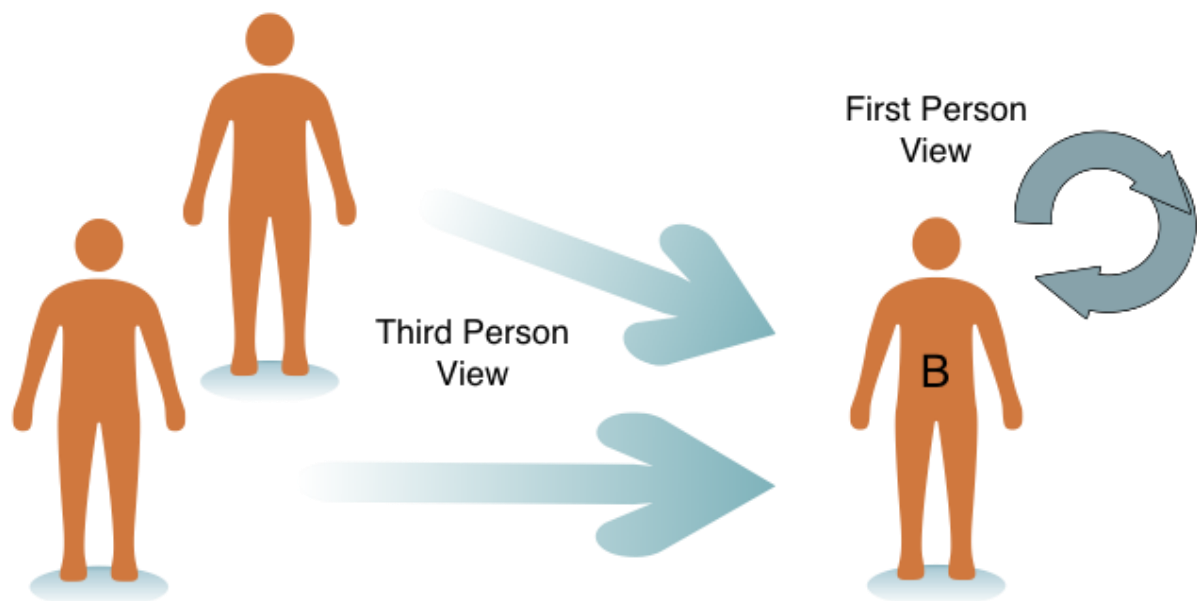


Figure 1: Distinction between First and Third Person View of Survival

If A's survival from state X to state Y is considered, it is one thing for B to consider that A has survived and quite another for A himself to consider that he has survived, at least

initially.⁶ Note that in asking the question here concerning survival, one is really asking if the person has the same identity, i.e whether the identity has survived. B can look at A in state Y and say that, yes, everything looks as it should do, A is reacting in the right sort of way, behaving as would be expected etc., and therefore B can conclude that A has survived, has the same identity. But if the same situation is looked at from A's perspective while in state Y, he will only define his situation as survival by virtue of remembering that he was previously in state X and perhaps also by remembering prior states to that, in effect remembering his previous identity. Clearly if he cannot remember being in state X or any previous states to that then he will not say that he or his identity has survived from that previous state. Even if he cannot remember, he will of course be aware that he exists and has *an* identity, but perhaps would not name his condition as involving survival.⁷

Of course he might begin to call it survival on being told by B and others that he had indeed survived and there might be other corroborating evidence (visual images for example), but of course such third party confirmation might not be available. So the internal view of survival is very different from the external view and the act of remembering (even mistakenly remembering) is crucial to this difference. In the discussion that follows it is often important to clearly distinguish between these two viewpoints when considering questions of survival, a distinction that is not always made explicit in the literature on the subject.

Penelhum⁸ in particular seems at times to give more weight to third party claims for identity over first person claims. These two types of claim are very different since the primacy of the bodily criterion of identity carries much more weight in third party claims. As

⁶ In addition there does not seem to be a sense in which A could sensibly say to himself that he had not survived - he either has survived or the question does not arise, and if he can ask himself the question then he must indeed have survived, he is certainly existing. The issue is really 'from what?'

⁷ There are further complications that are possible. For example A may be able to remember but his identity may *in fact* have changed from previously. If there are inconsistencies between his memory and his current situation (for instance he looks different to what his memory tells him he should look) then he would no doubt conclude that something strange was going on. Some of these complications will be considered later in this paper.

⁸ 1980.

the Prince and the Cobbler and many other such puzzle stories show,⁹ from a first person point of view, the individual would recognise that their identity had been preserved despite suddenly finding themselves in a new body. They will generally believe that they are the same person despite the change of outward appearance, even though it might take some getting used to.¹⁰ Third parties will of course need more persuasion.¹¹ If the changes are severe enough one can imagine doubt creeping in and this may be reinforced by what others say. This is reminiscent of the struggle to persuade others of who you are when every element of external proof is absent.

3.2 The retrospective view and the anticipatory view

Related to the issue of first and third person views of survival outlined above and the issue of personal survival is an individual's anticipatory (forward looking) view from the ante-mortem state to the post-mortem state of his/her own survival and an individual's retrospective (backward looking) view from the post-mortem state to the ante-mortem state of his/her own survival, as illustrated in figure 2 below.

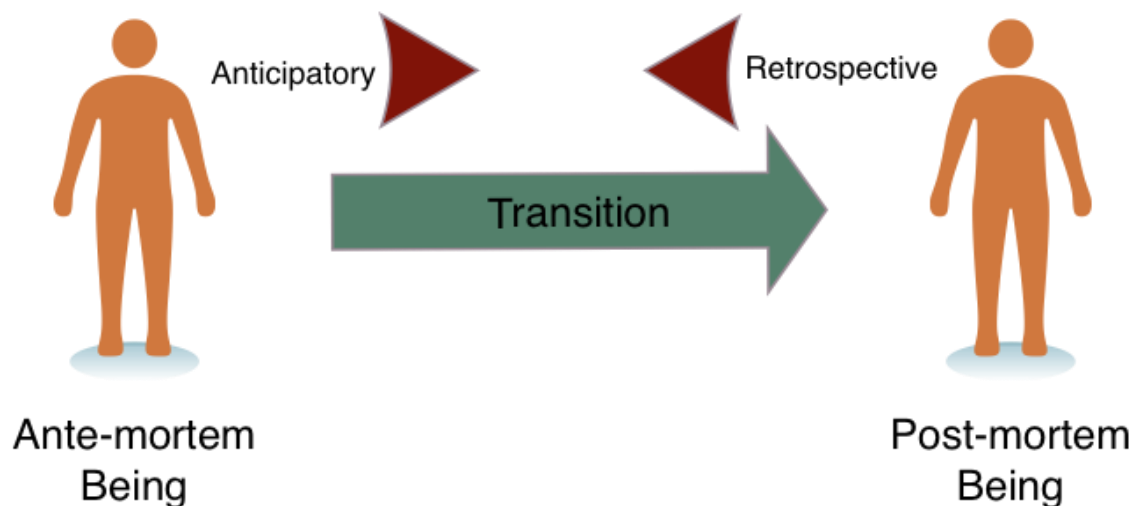


Figure 2: The Retrospective View and the Anticipatory View

⁹ Discussed more fully in Section 7 below.

¹⁰ As shown in Franz Kafka's story *Metamorphosis* (1961).

¹¹ As Gregor Samsa found out from the reaction of his family!

When looking forward an individual can confidently say that it is his/her own personal survival that is of interest and ideally it should be a form of survival that does not involve any discontinuity in existence, a genuine survival of death,¹² whereas when looking back it might not matter how they got to where they are as long as they feel that they have successfully survived and can remember back to their previous state. In other words the survival criteria that someone might wish to impose when in the ante-mortem state looking forward might be eased somewhat once they are in the post-mortem state looking back. Of course once someone is in the post-mortem state the transitional events have happened and the circumstances cannot be changed but it is just that an individual might be, for example, not unhappy that discontinuity has occurred, or that they are in fact a replica, once they see (or feel) that they have in fact survived after all. Even if there is absolutely no memory or knowledge of the ante-mortem state they would be happy to at least exist¹³ - once in that situation one would not know what one had missed or indeed that one had missed anything. Such a situation would not however fulfil the criteria for *personal* survival that is the focus in this paper.

¹² i.e. excluding any possibility of replicas etc.

¹³ On the assumption for present purposes that it can be accepted that life is a good worth having. Of course this might depend on the circumstances the individual finds him or herself in in the post-mortem world!

4. Overview of the Survival Alternatives

As well as perspectives on survival there are also various types of survival to be studied, all of which involve some form of transformation or transition from a being's **ante-mortem** state (the normal living state, or state X) to a being's **post-mortem** state (state Y), where this latter state would normally be called surviving or continuing to exist in some manner. Further reflection is included of whether survival from the point of view of the entity being transformed is or need be defined in the same way as survival from the point of view of a third party observer, given the potential differences between the two as highlighted in 3.1 above. Logically, this transformation could take one of a number of different forms, and each one of the major such forms is discussed below.

Once a being dies, if there is to be some form of survival then a) something of the deceased being has to survive in some form that is usable for the post-mortem state; b) some process has to be gone through to reach the survived state; and c) the entity that has survived must have some form of existence in the survived state. These elements are illustrated in figure 3 below:

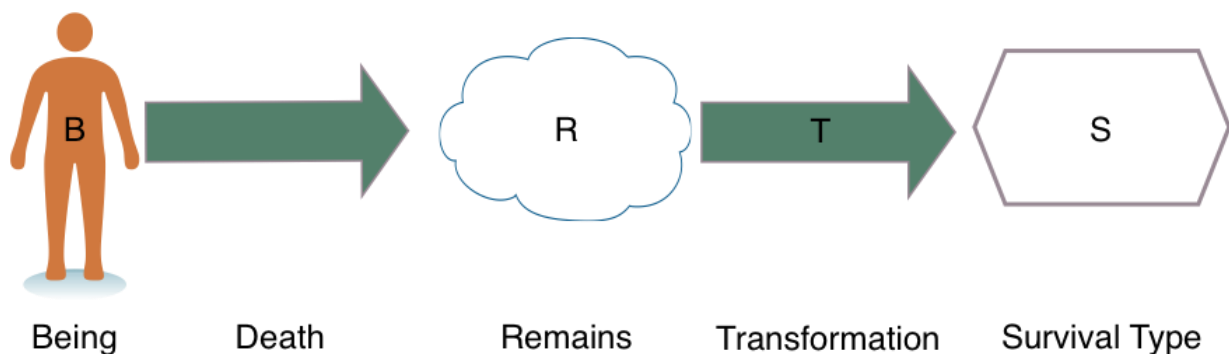


Figure 3: Generic form of the survival process

For R, T and S consideration is given to:

- a. what R might consist of, i.e. what constituents of the ante-mortem state might be required to carry over to the post-mortem state,
- b. what the transformation process might involve and,
- c. What state the post-mortem being is in and what happens once the being is in that state.

Perhaps unsurprisingly it is seen that there are a number of different possibilities for each of the components of the process. These possibilities vary in their plausibility and the treatment given to them in this paper varies accordingly. Some do not enjoy extensive treatment and others do not get a mention at all. But the intention is that the major possibilities of each of the above three elements are considered. This enables the intelligibility of these possibilities to be analysed in some detail to see if any aspect of any of them can stand up to scrutiny.

It could be said that the very use of the word 'transformation' to describe the process of survival undermines one's desire for *personal* survival, because of its association with a change of form from the prior state to the resulting state. However, even in life a person can be and often is transformed (e.g. physically, attitudinally, personally) while still remaining the same person, so if transformation is taken to mean no more than some process of change from state X to state Y then some of the sub-text normally associated with the word can be avoided. Also, it just seems reasonable to suppose that some form of transformation is involved in the progression from an ante-mortem state to a post-mortem state. After all, the being has died and that event alone is sufficient to initiate a transformation process whatever else may happen. Whatever else is said it is not the case that any of the survival hypotheses

that can be conceived involve the need or the claim that *no* change has taken place at all.¹⁴ And given that some sort of change does take place it can perhaps also be agreed that the physical body, the body that was a part of the being in the ante-mortem state, loses its life sustaining properties and decays from the point of death and for the most part plays no useful role in the transformation process itself.¹⁵ The one part of the physical body that does play a role, in at least some of the types of transformation that are considered, is the brain, but of course primarily from the point of view of its mental capacities rather than its physical characteristics.¹⁶ It may also be the case that the transformation method that is used to progress or change from state X to state Y might well be independent of what state Y ultimately consists in and indeed the whole process may involve multiple transformations.

Let us start by introducing in outline the different possibilities that are to be considered under each of the elements:

- R (**remains** of the being B),
- T (**transformation** of R to S),
- S (what finally **survives**).

This task is helped if the main forms of resulting survival are considered first and then how they might be achieved, i.e. initially each of the main possible results S are looked at in terms of how such a result could be achieved and to what extent it is intelligible or likely. As previously mentioned not all possible forms of S are covered in what follows. Instead the discussion focuses on the most common forms present in the literature on the subject and even with those the coverage is quite selective.¹⁷ It is also important to remember that the

¹⁴ Even if the mind continues to exist unchanged after death, the body undoubtedly does not and so even with this survival type it must be accepted that a change takes place.

¹⁵ With the possible exception of resurrection - see below.

¹⁶ If this is seen as controversial then please reserve judgment until the detailed discussion below.

¹⁷ It must also be said that this could of course be completely wrong in that survival if it does occur could be in a form quite unlike anything that can currently be conceived. However, it is not straightforward how an argument could be developed for something that cannot be conceived. It must therefore remain an open question until such time as a glimpse of it is caught.

main aim is to focus on *personal* survival, in that enough of the ante-mortem being B is present in R (and indeed and more importantly in S) so that there is recognition of what has survived ideally both from a first and third person point of view, recognising that there may be varying extents to which this can be achieved.

4.1 Survival Types

Given the above, the main forms of survival types to be considered are:

Disembodied Being - survival as some form of disembodied being, i.e. there is what would be recognised from a human perspective as a personality but without any supporting body or physical substance. Such a resulting position requires S to include some 'essence' of the ante-mortem being to be carried over to the post-mortem state, enough of an essence for there to be some grounds for the claim that the being had survived. What this essence might consist of is one of the things that is covered in some detail below. However, focusing on the most common ideas, the following are included:

- S1- the non-physical self (essentially the mind and the contents of the mind), e.g. as epitomised in a Cartesian view of a person as conceptually capable of surviving the death of the body virtually intact and,
- S2 - some form of ephemeral 'spirit' survival whereby a 'spirit form' of a person or other being is what survives. It will need to be discussed whether such a form is in fact disembodied and what implications this might have (such as immateriality) or whether such a notion is contradictory and it should really be considered as a form of embodied or quasi-embodied survival.

If survival is to mean anything, both of the above must incorporate some form of awareness by the surviving being. Typically this is awareness of and within the survival 'world' whatever and wherever that is. It may amount to awareness only of that world and of other survivors within it, or it may perhaps also include awareness of the ante-mortem world. Each of these is considered in what follows.

Embodied Being - survival as some form of embodied being, i.e. perhaps, but not necessarily, very much as that being appeared in ante-mortem life. Thus the embodiment might change the qualities and/or appearance of the being or it might not, although the certainty that some change is involved must be acknowledged given that to reach an embodied state, which is really a *re*-embodied state, some form of transformation T is involved. The types of embodied survival that are discussed include:

- S3 - embodied survival in a new body that is identical or similar to the ante-mortem body, perhaps in some other world, as in the classic 'heaven' interpretation of survival
- S4 - reincarnation - survival through being re-embodied in this world, i.e. elements of the ante-mortem being, after the death of its body, occupy a new body, and this takes place in the normal everyday world. Although this occupation of a new body could occur instantaneously, there is also the possibility of a gap in time.¹⁸ If there is a gap in time then consideration needs to be given to what happens in the intervening period when it looks as if the self must inevitably be in some state that is either disembodied or at least 'information-preserving' (i.e. this survival type may well require **both** transitions from an ante-mortem state to a disembodied or 'information-preserving' state and from there to a re-embodied state).¹⁹ There is also the possibility that this

¹⁸ As occurs for instance in some of the examples given by Ian Stevenson-see Bennett 2006 page 93.

¹⁹ By 'information preserving' here is meant that the elements of the ante-mortem being that are to survive continue to exist *in some form, whether material or immaterial*, such that the reincarnation can occur at a later time.

reincarnation sometimes or always occurs in a world other than our own. Reincarnation by definition implies that a self occupies more than one body consecutively but there is not necessarily a restriction on the number of times reincarnation can occur and so multiple iterations of the transformation are possible, each one triggered by the death of the body of the previously incarnated being.

- S5 - resurrection, primarily as understood in its Christian form. This alternative can be viewed in many ways as similar to S3 above but with a, potentially long, gap between death and re-embodiment²⁰ and where the dead body is resurrected as a complete reconstituted person at some point after death. Note that this is generally thought to occur once only, at the end of time, although logically there is no reason why it cannot occur multiple times. As with reincarnation, if there is a gap between bodily death and re-embodiment then it must be assumed that there is a period of disembodiment or ‘information-preservation’ in between.²¹

These five survival types are discussed further in sections 9-11 below.

4.2 Remains Types

Having listed the ultimate surviving states, consideration now needs to be given to what has to be preserved after the death of the ante-mortem being in order for these states to be achievable. The possibilities break down into three cases:

²⁰ Known as the intermediate state or ‘soul sleep’.

²¹ Although one view of this is that this period constitutes a period when the being *ceases to exist* and then presumably comes back into existence again in order to be resurrected - see Penelhum 1980 pages 94-7, although in order to come back into existence one would assume that there is something that needs to remain in existence in order to define what to bring back. In the present context this would be the ‘information-preserving’ element referred to above. And although it can perhaps be accepted that an omnipotent God can solve all of these difficulties, it should be remembered that the arguments in this paper focus on logical possibilities that as far as possible operate within known physical laws.

- R1. Remains for embodied survival: sufficient information about the ante-mortem being and/or whatever else is necessary to enable *embodied* survival,²² since hopefully it can be accepted that the physical matter that constitutes the body begins to break down immediately on death and remains behind. Thus there would need to be a form of *copying* and/or *preservation* process whereby the information required is obtained from the physical body and held in some intermediate form until required. The alternative to that would be that the actual physical body is resurrected and it is seen below that there are some difficulties with that approach.²³
- R2. Remains for disembodied survival: sufficient information about the ante-mortem being and/or whatever else is necessary is preserved to enable *disembodied* survival.²⁴ This could of course be a direct subset of the information required for R1 above, but note that it is at least logically possible that to include S2 from above, i.e. some form of spirit body, that the whole of R1 above is involved, since the information required to create a spirit body would include at least a subset of the remains of the whole being (it may perhaps be granted for example that a spirit body does not require to eat and so does not need the organs necessary for such an activity). Again this involves a form of copying and/or preservation process to extract the information and hold it in a suitable form.
- R3. Spirit remains - it must be at least a logical possibility that a spirit body accompanies the ante-mortem self (or *is* the ante-mortem self?) at all times during life and simply detaches itself from the Earth body on death. One difficulty with this is that there seems to be no empirical evidence for such a body unless one is prepared to

²² The use of 'whatever else is necessary' here may seem like an evasion but since what is needed to achieve the sort of survival being discussed here is not known there does not seem to be an alternative.

²³ Barring such things as miracles, which in general are excluded from consideration since to include them would make almost anything possible and the discussion has a stated intention of staying within the standard physical model.

²⁴ See footnote to R1 above.

attribute psychic happenings to it²⁵ and perhaps rather more evidence would be required before this step could be justified, although the possibility should not be ruled out. The definition of ‘spirit body’ is difficult but there are differences between it and cases R1 and R2 above. Firstly, potentially no copying or preservation is required at death to provide what is needed by the transformation process since copying could be said to be occurring at all times during life with the spirit body continuously mirroring the physical earthly body in the relevant ways. Secondly, while a spirit body incorporates the necessary parts of R2 it may in addition encapsulate aspects of the ante-mortem body that purely immaterial remains would not.²⁶

The five survival types that have been listed have required three different sets of remains to be available with some of those remains being subsets of the others. The transformation processes required to get from the remains to the survival types are of course different in each case and is considered further below.

4.3 The transition process

For successful survival to occur, some form of transformation or transition of the remains of the ante-mortem being has to take place that results in the surviving post-mortem being. Clearly the transition will be different depending on the resulting state and also on where the post-mortem being is located. As well as the nature of the transformation itself there are also questions relating to exactly *where* the post-mortem world is located and *how* beings may get from our present world to this new world. These questions are addressed in Section 6.

As far as the nature of the transformation process itself is concerned, this is difficult to discuss in isolation from the various survival types. In essence the argument is that the

²⁵ Such as out of body experiences, for example.

²⁶ For example, it would perhaps include information that would enable it to materialise in a recognisable way under certain circumstances.

transformation is a practicality since it is *whatever it needs to be* in order for that survival type to be achieved. To this extent it is implicit in all the discussion to follow. Of course it might prove to be impossible because a resulting survival type is inherently contradictory or unable to satisfy all of the conditions imposed upon it. Again this will be apparent from the general discussion. With that said the various remains types and survival types can now be covered in more detail.

5. What Remains Are Needed?

If there is to be any survival at all from the ante-mortem state then something must continue to exist from that state to form the basis of what survives. It has been seen above that there are three types of remains, R1, R2 and R3 and these need to be considered in more detail to see how they might be constituted. And these remains need to be looked at both in terms of their form and in terms of their content as each could vary depending on the transformation they undergo and the final survival type that results. It should also be noted that there is overlap between the different types. The immaterial remains (R2) are also required as a part of the whole being remains (R1) for example. R1 is discussed in 5.1 below, R2 in 5.2 below and R3 is covered in Section 11 below.

5.1 R1: Remains for embodied survival

These are the remains that are necessary where embodied survival of the being is the outcome under consideration. It will help later if the remains of the physical body are considered separately from the remains of the mind. Now it can be agreed that the physical body does not move from the place where death occurs (unless it is moved by other beings or circumstances - it does not move of its own accord) and it then begins to disintegrate. This would suggest that what survives cannot be the same components of the body that it had in its ante-mortem state. Rather it must be that sufficient *information* about the body survives. In saying this the possibility is being discounted that in order, for example, to resurrect a being, an omnipotent God gathers together all the original atoms of a body at the point of death and reforms them into that resurrected being. There would be at least two problems with this approach. Firstly, unless this happens immediately on death (and certainly the continued existence of mummified remains on Earth provides some evidence that this does not happen), some of these atoms may find their way into other living things, themselves subject to

resurrection, and thus lead to an unresolvable situation. Secondly, assuming the first problem could be overcome, this would mean that the resurrected being would be exactly as it was at the point of death, i.e. incapable of life. It follows that at least some degree of change to the earthly body must be allowed and must actually occur if any form of embodied survival is to be possible. This could take the form of a *mapping* of all of the elements necessary to reconstruct the body; a set of data that carries all the necessary information of the original body and of the body as it is to be resurrected, as well as how to get from one to the other.²⁷ This might seem incredibly complicated and unobtainable in practice but there is a parallel provided by the way that the living cell nucleus incorporates the information necessary to construct an organism, including the type of beings that are being considered here, via the DNA and RNA molecules.²⁸ It is conceivable that similar molecules could provide the information necessary to *reconstruct* an organism, at least of the physical body. Of course the molecules themselves, containing this information, would have to be *constructed or modified* using the information from the dead or dying being. And this might have to be an instantaneous or reasonably quick process, unlike the evolutionary nature of the DNA and RNA molecules themselves, but at least it can be seen how it might work.

One could speculate whether this mapping would hold the information about the organism at its prime, or at the prime point for each component (on the basis that different parts of the body may reach their prime at different times), rather than specifically at the point of death. Note that such information would be many orders of magnitude more complex than the DNA and RNA molecules themselves which are almost the same in each cell of a given living organism, and which are not present in all cells (although at the same time there is also a considerable amount of redundancy or 'junk' DNA so the molecule could be

²⁷ Although this could possibly follow a standardised process. Even so the process has to be both known and implemented.

²⁸ Together, of course, with the procedure to interpret this information to carry out the organism's construction.

trimmed down). The requirement would be for molecules that are potentially different for each cell, particularly for cells in the brain.²⁹ It should be noted that it is a *physical* substance (a molecule, or series of molecules) that is holding this information, and this may cause some difficulties (but on the other hand, these difficulties may be no more than if the information was held in some non-physical form!). This situation might also lead us to wonder if such a process can count as personal survival, but more will be said on this later. It is also worth noting that if a single molecule is capable of carrying the complete DNA mapping of a human body, then there should be no problem in principle with the super-DNA system discussed here (although the enormous practical difficulties are acknowledged).

A possible way in which the body could survive has been identified. But the information required for this as so far discussed would define the form of the *physical* body, including the brain in its basic form, but not the content, not many of the aspects that would define the *person* with that body. Clearly an extension to the set of information is required. It is certainly the contents of the brain that are required here, what can hopefully be agreed usually manifests itself as the mind. Whether this is sufficient on its own may depend on a particular approach to the mind/body problem. A dualist may feel that brain content and structure is not enough; that there is more to the mind than the contents of its associated brain. Whilst mind and brain are certainly not identical,³⁰ it must remain an open question beyond the scope of this paper to answer as to whether more is needed beyond brain content and structure.³¹ Note that on a dualistic view the mind is usually assumed capable of

²⁹ This requirement may lead to a difficulty. Mapping of brain cells may need a different approach to other cells (as per the immaterial remains in R2 below) because memories etc. are changing all the time but the brain is also deteriorating and final memories are ideally required along with other memories long forgotten and with the brain's capability and organisation as it was at its prime.

³⁰ In that there is a real distinction to be made between a particular mental activity such as understanding a sentence and the corresponding firing of neurons. even if they both have the same cause.

³¹ Even qualia such as 'what it is like to see red' for example, may well be inherent in a particular brain structure with its interrelationships and content and so even though qualia are not the same thing as neurons and synapses firing in a certain way, the qualia experience may still be the result of those particular configurations. See also the music/sound wave and rainbow/water droplet analogies in 5.2 below. But detailed consideration of this area is unfortunately outside the scope of this paper.

surviving the death of its associated body with no change or transformation being necessary. But again it must be remembered that the mind as it is at death may be no more than a befuddled mess, incapable of functioning properly, so if survival is to be anything other than a continuation of that state then some degree of change has to be accepted. No doubt these problems for the mind are caused by deterioration of parts of the brain but this just underlines the problem of trying to separate them into two things capable of separate existence - if the mind is befuddled because of its inter-relationship with the brain then its normal functioning is likely to be as it is because of the same inter-relationship. McTaggart³² argues that there is no such dependency implied. He provides the example of a toothache that affects the functioning of the mind and it would not be said that there was such a dependence in that case. But a toothache affects the mind because the mind can only think about *the toothache* rather than what it intended to think about. The mind is in fact still working normally. Brain deterioration on the other hand does prevent the mind from working normally. It is not the case that you are prevented from thinking properly because you cannot help but think about the brain deterioration. It can be accepted along with Bergson,³³ that memories are present somewhere even if not accessible but it cannot necessarily be accepted that freed from the limitations of the brain the mind suddenly has access to those memories and can carry them with it. Something more is needed: the necessary pathways to those memories need to be cleared through some form of re-mapping.

It is clear that in the ante-mortem existence the brain is in some way involved in the recall of memories. This is evident both when conscious selves cannot access memories because of a problem in the brain (such as disease or damage) and when neural activity is recorded when recall is occurring normally. Similar neural activity also occurs when in the act of thinking. In

³² 1930 pages 105-7.

³³ Quoted by Price 1940 page 375: "Compare Bergson's discussion of memory. According to him, it is forgetting, rather than remembering, which needs a causal explanation and the problem is 'Why is so little remembered?' rather than 'Why is there any remembering at all?'".

fact it is hard to separate thinking from recall since almost (if not) everything that is thought also involves recall of one sort or another. So it is not clear³⁴ that if you remove the brain from the picture (as would occur on death) that the mind can suddenly work normally again, or that conscious selves can continue. For, if the mind does not need the brain after death, why would it need the brain before death? Even if it is the case that the brain supports the mind and provides it with some, perhaps a significant amount, of its capability, this clearly leads to the suggestion that on its own the mind has significantly less capability. This does not sound like what dualists have in mind. Of course there is sense in the mind being integrated with a body in terms of life here on Earth. Having a body enables the mind to move around, communicate effectively, learn more easily etc. The aim in analysing what remains are required is to decide what is necessary in order to replicate a person and to enable the replicated person to think and behave exactly as the original person does. So the features of the original person that determine those mental activities and dispositional tendencies have to be identified. It must be accepted that a large part of it is determined by the brain, its content, how it is organised etc. But is there any part that is NOT so determined? Is there any truly non-physical feature that would have to be captured? To avoid being dragged too far into such a debate, it must be postulated that the super-DNA approach must capture all of the brain's structure and content, along the same lines as it did for the rest of the body above, and must also capture or encode all of the non-physical elements as well, if there are any. The only way that this could be avoided would be if the non-physical elements could be obtained as they are, i.e. they just come along as part of the encoding process, effectively as epiphenomena.

It should be noted that if the suggestion of this section is accepted, and a body, indeed a person, can be replicated via some form of super-DNA molecule, the molecule would still

³⁴ Despite McTaggart Op. cit. Page 106 who is of the view that 'It might be that the present inability of the self to think except in connexion with the body was a limitation which was imposed by the presence of the body, and which vanished with it'.

need to be placed in some form of nurturing receptacle or medium to allow it to develop into that body. And the result would need to be alive in the same way that a person is; it would need perhaps an initial 'push' in order to start the process off. If the conditions in the post-mortem world are very different from those in the ante-mortem world (for instance do beings eat and breathe as they do on Earth? Do they reproduce?), the development of the replicated being would need to be adapted accordingly. How would this be achieved? And would this development take time as it does on Earth? Would it grow immediately into a full adult? How long would that growth process take? These are just a few of the formidable questions that arise. On the face of it the obstacles look daunting, to say the least, but then to construct a human being or indeed any living thing here on Earth would be no less daunting and yet it happens all the time. The method is known to work, it is just not understood fully how it works, nor how it would be possible to replicate it by other means. It can also be expected that the aim would be for the post-mortem being to resemble the ante-mortem being as closely as possible and so the precise form of the ante-mortem body and mind needs to be captured as far as it is relevant.

5.2 R2: Remains for disembodied survival

Consideration now needs to be given to the remains that are necessary where disembodied survival of the being is the outcome. When considering this type of survival it would appear to be much simpler than R1 as discussed in 5.1 above, in effect a subset of that information. Indeed it would appear that all that is needed is the information relating to the mind. But this would of course need to be ALL of the elements of the mind that make up the being to enable it to be said that that being had survived: all its memories, character, personality etc. The extent to which this information is tied up with the brain needs to be considered as well as how it is organised, but essentially it is *content* that is needed along

with the *form*, by which is meant the character, personality, attitudes etc. of the ante-mortem being: their tendency to behave in a particular way, essentially as described by Parfit.³⁵ The entirety of what has to be captured can be broken down as follows:

- **Set of memories** - this may be the complete set of all memories of the ante-mortem person, or it may be a subset, the set of those memories that are important enough to carry on (on the basis that some memories may not be that relevant). This does of course raise the difficulty of identifying what is sufficiently important. It may for instance be the set of those memories that have a certain strength of pathway to them within the brain, but this has to allow for damaged pathways to memories that are nonetheless important. Some things that are forgotten are very important, whereas others are not at all important. If it is the case as suggested by Bergson that everything is remembered but a substantial amount of it is inhibited from recall through some mechanism (on the basis that total recall would be found overwhelming) then it must be allowed perhaps that a given memory has some sort of recall rating provided by the aforesaid mechanism, based on its status as inhibited or not, perhaps on a sliding scale. This would overcome any problem of damage to the brain pathways causing something important to be completely forgotten, but would of course still leave the difficult problem of how this inhibiting mechanism works and whether it is accurate, i.e. does it always inhibit what is not important and not inhibit what is important?
- **Character & personality** - if the post-mortem being is to be recognisable to itself and potentially to others then all or most aspects of its character, personality, where this is defined as emotional responses, social interaction responses, knowledge, dispositional tendencies and abilities, judgments, attitudes, moral precepts etc., is required, at least initially. In fact given a situation in ante-mortem existence and a

³⁵ 1987 p205.

similar situation in post-mortem existence, it would be expected that the being would respond in the same way in the two situations as far as that is possible allowing for the differing circumstances of these existences, and assuming that nothing had happened in the interim to change relevant aspects of the personality etc. So sufficient has to pass over for that to be the case. While it is recognised that character and personality may well continue to develop and change in a post-mortem existence it seems reasonable that at least in the beginning these attributes retain or be close to their ante-mortem values.

- **Physical description** - even though immaterial remains are being focused on here, some form of *description* of the physical appearance of the body might be necessary (it might for example be used as a criterion for recognition in a disembodied world).³⁶ Memories together with character and personality could perhaps be relied on but this might be considered too subjective a view, so an objective description might also be needed that is independent of subjective feelings. Of course it might be easier from a practical point of view if a full mapping took place which preserved everything but of which only certain things were used. Being selective at the point of creation always runs the risk of missing out something vital. In this latter case R2 and R1 would appear to be the same, but the physical description that might be provided as a part of R2 would not need to be anywhere near as comprehensive as the super-DNA molecule of R1 above.

There is another problem with the idea of the complete set of memory, character and abilities etc., being mapped from a person into some other form. That is that the brain is continually adapting to its environment, situation and memories; basically it has the property of *plasticity*. Certain areas of the brain are larger in some people than in others because they

³⁶ For instance if there was, in the ante-mortem world, person A who only knew person B by sight, person A might have little chance of discovering person B in a disembodied post-mortem world without such a physical description being available.

carry more information.³⁷ As well as size changes, there is also the phenomenon of synaptic connections being strengthened whilst others are weakened and perhaps broken altogether, even though the base memory or information might still be there.³⁸ These connections might provide a stronger or weaker path to emotions or familiar faces or objects, for example, so that certain situations cause strong reactions and others weak ones. In other words as well as information storage there are dynamic physical pathways in the brain that determine much of what makes up the self's current memory patterns, personality etc., and form an important part of what it would be said makes up those aspects of a person. Thus any mapping would need to incorporate and encapsulate this physical element. Just extracting the memory and basic character data would not be enough. Thus in an undoubtedly rather complex way the items of information that require to be mapped for a transfer to be complete can be said to have certain properties that they carry with them (such as degree of importance) as well as perhaps complex interrelationships of different types between them. As an example of this phenomenon a memory that is particularly unpleasant might have been suppressed by the person concerned, perhaps by avoiding any recollection, thus leading the brain connections to it to degenerate. In any form of transfer this memory, which is still present in the brain, would be transferred, but it may carry with it a 'suppress' tag, in effect, to ensure its relationship to the self being transferred remains the same.

Regardless of what is necessary to pass on, it is also relevant to ask which *version* passes on. The personality as it is at the time of death might not be the preferred one - an earlier one might be more adventurous, less conservative etc., but at the same time elements of the mature self might be valued, especially the knowledge and experience that accumulates with age. This would of course require some sort of mechanism to select personality attributes and

³⁷ Although not the overall brain size - for example the posterior hippocampus of a London taxi driver is enlarged because of the spatial data that is retained and the anterior hippocampus is correspondingly reduced - see Maguire et al 2000.

³⁸ See for example Penrose 1995 page 365.

this immediately gives rise to the problem of deciding which attributes to select and which to not. Who or what is it that does the deciding?

Furthermore, it needs to be considered whether the remains need be non-physical or could be physical. Clearly the suggested use of a super-DNA molecule implies physical remains but it may be that there is a non-physical or derivative equivalent available, for instance if the information contained within the molecule could be extracted and transmitted where it needs to go. Broad³⁹ suggests that what needs to survive need not be unextended. Some form of energy field as suggested by him would possibly fit the bill of something that could at least last for a time after the death of the body.⁴⁰ It would clearly be important that that field, which may weaken progressively after death, is quickly picked up by something or other that takes it on to the next stage. Of course it may not suffer from that diminution of power, it is just not known.

There is a further point that is relevant to this discussion. The brain is an extremely complex organ of the body which amongst other things stores one's memories, abilities etc., at least while that brain is a part of a living body. If *another version* of this set of information is allowed for which is perhaps non-material and which can **survive the death of the body**, that death which can of course occur at any time, requiring this other version to be always current, and that presumably interacts with the body during life (as per the dualist account) - then why is the brain required at all? Or at least why are the higher level functions of the brain required at all? It can be seen that the brain might be needed during life for various functions such as body control, sensation etc., but many of the activities of the brain are not concerned with bodily functions at all. If it really existed as a separate entity, could not this other entity provide these functions on its own? There is a related point to this one. Could not the mind simply continue to exist when the body dies? In such a case there is no mapping

³⁹ 1962 pages 416-7.

⁴⁰ Ibid page 417.

required, no transformation at all, the mind simply survives the death of the body. However, in such a case it must be asked if the mind could exist on its own and continue to function fully without the facilities of the brain being available? This brings us back to the mind/body problem of course, but the relationship between mind and body is key. To resort to analogy, the mind could be to the body as music is to sound waves, or as a rainbow to water droplets, in each case the former being a manifestation of the latter. There is a causal dependence between them but there is also something else (a subject) perceiving the results of the particular configuration of the sound waves or the effect of the sun shining through the water droplets. In the case of the mind it would appear that the mind is both manifestation and subject. This analogy may be rejected since it also implies that if the cause was not present then the manifestation would not be present; but if this analogy holds then the mind clearly cannot continue to exist without its cause, the living brain, and some other means, some transformation, would have to be found to ensure that the mind, or at least its contents, could survive.

6. The Transition from the Ante-Mortem State to the Post-Mortem State

There is clearly some form of transformation involved in the progression from the ante-mortem state to the post-mortem state. In none of the alternatives that are being considered is no change required. Examination is also necessary of what needs to survive for successful personal survival, which will help to indicate what content the process needs to act on and preserve. But what form would the transformation process take and where would it occur? The difficulties that are faced when discussing these issues are not of course to be underestimated. Many writers on the subject jump from consideration of this world to the next without mentioning how to get from one to the other and certainly in this paper only limited space can be given over to it, but it is a thorny problem that has to have a solution if the concept of a post-mortem world is to have any sense at all.

6.1 Where is the post-mortem world located?

It would also appear that at least a part of the post-mortem existence takes place in some realm other than the ante-mortem everyday four-dimensional world. Only the reincarnation survival type includes a clear period where post-mortem existence is carried out on Earth but even this type may include a period after death and before reincarnation occurs where the remains appear to be in a place that is not currently understood.⁴¹ Whilst it is possible that post-mortem existence occurs wholly here on Earth, completely amongst us, but wholly or largely undetectable, it is clearly a quite different state to the normal living state with quite different requirements and the location question has at least to be kept open. If it does take place 'somewhere else' then some effort should be made to identify where that is or at least what it might consist of.

⁴¹ See 10.1 below - Although it may be that it is the mechanism rather than the location that is not understood.

Disembodied survival: even if it is allowed that disembodied survival is a completely immaterial survival as far as the individual surviving entity is concerned, consideration of what existence might be like in such a state leads to the conclusion that it would need some kind of supporting structure, perhaps as a means of presenting images or as a medium for communication, for example. Although such a structure might be completely beyond current understanding, it would appear that it would need to have some physical characteristics in order to provide this support. For instance even what is familiar to us as telepathy appears to require some form of physical environment and energy source in which to operate.⁴² If there is a requirement for a physical structure, then it might be hard to say where this structure would be located, although the possibility cannot be completely ruled out that there could be universes or worlds distinct from our own (parallel worlds, for instance), and that one, or some, of them are responsible for hosting the post-mortem existence world or worlds. The difficulty is that no evidence for such parallel worlds can be provided and so it must remain speculative and thus be open to rejection.⁴³

Embodied survival in another realm: if a physical post-mortem world has been constructed successfully as above then such a world could most likely also accommodate embodied survival, although the requirements for hosting disembodied entities would be very different to those for hosting embodied ones, even quasi-embodied entities such as spirit bodies.

Of course it must be asked if the entities that inhabit these post-mortem worlds are:

1) mortal in the sense that they have a life-span and therefore their life there comes to an end at some point, or

2) immortal, in the sense that once in the post-mortem world they stay there for ever.

⁴² Does it? - Certainly telepathy as it is currently understood functions between two brains/minds - is it even possible that it could operate between two discarnate minds?

⁴³ The Many Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Theory provides one such theory for which evidence *is* claimed, although not of course in relation to post-mortem existence. See for instance Everett 1957 and Deutsch 2002.

If (1) then it must be asked what happens when they die in the post-mortem world. Do they for instance undergo further transitions to yet other post-mortem worlds? If they do then are the subsequent worlds the same or similar to the first one and will they reach a stage at which they complete their journey? If they do not undergo further transitions then it must be asked what has been gained by the construction of the one post-mortem world? If (2) applies and they are immortal then do they develop as persons beyond their final ante-mortem state? Do they continue to develop? Immortality has its own problems that there is not the space to discuss at length here.⁴⁴ Suffice it to say that a life that has one period on Earth followed by immortality seems strange given the extremely variable and often limited opportunities available to beings on Earth with the chance of death occurring at any time, and many prevented from reaching their potential. Many humans and animals die in infancy and consequently before they are able to develop fully. Would it make sense to send them straight to an immortal world, if indeed the present world is any sort of proving ground or ‘first stop’?

Price suggests that “when we speak of ‘passing’ from this world to the next, this passage is not to be thought of as any sort of movement in space”.⁴⁵ It is rather a ‘change of consciousness’⁴⁶ that is analogous to the change that occurs when going from a waking state to a dreaming state. Price is basing his next world on a conception of it as a world of mental images and because of that the question of where it is just does not arise for him.⁴⁷ However he does also say that this world, which he describes as an image-world (and the general idea of which is discussed below) would have a space of its own. Even though we ‘could not find it anywhere in the space of [our] physical world...this would not...prevent it from being a spatial world all the same’.⁴⁸ But that seems very untidy. There may not be a passage from one spatial location to another in this world, but if there is another world, generally

⁴⁴ But see for instance Sorensen 2006 and Williams 1976 (1).

⁴⁵ Price 1965 page 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid page 12.

⁴⁷ Ibid page 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid page 12.

undetectable to us, then this is surely sufficient for current purposes and there is no need to say that the question of where it is does not arise. Even dream images have a location - in the brain - even if it is difficult to pin down precisely where they are. So, even if it seems not to be possible to answer the question it is certainly not illegitimate to ask it. The difficulty of attempting to answer these questions is of course clear especially when answers are sought within the standard ante-mortem framework.

6.2 Passage to the post-mortem world

Because it would appear that if there is a post-mortem existence then it takes place in some realm other than the ante-mortem everyday four-dimensional world, then some form of passage or route from one to the other and a process for the transmission of content is needed (whatever form that content may take) to transfer what is necessary from the ante-mortem world to the post-mortem world. What form would this passage and process take? Mention has previously been made of the sheer quantity of information required and also of the amount of information that can be carried within a single living cell, so it is possible that the information required could be encapsulated into the smallest possible form and then digitised or quantised in some way in order to facilitate its transfer to a distant or other-dimensional location by means of a form of teleportation. One question that arises: is this transfer a normal spatio-temporal *movement* from one point to another while obeying standard physical laws,⁴⁹ or is it some form of *action at a distance* whereby the transfer occurs instantaneously or near-instantaneously and does not obey physical laws as they are currently understood? Considering physical matter transfer for the moment, there would appear to be a need for an external force to be involved in the transfer, something external to the matter being transferred, in order to provide the medium within which the transfer can operate and the

⁴⁹ Even if potentially extremely rapid movement, e.g. close to the speed of light.

means by which it can occur. Of course since there is no knowledge of what such a process is or how it might work, this must be speculation but it can be seen that it is the type of force that would be needed in order to cause physical transfer of the required material.

The above situation does of course involve the movement of physical material and it might be thought that this would only be necessary if the end result were some form of embodied survival. Furthermore, the actual physical material is contingent to the process and is therefore not critical to the survival process itself. So another option is for the *information* encapsulated in the physical material, including a description of the physical body, to be transmitted to the post-mortem world in some way, some form of information-transfer, which could then be interpreted at the destination and mapped into whatever receptacle was waiting for it, or held somewhere until a suitable receptacle was available. Some form of elaborate mechanism would still be required to send and receive the information but the mechanism is in principle more understandable to us, being more like wireless telephonic communication than teleportation.

It is also assumed here that the transfer takes place in one go at the end of life, but it could of course be a continuous process occurring during life (perhaps during sleep). The maintenance of a spirit body could operate along similar lines to this continuous process. This maintenance means that such a body would be ready at any time to vacate the ante-mortem body should the need arise. Whenever that occurred, it would already carry within it the necessary information for its post-mortem state. All that is then necessary is for the spirit body to make the transition to the post-mortem existence and this would need mechanisms such as have been described above.

Of course it has to be said that none of these mechanisms have been detected by scientific instruments, or at least not with any form of satisfactory explanation. Even if ghosts had been seen or apparitions or other paranormal phenomena experienced and it is possible that these

correspond to spirit bodies or other aspects of post-mortem existence, it is difficult to give credence to such experiences, although it is perhaps our loss that they are not taken more seriously by the scientific world and properly investigated. And it should be noted that these paranormal phenomena are detected in what is seen as the ante-mortem world and seem to be inhabiting this world (leaving aside evidence provided by mediums). So when this situation does occur is it a sign that something has gone wrong? Or are these phenomena in transition waiting for their opportunity to move on?

Introducing a spirit body as the information carrier from the ante-mortem to the post-mortem world does appear to solve a number of problems but that is only by postulating its existence and proceeding from there. If it is truly a separate entity then the problem of how it interacts with the physical body of a person has to be faced and whether that interaction is one way or two way? When the two entities separate, does this affect the body at all? For instance can the body continue to live without such a spirit body or does its life of necessity come to an end (which would suggest the spirit body is needed for life)? To what extent is the spirit body capable of separate existence? What energy does it require to function? Where exactly does it go and what does it do when it gets there? Is there a purpose behind it and what it does? How can the spirit body provide our identity and therefore be the surviving person? The list of questions is nearly endless and the possibility of answering any of them seem remote.⁵⁰ Spirit bodies are discussed further in Section 11.

⁵⁰ There is the further point that such a spirit body could itself have a limited life span and be subject to a life-death cycle. Following this path soon arrives at a regression. If on the other hand it is immortal then the discussion elsewhere in this paper concerning immortality becomes relevant.

7. Personal or Non-Personal Survival?

Survival, if it occurs, can be personal or non-personal. From the point of view of the ante-mortem person, personal survival would appear of most interest. By this is meant survival of the ante-mortem person such that there is sufficient continuity for them to know that they have survived, essentially their identity has been preserved: they are the *same* person as they were before.⁵¹ Non-personal survival is also a possibility. However, it would appear to carry much less significance to (non-Buddhist) humans in general, even though philosophically it is of equal interest. Parfit, for instance, amongst numerous others, would not agree that preservation of our identity is all important.⁵² He argues that it is psychological connectedness that is important rather than whether this preserves personal identity or not; therefore as long as this connectedness can be achieved then it should be considered as successfully surviving. For Parfit, being destroyed and replicated is about as good as ordinary survival.⁵³ But others may not be prepared to accept this. For them personal survival may require rather more. Given what has been said above about what the survival remains might need to consist of, would these remains be sufficient for personal survival, or is too much modification of the ante-mortem self involved, leading to the conclusion that the remains are sufficient for some form of survival but not necessarily for personal survival? To achieve personal survival, we have noted that the *identity* of the person as it was in ante-mortem life needs to be preserved, or at least sufficient elements of that identity need to be retained such that the person recognises that they have survived. What constitutes the identity of a person over time, even during life, is itself a major topic. Some writers give precedence to bodily continuity and others to psychological continuity yet others to a combination of these. Parfit

⁵¹ Of course this may not mean that they are identical *in all respects* to before, just that sufficient is preserved to ensure that the person feels he/she is the same person.

⁵² See Parfit 1987 Chapter 12 'Why Our Identity Is Not What Matters'. Note that Parfit is talking in terms of survival after various forms of brain manipulation rather than survival of death per se, but the situations are very similar.

⁵³ Ibid p201.

acknowledges that the question may have no answer.⁵⁴ This paper cannot cover this topic in full but one or two remarks can be made as they relate to survival. Firstly, because it is *personal* survival that is being discussed, the approach needs to consider identity from the first-person point of view rather than from any other perspective.⁵⁵ Secondly, the person in the post-mortem state needs to recognise that they have survived *from* the ante-mortem state. What is required for this recognition? Waking up after a night's sleep can be considered as an analogy. Here it is the mind that is the first thing to orientate itself. You gather your thoughts and consider where you are, what you were thinking about or doing before you fell asleep. Only then do you check your body, if indeed that occurs to you. But by this stage you are already aware of who you are, so to speak. Certainly, it would appear that a body that the person recognises is not essential to their own perception of their identity.

These questions are investigated further in the following two sub-sections, firstly by discussing the nature of the person and then by examining what personal survival might involve. But *levels* or *degrees* of personal survival can at least, at this point, be postulated. Two such levels are as follows:

- Psychologically Continuous Personal Survival - Survival where as a minimum the post-mortem self or person identifies with and recognises itself as continuous with its ante-mortem self or person. In general this may be by remembering experiences, dispositions etc. of the ante-mortem existence when in post-mortem existence.⁵⁶ This would seem to be the level of most forms of survival that involve copying or replication.

⁵⁴ Parfit 1987 p213, although he acknowledges that this is probably based on a *Reductionist* view of persons. See 7.1 below for more discussion of this.

⁵⁵ The results of the two approaches could be different: see 3.1 above.

⁵⁶ See Parfit 1987 p204 onwards for a full treatment of this survival criterion.

- Identically Continuous Personal Survival - as for Psychologically Continuous Personal Survival, but with the stricter requirement that the post-mortem self or person *is identical with* the ante-mortem self or person and is not in any sense a copy.

7.1 The Nature of the Person in Relation to Survival

What constitutes a person is as large a topic as what constitutes the identity of a person. For a person to remain the same person one would expect them to preserve their identity through time. One way of looking at the nature of a person is to consider whether they, as a person, are separate from their thoughts (and body) or whether their thoughts (and body) are a necessary part of them, or even *are* them. This has been characterised by Parfit⁵⁷ as the non-Reductionist view vs. the Reductionist view respectively. A non-Reductionist could also hold the view that the person is a separately existing entity (S.E.E.), although they need not. These differing views of a person give rise to various survival emphases that are brought out below.

It has been seen above that to achieve personal survival it is important that a person's identity survives from the ante-mortem state to the post-mortem state. He or she wants to arrive in the next world (wherever and whatever that is) and know that it is them, in some way to be able to say "Yes! I did survive after all!", which implies remembering their previous state. Clearly if they do not know (are not aware) that it is them then they will not be aware of *their* survival. This surviving entity could be anybody, or even a completely new person or being. So surely that would not count as *their* personal survival even if a considerable amount of information relating to or from them found its way into this new being. It seems important that their thoughts and all those things that can find their way into their thoughts (e.g. from their memory) are important in their recognising that it is them. Even to feel and see their body and recognise it requires knowledge of their body held within

⁵⁷ 1987 page 210.

their thoughts. Included in 'thoughts' here is everything that can be thought, all the person's memories, knowledge, abilities, tendencies, personality traits etc., etc. It also includes the capability to think - implicit in the remark 'can be thought'. And as it is also clear that the body that has been that person's body during life cannot continue with them after death, their post-mortem body would need to be some form of replica or perhaps something different entirely, assuming that there is some form of body at all. It should further be said that even if the post-mortem person has no knowledge of the ante-mortem self, they are *someone* and know that they are alive in whatever post-mortem sense that might be. So while this would not count as survival of that person (and therefore not personal survival in any sense that has been characterised here), there is a being with a post-mortem existence that stands in some relation to that person - they would not be there if that person had not died.⁵⁸

This approach is neutral as to the reductionist or non-reductionist view. But what if the problem is looked at from these two standpoints? If a person is *separate* from their body and from their thoughts then on the face of it they could survive without either of these things, especially if it is accepted that they are an S.E.E. The fate of the body after death seems clear and so it can be accepted that some other receptacle might be used. However, it seems problematic that a person could be said to survive if they had to survive without their thoughts. Consider a hypothetical case: I wake up one morning with completely different thoughts, memories etc. and also with a different body (perhaps with the exception of the brain which remains). Basically the brain has been completely remapped with a different set of memories, thoughts and thought patterns. Let us also say that the thoughts and the body (apart from the brain) are from a random person in the next county from where I live, a complete stranger. And let us further assume that I am capable of perfectly normal thought processes from that point on - there has been no discontinuity of consciousness, or at least

⁵⁸ Of course it could also be said that if the post-mortem person has no knowledge of the ante-mortem person then really they bear no relation to them whatsoever. They could be anybody. But there is a connection, a causal chain at least, even if this would not count as personal survival.

none that is any different from what normally occurs during sleep, although there has of course been a discontinuity of memory. Would I know that this had happened to me? Would I say 'I seem to have a different body' (which I might if only the body had changed); would I say 'my thoughts, memories, knowledge, personality have changed' (which I might if only one of these characteristics had changed); or would I not know that anything had happened at all and would I just think as if I were the complete stranger ('How did I get here, for goodness' sake?'). In fact would it be me doing that thinking at all?⁵⁹

Furthermore, what if my brain were not 're-mapped' but wiped clean (and including a change of body)? With the only thing left being the genetic tendencies inherent in the DNA structure within my brain cells. It seems to me it would be like being re-born. I will have lost all capabilities as well as memories. What in that case would be left of me as I was before? I (or whoever the person now is) would be starting again just as if they were a new-born child, learning everything anew. In such a case not only the memory itself would be lost but also the *awareness* of that memory. There would only be awareness that nothing was known; in fact not even that, for to know that nothing is known there has to be awareness that there is something to know. Again I do not think in such a case that I in a substantive sense would have survived at all. Of course I have survived in some sense - no new being has been created and I still have continuity of consciousness of sorts. But really the person is making a fresh start and is not even aware that they are making a fresh start (they might come to learn this later of course). As the person moves forward they will acquire new memories and capabilities and re-develop their identity but this will owe nothing to their previous identity (other perhaps than tendencies and aptitudes in certain directions etc. resulting from their

⁵⁹ Similar, although not identical, puzzle cases that highlight different issues are provided, for example, by Locke's Prince and the Cobbler example mentioned in Penelhum 1980 p79-80, John Perry 2008 -The Problem of Personal Identity and Williams 1976 'The self and the future'. In the latter paper, Williams presents two approaches to the puzzle which appear to lead to a paradox, but it appears that this is because he adopts a Reductionist characterisation in his first approach and a non-Reductionist characterisation in the second approach.

genetic makeup which can be assumed has not changed). Such a person can be no more me than one of my children is me. This would not count as personal survival, certainly not in the sense that has been discussed. So it certainly looks as if continuity of thought (essentially memory and character) is an important feature of personal survival including the ability to look backwards and recognise that you had survived.

As a further point consider a random memory suddenly appearing in someone's thoughts, one that the person cannot remember experiencing or learning and that does not seem to fit in with their other memories, as if that memory was really someone else's. Let us assume this is a memory of a personal kind, such as a memory of an incident from childhood. Here there is the memory itself and the inability to remember its original occurrence. Is there one thing going on here or two? Is there a failure to remember the memory because it can't be linked up with other memories, or does the act of remembering somehow refer to a different set of corroborating information in order to determine that a given memory is a personal memory - a memory of something that happened to that person?⁶⁰ Normally there is no difficulty in distinguishing between personal memories and other memories. The personal circumstances in which the memory was acquired are either remembered (such as "where were you when President Kennedy died?"), or these circumstances have been forgotten but the memory is just accepted as a fact (such as "In what year was the battle of Hastings?"). Somehow with facts we *know* that we know them - this is something over and above the knowledge of the facts themselves. In the case of genuine memories, the occurrence of the event that caused the memory as well as previous recalls of that memory can all be recalled, which is perhaps an act of reinforcement of that memory, a strengthening of pathways in the brain. These factors might also explain why a new memory randomly planted in one's brain would not easily fit.

⁶⁰ See Shoemaker 1959.

So while I seem separate from my thoughts, after all I am sat here typing words emerging from my brain and I am aware that I am typing, this awareness results from being alive - a form of current dynamic processing going on to support the process of living and which retrieves memories etc. from other parts of the brain as required. This awareness need be no more 'I' than the individual memories are, or even the whole set of memories. It is everything together that constitutes 'I'. So while I may not be complete without my thoughts, if the complete set of those thoughts memories etc. are taken (the whole of R2), together with my genetic tendencies as they relate to intellectual activity, placed into a suitable receptacle, e.g. a brain and associated material together capable of life, and life introduced into it, then it should be able to continue as if it were me and I should recognise that it was indeed me because I would remember things that I recalled witnessing or experiencing and I would behave in ways that I would recognise as ways in which I am accustomed to behave etc. There is no extra thing that is necessary in order for it to be me. Any suitable body and brain would suffice as long as it was mapped in the appropriate way. This is despite having a distinctly uncomfortable feeling when imagining this happening to me: looking forwards it seems doomed to failure-with all this transformation going on how could it possibly be me? It still looks like a copy rather than strictly a continuation of me. Whereas when looking back from the state *after* the transformation it looks as if it should work. This underlines the tension between the anticipatory view and the retrospective view⁶¹ and between the various levels of personal survival⁶² and corresponds closely to the reductive case of person A's brain contents being transferred to person B and vice-versa in the Williams paper⁶³ and also Parfit's teleportation example.⁶⁴

⁶¹ As per 3.2 above.

⁶² See above.

⁶³ See Williams 1976 'The self and the future'.

⁶⁴ Parfit 1987 p199-202.

7.2 What is Needed for Personal Survival?

If a person projects themselves forward from their current ante-mortem state to the post-mortem state, and tries to think ahead to imagine what life might be like if they personally survive,⁶⁵ then it certainly looks as if what makes sense as the minimum case is for the content of that person's mind to survive with memories, character traits and abilities intact. They would probably not mind too much if their bodies were altered, perhaps significantly, or even if they occupied a different body altogether.⁶⁶ Depending on the mode of survival (disembodied or embodied), they might expect that those parts of their minds associated with their bodies (e.g. those parts concerned with hunger, pain, etc.) would not necessarily survive or might continue in an altered form (after all they would certainly not continue with their ante-mortem body unchanged). They might also expect that their character and abilities will get an opportunity to improve, that they will learn new things, adopt new behaviours and achieve new moral standards. No doubt the next world is rather different to the present world and requires survivors to adapt, perhaps to a significant degree.

What is it for the post-mortem person to know that he is the same as the ante-mortem person? Is it for that person to have the same psychological traits etc. (Essentially all of R2) that the ante-mortem person had? But those memories and character etc. could have been planted in his consciousness.⁶⁷ In such a situation the person might not in fact be the same *person* at all unless we accept the non-reductive view of a person. More is said on this later but it seems impossible for this to be true personal survival. How can I be sure that it is me that has survived unless I somehow feel that I have continued to exist (as with waking from sleep or unconsciousness) rather than have died and be somehow reconstituted? Anything reconstituted just is not me. Normally we would do this when we wake up by orienting

⁶⁵ As in Penelhum 1980. This is examined in more detail in the sections on post-mortem existence below.

⁶⁶ There are of course limits to the changes that might be considered acceptable. Although there may be no choice in the end it would be preferred perhaps if the new body was similar to the old one; this being a way in which psychological characteristics etc might more easily be retained.

⁶⁷ As with, for example, Parfit's quasi-memories - see Parfit 1987 p220ff.

ourselves with our surroundings, other people, seeking corroboration etc, but presumably this would not be possible in the same way after death. When (if) we wake up it will undoubtedly be in quite different surroundings with different means of corroboration available to us. This would appear to apply whether or not what survives is a separately existing entity (S.E.E.). An S.E.E. would have the same requirement for continuity as would any other form of personal survival, with the possible exception of an S.E.E. that is so removed from the ante-mortem person it was associated with that it did not count that person's psychological characteristics etc as important to its own survival.⁶⁸

The problem with reconstitution is discussed in the Perry Dialogue⁶⁹, for example, where the argument is used that it is essentially the Identically Continuous level of personal survival of the ante-mortem self that is important for us in terms of survival and a copy or reconstitution of this self just would not do. Furthermore, the fact that it is logically possible that the post-mortem self could be a copy means that it is also possible that two copies or more could be made and in addition those copies could undoubtedly be created at different times.⁷⁰ In the Dialogue, this possibility is used to show how absurd the notion is that there is some form of reconstitution going on. But It could also be argued that if two copies are made of me on my demise, then there are just two people (entities) who think they are me and have the same memories as me. From that point of creation, of course, their histories diverge. What is the problem in this? It just seems odd from a personal survival point of view - from an 'identity' point of view - since a copy cannot be identically the *same* body, but it is not really odd. It seems odd to us because it does not happen in the normal ante-mortem world as far as we know. There is also no need, as Cohen says⁷¹ to say it is only you as long as only one copy is made, and if more than one is made then NONE of them are you. Why not? They

⁶⁸ And in which case although this might constitute personal survival of the S.E.E. it does not constitute personal survival of the ante-mortem person as we would understand it and are discussing it.

⁶⁹ Perry 1978.

⁷⁰ Ibid page 32 - Weirob's comments.

⁷¹ Ibid page 33,

are really just as described - each are copies of you (but of course Cohen is right that neither of them are *identically* you, but that does not mean that they are not you *at all*). Certainly, neither copy has any special place vis a vis the other. Each would feel the same as the other and would have your psychological characteristics and would be content to call themselves you. Parfit⁷² makes a similar point where he says that the best description of the copying case is that neither of the resulting people will be him. "It is arbitrary to call one of these people me, so the best description is that neither will be me".⁷³ In fact even a single copy is not *identically* you, it is still a copy, so the number of copies seems irrelevant to the argument.

There is certainly a distinction to be made here between how you would view yourself internally from the first person point of view vis-à-vis how you might be viewed externally from a third person point of view and whether the view is anticipatory or retrospective. Externally it will look like a duplication, internally and retrospectively each will feel fine individually as a person in their own right. In addition, when you think about the possibility of it happening to you (as Weirob is doing) then you are looking at your own possible future survival externally rather than internally. Of course there may be problems in being a copy at all. The whole notion of copying on the face of it seems to render personal survival troublesome, certainly in terms of continuity. But should it? Is there any other way that survival of the demise of one's body could occur, i.e. does not some form of transfer into a new 'receptacle' for want of a better word, always involve some form of copying?

But is one's own personal survival really critical here? When looking forward to the future from the present it is continuity that is sought: the focus is on the continued existence of the ante-mortem being. But if the person looked back from a point after their bodily death then as long as it *seems* to them that they had survived, i.e. all their psychological

⁷² 1987 p260.

⁷³ Ibid p262.

characteristics etc. are intact then should they then not feel satisfied that they had survived?⁷⁴ As Cohen says⁷⁵ ‘do you really have any less reason to care for the survivor than for yourself?’ and Parfit would agree since for him psychological continuity is what is important. Of course, caring for a survivor is not quite the same thing as caring for your own survival, but if the identically continuous level of personal survival cannot be achieved given the transformations that must occur then perhaps psychological continuity is the highest level that can be reached.

Most of us can imagine being involved in teleportation situations familiar from popular science-fiction which involves being teleported to a different location,⁷⁶ however unlikely such a thing might be to achieve in practice. Clearly this is a total transfer, physical as well as mental and involves a complete reconstitution of the person and removal from one place and reappearance in another. If this became a common occurrence in real life it would no doubt be freely accepted.⁷⁷ There is nothing about such teleportation that on the face of it appears problematic, although it is easy to imagine things going wrong sometimes. For instance the process could malfunction and deposit two copies of the teleported person at the destination, or at two separate locations. This would of course raise huge problems which would have to be legislated for (somehow!) - what if the duplicate refused to ‘go quietly’? - but if these are ignored for now there seems nothing physically impossible about the concept, however difficult it would be to put into practice. However, what does appear problematic is that you now have two people (A1 and A2) where before you had one (A) and those two people have a common history and therefore common expectations (they live in the same house, have the same spouse or partner, the same parents etc etc). A1 and A2 both have the same claim to the

⁷⁴ Again see the discussion concerning the anticipatory and retrospective views (section 3.2).

⁷⁵ Ibid page 49.

⁷⁶ See also Parfit 1987 p199 for a discussion of this process and some of its implications.

⁷⁷ Even when watching a fictional movie one does not say ‘that’s impossible’, one just accepts it (although one probably would not be as accepting if it happened in the middle of, say, a true-to-life drama).

life of A but clearly both cannot retain that claim, so clearly there is an issue, even if it is a practical one, with such copying occurring *within life* at least.

In the foregoing it has been assumed that the requirements for survival include a suitable target receptacle to survive into. This is clearly a form of embodied survival. If disembodied survival is to be considered on the other hand there is no material receptacle for the thoughts at all, or at least no *personal* receptacle. Something else would have to perform that function. It is possible that while in a disembodied state a person nonetheless exists within some form of receptacle or medium but it is difficult to imagine what it might be unless it is itself physical in some way. It also needs to be such that the person is aware of what is going on (unless it can be accepted that there is no awareness during this state, i.e. it is as if the person were asleep - which might be the case if it is for example an intermediate state).

8. The importance of memory

Memory is an important part of a person's identity and has been proposed by some (such as John Locke)⁷⁸ as being the key criteria for identity. When life in a disembodied state is considered below, memory is perhaps the only element left that can be used to distinguish the identity of one person from another. Hence it is important to explain a little more about memory as it might be relevant to these key considerations and in particular to refer to some of Penelhum's⁷⁹ arguments, which are discussed at length later.

In considering the importance of memory, the distinction between different types of memory should first of all be stressed. Memory of events (which Penelhum appears to concentrate on), episodic or autobiographical memory, is a part of *declarative* memory, along with facts that are learnt. But there is also *non-declarative* memory which is concerned much more with skills and abilities learnt, along with one's characteristic tendencies.⁸⁰ This latter type of memory is important for identity in that from a third party point of view someone would be recognised quite often by their abilities or character rather than by what they remember.⁸¹ So when Penelhum says that the fact that A at time T2 remembering a memory of something that happened to him at time T1 cannot be used in support of A's identity without third party corroboration,⁸² he is using only a part of the types of memory available, namely episodic memory. And even episodic memories are often unique to a single self; there are many episodes (thoughts) that no one else witnesses. A self is thinking all of the time. In fact most of what a self would identify as belonging to him or herself is made up of these personal introspective thoughts.

⁷⁸ see Locke 1996 p133-149 - Of identity and diversity.

⁷⁹ 1980.

⁸⁰ Bear et al 2001 pages 726-729.

⁸¹ This is why the prince and the cobbler story works and we accept the prince as the prince even though he is in the body of the cobbler - as well as recognising his declarative memories we note his princely skills and ways and his lack of cobbling skills. It might just be that in the body switch situation we need more time to come to terms with the true identity of the person involved in the switch. We may after all be in a position to observe a person's behaviour rather than hold a conversation with them.

⁸² Penelhum 1980 pages 54-67.

Can more be said about what it is for memories to belong to the same disembodied entity at T1, T2 and T3? Remembering that a physical body cannot be appealed to and perhaps an entity that has those memories cannot be appealed to either (i.e. if the entity *is* those memories).⁸³ It would appear that Penelhum is being too restrictive when he concentrates on episodic memories as the key to identity at the expense of dispositions, abilities skills etc.⁸⁴ Non-declarative memories do fade with time but less radically than memories of events, facts etc. They are 'laid down' more permanently. And the transition of all types of memories through time operates very like the transition of cells in a body. Just as cells grow and die, memories are created and disappear (as in Figure 4). Also, memories do not normally pass from one entity to another (a person's memory is always personal to that person) in the course of the existence of that entity, rather they are created or disappear *within* that single entity.⁸⁵

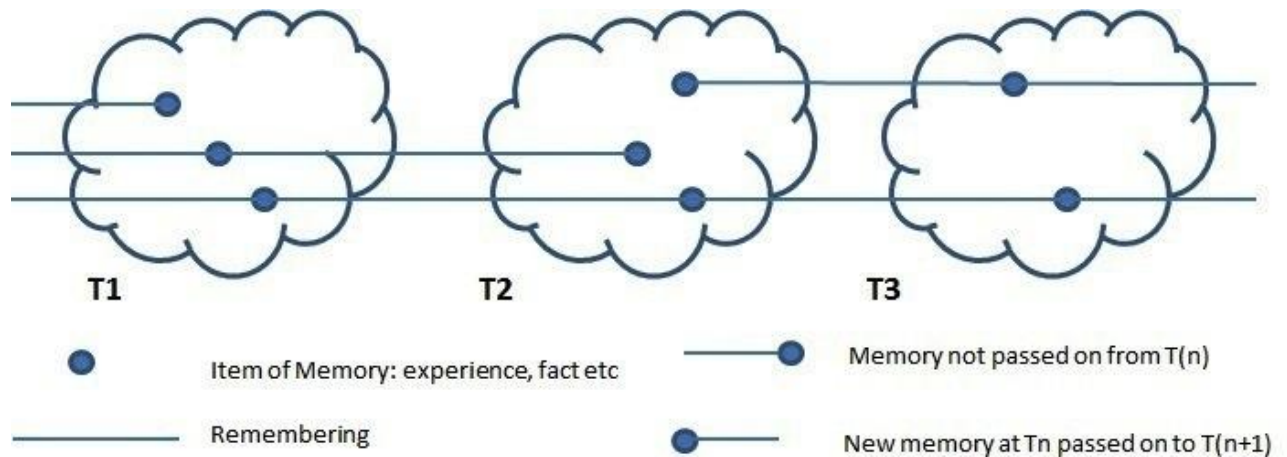


Figure 4: Memory Through Successive Time Intervals

⁸³ Although it seems that memories must have a subject: the subject that has those memories. For a disembodied mind we have to consider what that subject might be.

⁸⁴ Although this may be unfair in that third party corroboration can of course occur regarding dispositions etc. as well as events.

⁸⁵ With the possible exception of reincarnation, discussed below. However even here the situation is different as memories generally appear to pass from one entity A to another B only after entity A has died. Also at present our focus is on disembodied existence.

Also importantly, it is the actual collection of all types of memories as they are at T1 **and** T2 **and** T3 etc. and their temporality that constitute the continuity of memory identity (as it is with the bodily identity). It is **not**, for instance, just the memory of previous memories as held at T3 (which is an episodic memory). So in this case, what makes the entity the same is the *continuity* of the whole set of all types of memory at all times, not simply whether there is any particular remembering at any one time. Thus the fallibility of memory is not the factor that tells against its use as a criterion of identity.⁸⁶ It is true that if all of a person's memories at one instant were totally different from their memories at an immediately preceding instant (i.e. there is no memory continuity) then it can perhaps be accepted that it would be difficult to preserve identity (in such a case the person would not remember who he/she was previously, in fact she would think she was whatever her current memories indicated), but even here these are *in fact* the current memories, so they constitute identity⁸⁷ no matter what they are and how they relate to memories as held at previous times. Also it seems true that if **all** one has to go on right now are one's memories, then one has no way of knowing whether those memories are continuous with the set of memories from yesterday because there is no access available to yesterday's memories, there is only what one believes are today's recollection of those memories, and they could of course not be one's own memories at all. So internally, from the first person point of view, the only thing one has to go on are one's memories and they could of course be deceptive as to what memories were had previously. But it must be said that *if* one is disembodied and all that one consists of is a mind with a set of memories *and* it cannot be said what a mind without ANY memories (of all types) would amount to in terms of a self, *then* clearly memories are all there are to go on. One *is* one's memories and in such a case one cannot be deceived.

⁸⁶ This was a criticism of Locke's account of memory as a criterion of identity made by, for instance, Thomas Reid (see Reid 2008).

⁸⁷ Although clearly not *continuity* of identity.

It does seem important whether a person is *separate* from his/her thoughts/memories etc. (i.e. the non-reductive view) or whether he/she *is* their thoughts/memories etc. (the reductive view). This is important for the Prince/Cobbler puzzle cases. If a person is his/her thoughts then they, as a person, will go wherever the thoughts go regardless of their body. But if they are separate from their thoughts then they could get a complete set of new thoughts/memories etc. and still be the same person. This is illustrated in the Perry⁸⁸ example which looks at the same problem from those two directions. This does not solve the issue but might help to explain why there is a puzzle. Furthermore, one certainly has *an* identity, no matter what it is.

⁸⁸ 2008

9. Existence in a Disembodied State

It is now time to move on to discuss the various types of possible post-mortem existence, beginning with aspects of existence in a disembodied state, with particular reference to communicating with others and satisfactorily establishing one's identity.

9.1 In what ways could disembodied selves perceive their environment including other selves?

The experience of existing in a disembodied state has been discussed at length by Terence Penelhum.⁸⁹ He tackles the potential problems in a similar way to this paper in that he seeks to determine whether the notion of disembodied existence is or can be made intelligible for a self. For example, there is the issue of whether a being without a body can perceive, or can act as an agent, i.e. can cause change in the world in which it finds itself. The problem is that a being without a body lacks what would be seen as the normal means of doing these things, e.g. no eyes for seeing or ears for hearing and no limbs or voice to make things happen in the world. One way this situation can be investigated is by postulating post-mortem existence with an intact mind but without a body, and in particular without a brain, in order to see what might follow. Penelhum suggests that in such a state an entity should be able to make sense of images that are presented to it based on the pre-existing knowledge that the entity has, e.g. the knowledge that is brought from the ante-mortem embodied state, and these images could be arranged temporally, so that the entity could observe a sequence of related images that made sense as an unfolding event or activity or something similar. But this does of course assume that a disembodied mind could have the capability to perceive images in this way and even this is by no means clearcut. Such a situation would correspond very closely to how normal real life experiences are represented to one's consciousness based on certain

⁸⁹ Penelhum 1980.

interpretations of the way perception works⁹⁰ and might therefore depend on *physical* characteristics. If this capability is assumed, then it is at least logically possible that these images could be influenced or changed through an act of mental ‘willing’. Whatever can be granted, this situation presupposes that there is some external system or entity (such as God) that produces these images and places them before each disembodied self,⁹¹ since a disembodied self in the situation that has been described could not conjure up any sense-data that corresponded to something existing externally to itself through its *own* volition as it has no perceptive capabilities of its own (although it might be able to *imagine* things and view them accordingly.) If images can be presented to the disembodied self then why not the mental equivalent of sounds, smells etc?⁹² For the disembodied entity itself to try to construct such mental perceptions would be difficult but perhaps all it would have to do would be to ‘think’ of the perception and this would be enough to construct it and make it available to others. If all of these communication variants are allowed, and there is an appropriate system in place, then any conversation that can be constructed between disembodied entities can be enhanced through their use.

9.2 Could a mind do this on its own?

The **big** assumption underlying the viability of a communicating disembodied entity is whether what is in effect a mind on its own, entirely immaterial, without a body, but in particular without the causal role of the brain, is capable of sustaining what has been described. It has been stated that such a self can recognise and understand certain images placed before it - in particular images that he or she would recognise from his or her past life (it can be imagined that experiences that the self has *not* had being a mystery - which should

⁹⁰ For example the representational theory of perception - see Smythies 1965.

⁹¹ Perhaps as a form of divine intervention or pre-established harmony, for instance, or some other post-mortem environmental structure within which disembodied entities must operate.

⁹² Penelhum 1980, page 33-35.

be no problem; but even if it is a mystery, some parts of the image at least are likely to make sense).⁹³ But surely to understand something (or even *attempt* to understand it) at the very least you must be able to refer to assimilated material you already have at your disposal and perform an initial recognition (such as a match against existing images - effectively your memory - or existing knowledge, e.g. of language) and then make various associations (what the image you recognise means to you, how you react to it, etc.) This presupposes that you have the means to access possible candidates for recognition and the necessary associations for understanding. And if the mind is just that, a mind without any body at all and in particular without a brain, where will those resources come from? This leads us straight into the mind-body problem, of course; can the mind really exist and function without a body?⁹⁴ To get to this position, the mind on its own is already being granted awareness as well as the capability of separate existence, and even if it is fully accepted that conscious awareness is something quite distinct from any associated neuronal firing in the brain, even so can the mind carry the resources it needs in a disembodied state *unaided* or does it need some form of information storage mechanism to provide them? This storage could of course be added or made available to the disembodied mind, but in doing so the nature of the entity being dealt with would change. It is clear that a substantial supporting mechanism is required within a post-mortem world that is very different from the ante-mortem one. This may not be very surprising in itself but the extent of the change needed might be. Consider the 'Brain in a

⁹³ There is also the important point here that it has been assumed that the disembodied being still has a gender - is still recognisable as male or female. Of course the being would remember being male or female on Earth but would the post-mortem being still have this distinction?

⁹⁴ According to Perrett (1985 page 334), Ewing (1968 page 172) suggests that the assertion that the mind *cannot* exist without the body might be based on a fallacy highlighted by the analogy that the fact that a window is needed to see the sky from one's desk might suggest that the sky could not be seen when outside because there is no window to look through. But this fails to highlight that the reason that the sky cannot be seen without a window is because there is a wall in the way. Also a window is not a necessary condition of seeing the sky since, even if the window was not there, as long as the hole it occupies was there you could still see the sky. The main thing is the wall - remove it and there is no longer an obstruction, so there is not the dependence on the window that is suggested, rather a dependence on the wall. Although Ewing is making a primarily linguistic point it is clear that care must be taken not to push analogies too far. This same argument is put forward by McTaggart 1930 page 105, to whom Ewing acknowledges his debt.

Vat' thought experiment as an analogy.⁹⁵ The brain in this situation is linked up to various items of apparatus and can be given all types of sense impressions and could conceivably successfully exist. But what if it were a *mind* in a vat, i.e. there is no brain, only a mind? If it can be assumed that such a mind could still be linked up to apparatus (somehow) and be receiving sense impressions (clearly quite different ones to those a brain would need to receive), nevertheless could it operate successfully, be alive in any sense akin to which the self is here on Earth? It seems highly doubtful. Of course in the earthly life the mind does not have to operate without the brain (as far as is known) but it cannot be deduced from that that it cannot, but to contemplate such a possibility forces one to go some way beyond one's normal experience range.

Further points could be made concerning normal life experiences. For instance, dementia sufferers experience damage to the brain and this has a direct effect on their mind, in particular on their ability to remember. Cut off brain pathways to certain memories, experience etc. and the mind is directly affected. Further, sense impressions received by the brain from the sense organs in life undergo considerable modification and selectivity before being presented to a person's consciousness, so the images received by the mind would it seems need to have been pre-processed in a similar way in order to get them into the right state, which is no doubt a subjective state, determined by previous experiences and predispositions.⁹⁶ All of this tells against an unsupported mind being able to exist in any way similar to that mind's existence on Earth, which must in turn tell against the feasibility of completely disembodied survival as in any way personal, even if possible.

9.3 Communication & identity: what would other disembodied selves think?

⁹⁵ As first introduced in Putnam 1981 for example, and with much subsequent discussion in the literature.

⁹⁶ Even if an alternative view of this process of selection is accepted, e.g. that it occurs in the consciousness, not the brain, then it has to be posited that the mind on its own is capable of conducting all of this selectivity etc. unaided.

Let us now assume that a state has been reached where there is a group of similar surviving selves who have some degree of awareness of each other,⁹⁷ then the images or other sense impressions that are available to them, to the extent that they are from and of each self, serve very much as third party evidence of identity. So if the selves see images and perhaps other sense impressions at time T2 with some similarity to those seen at time T1, they would (assuming they could remember anything!!) associate the one with the other and deduce that something that constituted the same being as before was currently communicating with them (of course it has to be assumed that these selves are capable of logical thought). Therefore the images that a given self was receiving would act as criteria for identification and allow that self to recognise the other in a similar way to the way that self would recognise the other when in an embodied state. All such communication needs to occur in the context of a common background of information and semantics; a vast cultural and stylistic record that establishes a common framework of understanding. Without it such communication would at best have a very slow take-up rate and at worst would never get off the ground.

But how could these selves communicate, even if we assume they can understand each other? If it can be assumed that some form of telepathy can operate between disembodied selves some progress may be made. In our ante-mortem state, many of us are aware of seemingly telepathic communication with those who are close to us, such as spouses, and less often (but not uncommonly), an overwhelming sense that the person is present even though they are not,⁹⁸ so perhaps such a system can also operate between disembodied selves, where there is nothing material to inhibit it, although again careful consideration needs to be given as to whether such a thing is possible in a totally non-physical way. If that possibility is granted for now, there is the further problem of working out how a disembodied self A can

⁹⁷ As in Price 1965 pages 10-11.

⁹⁸ See Price 1940 pages 367-368 for a discussion of spontaneous telepathy which may be more common than is thought - see Price's discussion about inhibiting telepathic messages (ibid pages 374-376).

communicate with a particular disembodied self B. Details of a framework within which this might work are provided in Appendix C.

Whatever the framework, it clearly has to be accepted that these disembodied selves have the *capability* to initiate and respond to communication messages and as a consequence it must be assumed that they also have intentionality, awareness etc., in fact everything that ante-mortem selves have but with substantially reduced faculties (since they lack most perceptive faculties). So we have to be satisfied that if one starts with flesh and blood ante-mortem beings with all their faculties and remove all those faculties that are obviously physical, including those that depend on the physical, then one is left with a fully capable self but with just those faculties removed. But can it be the case that removing everything physical would still leave selves with these capabilities? Of course the brain is fundamental to this assumption. In fact it is so fundamental that it is difficult to imagine what a disembodied self could achieve if it lacked the support and capabilities of a brain or something similar. Any messages that the self wished to generate would require supporting energy both to generate the message and to send it telepathically. Any attempt to use information from previous messages sent or received would require the *capability* to recall (which perhaps can be granted) plus the *knowledge and content* of the recalled information itself and surely this would have to be recalled *from* somewhere, e.g. from some form of memory bank. Received messages also need to be *understood* which implies access to a whole range of supporting material and memories. Such memories are open-ended in nature and of indeterminate quantity, so some form of management of these memories would also be required. And it has already been assumed that memories of the ante-mortem self are available for recall as well. How can all this be achieved in a totally non-physical way?

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that there are elements of a self's character that are not elements of that self's mind - they come from the self's *physical* makeup. i.e. there is

no reason that one's character, personality etc., should come from one's mind alone - some of these traits are inherited through genes and are reflected in certain physical ways. The mind no doubt utilises them and is influenced by them, but remove the brain from the picture and how can all those character elements remain?

9.4 Multiple worlds

The above arguments would seem to apply whether the post-mortem disembodied self is aware of only this ante-mortem world, only another post-mortem world or indeed both. As far as the self is concerned, it is presented with image and other data of some form and has no independent knowledge of where these data come from or relate to. The self can only react to them as he or she finds them. Penelhum seems to feel that for the purposes of purity of the hypothesis the survivor "must not be allowed to perceive this world from the next one" or at least such perceptions should "not be thought by their owner to be perceptions of [this world]".⁹⁹ It is hard to see why, logically, this has to be so. However as Penelhum rightly says in speaking of these perceptions nothing has really been said about how those perceptions are presented and by whom or what.¹⁰⁰ If it is allowed that it is another world that is being perceived then there is the issue that many of the images provided may well be difficult to understand, armed as the post-mortem self is solely with information brought from the ante-mortem world (at least initially). Because of this, if the survivor is to make any headway he/she must be able to learn new things, to record his/her experiences and recall them later perhaps when a similar experience is presented at a later time. Here again there is concern as to whether recording of experiences (effectively the building up of new memories) would be possible for a totally disembodied being.

⁹⁹ Penelhum 1980 pages 52-53.

¹⁰⁰ The telepathic method of communication requires entities able and prepared to communicate with other, initially unknown, entities. Unless there is some method of targeting a particular group an entity will not know where messages originate or end up. Much more could be said on this topic, which is discussed to an extent in the previous section.

10. Existence in a Re-embodied State

The three main categories of re-embodied existence that are being considered: Reincarnation, Re-embodiment and Resurrection, are discussed individually below.

10.1 Reincarnation in this world

Reincarnation is one form of survival after death that there appears to be some tangible details of or evidence for, even if there is generally no idea how such a situation can occur given the present understanding of the biology of living things and current knowledge of the physical world. Some of the evidence is provided by the studies of Ian Stevenson who has analysed numerous cases of reported reincarnation over a number of years.¹⁰¹ Of special interest to us in the light of Penelhum's focus and the function of memory in personal identity is the fact that many of the cases studied by Stevenson involve a person who is currently alive possessing some memories of a person that they believe to be themselves in a previous life¹⁰² and also in some cases having character traits that match those of that person. These memories are such that they are *first-person* memories in the sense discussed in previous sections in that the people who report them see them as memories of things that happened to them.

A significant number of people in the world treat reincarnation as a fact of life and accept it without question. There are also a large number who do not believe in it or who perhaps ignore it. It may be hard to believe that reincarnation can be something that happens to some human beings or some groups and not to others, since this would suggest either that belief in reincarnation makes it more likely to happen or that it is somehow inbuilt in certain peoples. To accept this view you would have to follow some form of pluralism as per John Hick.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ See for example Stevenson 1974.

¹⁰² See for example the case of Sukla, *ibid* page 52ff.

¹⁰³ 1985.

Unless the reincarnation memories are reinforced they also tend to be forgotten,¹⁰⁴ so there must be a possibility that all selves are reincarnated but the vast majority of them do not remember any information about their previous lives. Furthermore, reincarnation is not really about memories so much as it is about legacy, essentially karmic legacy.¹⁰⁵ As an alternative, an absence of reincarnation may be more likely when a person lives a normal life span. But there again, as Broad¹⁰⁶ says, there is no evidence to suggest that reincarnation is anything but an 'an extremely rare and exceptional occurrence'. Interestingly, several of the cases that Stevenson studied seemed to involve a violent death (car accident or shooting for example) and perhaps the shock of this leads to a tendency for the memories to be set free in some way,¹⁰⁷ which may be connected with the deceased having 'unfinished business'.¹⁰⁸ Also, in some of Stevenson's cases, there is a gap between the death of the person and the birth or even conception of the reincarnated person and this is suggestive of some form of disembodied existence in the intervening period.¹⁰⁹ If there is an intervening disembodied state, then this seems likely to be no more than an abeyance state in which the self to be reincarnated *awaits* reincarnation. Perhaps this is a form of *sleep* state. It is possible that the reason why certain races, religions or sects believe in reincarnation has a **genetic** basis; a tendency to make them more likely to inherit these memory traces. Further examination is needed to see why this might be so and what the implications might be.

If reincarnation occurs, even rarely, then presumably it repeats itself over and over again. Certainly in the Buddhist tradition, reincarnation does not just occur once but occurs repeatedly until a certain state is reached. Although the purpose of this process may be to

¹⁰⁴ Very much as one's own early memories can often become faded or disappear altogether.

¹⁰⁵ See Forrest 1978 - even if we have no knowledge of our karmic heirs, it can still be argued that we have a responsibility to them through the legacy that we leave them.

¹⁰⁶ 1962 page 413.

¹⁰⁷ This point is also brought out by Bennett 2006 page 91.

¹⁰⁸ See Stevenson 1980 p35, highlighted by Bennett 2006 page 91.

¹⁰⁹ Or possibly 'non-existence' but if that is allowed then coming back into existence again must also be allowed and how would that occur? The information to re-create the person must have been kept somewhere and so at least in that sense they did not go through a period of non-existence at all.

improve one's soul or essence of being, it can be seen that to continue to remember everything about previous lives would be confusing, monotonous and potentially unpleasant. Also if a person knew that that were just going to keep coming back after they died, it would change their whole attitude to death, and indeed to living. Death would not be so important an event in life because the person would know that they will just come back as someone else. This could get very claustrophobic: there would be a feeling that you could not escape life even if you wanted to, especially if there was no sense in which one could choose whether or not to continue. This has a tedium of immortality ring to it.

But let us grant that in at least one case this is what has happened. The memories (or at least some of the memories) of a person P1 alive at time T1 but dead at time T2 have indeed been placed somehow in the memory of a different person P2 at time T2 rather in the manner of Parfit's quasi-memories,¹¹⁰ but with the crucial difference that Parfit's Jane knows that these memories are not her own - she is aware of the memory but she knows she did not acquire the memory herself, whereas in the reincarnation case P2 has the memories and also knows - feels - that they are her own. How can this possibly happen and what are the implications? The first thing that springs to mind is that if there is a gap between the death of P1 and the conception of P2 then where do these memory traces exist in the meantime? Furthermore, if P2 has inherited some of the character traits of P1, then this suggests that the normal biological inheritance from parents (via inherited genes) together with associated random mutations etc. of those genes is not the only source of one's initial character make-up, indeed these may be partially suppressed in such cases. Also how do these traces actually get into P2's memories and in particular into P2's brain? The method would seem to require an incredibly complex operation to 'wire' the brain of the person P2 to provide these memories and character traits, unless it can be granted that there is a completely non-material

¹¹⁰ See Parfit 1987 p220ff.

counterpart which holds this information. Certainly if there is an existence gap between P1 and P2 then it would appear that some form of non-material or minute physical material is required to hold the information safely until required. If this is the case then there must come a point at which this information is conjoined with a host. But is there a choice involved here or is it a random process, e.g. one that is triggered by the sudden availability of a suitable embryo of the right age? Perhaps this also has some form of genetic basis. If there is a choice then who makes that choice?

The driving force and the mechanics behind reincarnation are puzzling, but what does it mean for personal survival? It certainly suggests, when it occurs, that some part or a copy of that part of a person P1 persists after the death of his/her body and is re-used or re-appears in the body of another person P2 at a later time. So there is a definite sense in which this is sufficient for certain definitions of personal survival. For instance it would suffice for Parfit and would therefore certainly be at the level of psychologically continuous personal survival. It also looks retrospectively as if the person has survived. But there does not appear to be a sense in which what really persists is identical with the person P1. Or at least P2 accepts that they are P2 even if they remember themselves as P1 and want to return to where and with whom they lived etc. Perhaps this is inevitable and natural, but it is a new life rather than a continuation of the old and so is rather a weak sense of personal survival. The self is the current incarnation and generally only in seemingly very exceptional cases does the self see itself in its previous incarnation and furthermore it tends not to look forward (in the sense of thinking about it) to its next incarnation. But perhaps this is based on too narrow a view of life, one where the self appears at the level of the individual life and not at a higher multiply-reincarnated level, for whom this life is but one of a series.

Another possibility is that reincarnation depends either on spatial coincidence of the memory traces with a new embryo,¹¹¹ or on approximate physical proximity, with the added proviso that the traces are able to change position or act at a distance in order to locate the host. It is certainly the case where the Druze sect is concerned that reincarnation appears to occur within a radius of relatively few miles. Perhaps reincarnation as it is experienced in the world is no more than an energy concentration left behind in certain cases when a person dies which can be picked up by other receptive beings (presumably by exactly zero or one person at one time only), i.e. there is no intentionality behind it, it is just something that can result from the physical make-up of the present world, albeit something that is not understood very much at present. If this is so, then there is no 'self' as such that is being reincarnated, just a collection of memories that persist or are copied and find their way into a living being.

Assuming reincarnation occurs what is it that is surviving? It would appear to be memory¹¹² as a minimum and in some cases birth marks have been noted that correspond to wounds suffered in the preceding incarnation¹¹³ but these are the overt aspects of the phenomenon. There may also be less overt aspects. If the true self is buried within us and not easily brought to the surface then it could well be that this self is at least partly made-up of traits, personality, character etc. inherited from the preceding incarnation. The interplay of these traits with the traits as they would be if inherited from the biological parents is of some interest and might lead to internal conflicts, not to mention filial conflicts. This may be another reason why memories may be suppressed. So if it can be accepted that the self is reincarnated then it seems likely that the ante-mortem self as has been discussed is itself a reincarnation rather than being newly created. So, did that self have a beginning? Or has it

¹¹¹ i.e. that P2 or the mother of P2 physically passes across the exact spot where P1's trace was located and this was the reason that P1 ended up in P2.

¹¹² Both declarative and non-declarative memories, i.e. both events and abilities from previous life appear to be carried forward into the reincarnated being.

¹¹³ See for example the case of Ravi Shankar in Stevenson 1974 pages 91-105.

perhaps evolved¹¹⁴ very much as life has evolved? The life-force inherent in living things provides continuity of life in general - living things procreate and create other living things and so life continues uninterrupted in an evolutionary process from very simple beginnings (in fact from the origins of life). Is this the same with the self? Or is there a point during that evolutionary process when the self comes into existence? Is, for example, the self of an animal different from the self of a human? Given that at some point in evolutionary history human beings split off from the path taken by modern fish,¹¹⁵ for example, were there selves at that point that have evolved into fish selves and human selves respectively?

If there is some form of post-mortem existence then the sort of existence suggested by reincarnation is one of the most economical in that, in the normal run of things, old bodies die and are replaced by new ones and some memories are passed on and since this happens here on Earth there is no need to postulate separate worlds. But a very similar process already happens in this world in that parents beget children who inherit some of their parents' characteristics and they also benefit from the accumulated learning of the world. Why is this extra reincarnation layer present, and what is its purpose? It appears difficult to come up with a convincing explanation in terms of one's current understanding of the world.

10.2 Re-embodiment or quasi-embodiment in another world

Reincarnation, as described above in relation to this world, could of course occur in another world, the 'next world' as it has been described. This could be called reincarnation because it could happen in a very similar way in that whatever the essence of the self is that remains after death could potentially occupy another body *wherever* that body is located. For this to occur of course this essence has to pass from this world into this other world and there has to be a suitable receptacle or body for this essence to occupy that is available or capable

¹¹⁴ As assumed by theories such as metempsychosis which regard 'not only the human body but also the mind or the consciousness or indeed the soul as an evolutionary product' - Ducasse 1961 page 6-7.

¹¹⁵ See Dawkins 2005.

of being made available in this post-mortem world (i.e. it is assumed in this situation that information about the ante-mortem physical body is either not passed across, or only limited information is passed across (such as might be used for certain personality purposes). As an alternative, a full set of information might be passed across but only a small proportion of it used. The distinction is that this is a physical or quasi-physical embodiment in the next world (in contrast to the disembodied state discussed in Section 9). Since it is a physical post-mortem incarnation then some of the problems associated with a non-physical existence previously noted do not arise, but this post-mortem world has to be a world where, like the present one, there are bodies available or which can be made available, for occupation. So it has to be the sort of world where beings are being created. If it is such a world do these beings also die in this other world? Or are they immortal? If they die, does their essence pass on to yet another world to be re-embodied once again? There is no particular difficulty with this arrangement. In fact it makes some sense to conjecture a series of worlds each to be inhabited by beings that have satisfied the conditions required to enter that world and that pass on to the next such world once they have satisfied its conditions. This suggests a hierarchy of worlds but of course it could also be a collection of different worlds that are all to be experienced although not in a specific sequence. It can also be imagined that the sequence comes to an end once all the conditions have been successfully met, as in Buddhist beliefs.

Where could these worlds be? Well, parallel worlds to the present one have been postulated elsewhere and so a series of such parallel worlds could be postulated for this post-mortem existence. It has to be accepted that the necessary material or information is able to pass from one world to another (perhaps in exchange for material passing back the other way to maintain conservation of mass-energy); if there can be no such exchange then non-physical information passing between the worlds has to be postulated instead.

10.3. Resurrection

What might be called the ‘mechanics’ of resurrection are very similar to reincarnation or re-embodiment, as discussed above, but with two particular differences. The first is that as pronounced by the Christian Church it is something that occurs for everyone at the end of time. All the dead are held in abeyance until this day (of judgment) when all will be bodily resurrected very much as they were at the time of their death. It has already been noted that there are some difficulties with this notion but it could be the case that all beings are resurrected in a closely similar form to their ante-mortem existence using materials available at the time of resurrection rather than the exact cells etc. used in the original ante-mortem body and in such a way that they could live in that form at least long enough to hear and suffer their fate.

The other difference is that reincarnation or re-embodiment is in a *different body* supplied or available for the purpose whereas with resurrection it appears important that it is the *same body* as the one that was used in the ante-mortem existence. This may tell us something about the definition of a person and continuity of that person as seen through Christian eyes. With reincarnation the physical body itself appears less important - there certainly has to be a body but its precise form is not vital - it can change quite freely without affecting the underlying post-mortem process, and clearly changes many times during the entire cyclical process. With resurrection on the other hand (certainly as defined by Christians¹¹⁶), there is only one period of ante-mortem life available within one body within a single period of existence after which the abeyance state is entered until such time as resurrection takes place. Furthermore, resurrection is the resurrection of the actual ante-mortem body or something very similar. So here the body as it was during its ante-mortem life carries much more importance and the self or person whose body it was has only one chance - one life - to get things right.

¹¹⁶ There could of course be other forms of resurrection that provide for repeated cycles of life, death and resurrection.

The period between bodily death and resurrection is in effect an intermediate state.¹¹⁷ It must also be presumed that in this intermediate state the being, or the essence of the being and enough information about the body to be able to reconstruct it has to be held somewhere and in some form until such time as it is resurrected. As has been seen previously this would need to consist of what was called Whole Being remains (R1 - see 5.1 above) earlier, comprising both body and mind information. It has been suggested that this could be held in the form of an extended DNA molecule or molecules. There would thus need to be one of R1 for each entity that was to be resurrected. Clearly also if the information is held within this form then there would need to be a growth or transformation process available to generate the resurrected living entity from the DNA coded information. This process might take some time as it does currently on Earth, or it might be greatly speeded up, if miracles are allowed for or if there are completely different conditions prevalent at that time.¹¹⁸ Note that such a reconstruction may go way beyond what is acceptable for *resurrection* of a body.

Given that the purpose of resurrection is the Christian one of judgment, it should be noted that the information required for each entity must include their deeds and other material on which judgment will be meted out. This may be contained already within the memory of the individual, especially if the memory is allowed to be the full memory of everything that happened to that person during his/her ante-mortem life, but it may on the other hand require additional information to be stored. One can imagine, for instance, that the period during which the ante-mortem existence occurred for the being would be relevant since at different times different actions might be considered right or wrong (certain actions carried out in prehistoric times might be forgiven that would not be if carried out in today's world for

¹¹⁷ Termed bardo in Tibetan. It has also been called 'soul sleep'.

¹¹⁸ But then given the considerable elapse of time that for most will have taken place between death and resurrection, the length of time involved is probably not important.

instance).¹¹⁹ Equally, it is very possible that there is no awareness of a particular deed in one's memory and also the consequences of a deed is often more relevant judgmentally than the deed itself. So some form of external record of deeds and consequences must be preserved.¹²⁰

As to where this information might be held during the intermediate state, certainly the super-DNA for each entity certainly needs to be held somewhere until needed. Given the size and possibly quantity of molecules or similar needed, this probably does not create a huge storage problem, although it might create an indexing and retrieval problem, given that some considerable time might well elapse between death and resurrection. Also it must be assumed that every being that ever existed will be resurrected. But it should be said that resurrection is not really survival per se since the stated aim, at least with the Christian view, is that it is for judgment and its consequences and not for survival as a route to improvement (although as it is a form of post-mortem existence, no matter of what nature, it does strictly speaking fulfil the criteria). Also there could be types of resurrection other than the Christian variety.

Resurrection could also occur via the spirit body that was discussed as option R3 (See Section 11 below). This would provide an alternative way to provide the necessary information concerning the ante-mortem self, although it has to be said that the form that this could take is not known. It also seems that if during the intermediate state the beings to be resurrected lie in abeyance then the role of the spirit body is limited to leaving the body, going into abeyance, and then being brought out of abeyance at the required future time. One advantage of this could be that there is no need for molecular growth mechanisms to be in place, but even so the process involved is no less a mystery.

¹¹⁹ Resurrection is being discussed here as a possibility for all time not just something that starts with Christianity.

¹²⁰ Of course we could also say that the omnipotent God, who will judge all beings, will just know what all these thoughts and deeds are and no external record is therefore required.

11. Quasi-embodiment: The Spirit Body

Of the remains types outlined in Section 4.2, the discussion of R3, that is, spirit remains, is still outstanding. These remains stand apart from the others in that they appear to sit somewhat uneasily between the other remains types being in many ways neither one thing nor the other. They also appear to imply a separate entity and thus give rise to the problems associated with such a complication.

11.1 What are spirit remains?

The idea is that there is a spirit body¹²¹ that exists in parallel to each ante-mortem being and develops alongside it, effectively mirroring that being. Presumably therefore it comes into existence at the same time as the embryo of the ante-mortem being and grows with the being from that point. When the being is young, the spirit body is young, when the being is an adult the spirit body is an adult, etc. To be useful for survival, this spirit body cannot decay in the same way that a physical body does, i.e. it cannot be subject to the same diseases (or be affected by those diseases as a physical body is) so that the spirit body remains, in effect, in peak condition.¹²² At or close to death, the spirit body simply detaches itself from the ante-mortem being. Consequently, no copying or reproduction is involved at the point of death since the spirit body has in effect been maintained in its required condition at all times during life.

The way it has been defined, this spirit body needs to carry with it everything necessary to continue its existence after the death of the ante-mortem being, including all the latter's memories, character and personality. Such spirit bodies have been said to consist of a higher

¹²¹ Often called an etheric or astral body - see Price 1968 page 251.

¹²² A different interpretation is possible here - one where spirit bodies go from body to body - similar to reincarnation, so they do not grow as described but they may adopt a persona while occupying a body etc. The problem with this approach for the present paper is that it would not count as personal survival of the being on Earth: what survives is the spirit body, so the spirit body would have to be the true self rather than the ante-mortem self.

kind of matter¹²³ or to be some form of energy field, but note that the amount of information that this matter or field would need to carry is enormous (as has been explored at length earlier in relation to the other remains types). Furthermore, the empirical evidence for such a body is scant to say the least and any evidence that might be relevant is often associated with sensationalist reporting and as a consequence is difficult to take seriously. It must also be a concern that there is normally no detection available to us of this body in the living; most of the reported evidence, such that it is, concerns the dead.¹²⁴ Why should it be so elusive? There is also the problem of how the interaction between the ante-mortem being and the spirit body would operate, essentially the same problem that arises in relation to the interaction between the mind and the body or between the body and some other 'occupying' entity. If the spirit body is truly immaterial or even quasi-immaterial (as in an energy field of some sort) then how does it absorb all the necessary information? And does it act on the physical body in any way, or is it purely an epiphenomenon? If it does consist of 'higher matter' what exactly is that made up of? As a minimum it looks as if it must be counted as material remains. In all cases, if there is to be survival, whatever does remain must be capable of continued existence after its host body has died and also be capable itself of intentional action - it must have some form of life within it so that it can act. The relationship between the spirit body and the host being, in particular the host self, is another question that arises. If the spirit body is what survives then to what extent can that be counted as personal survival? This question is considered below.

11.2 Could a spirit body support personal survival?

A Spirit Body (SB) as described above, which constitutes the set of remains R3, is in effect a Separately Existing Entity (SEE) as described by Parfit and discussed in 7.1 above.

¹²³ Price 1968 page 251 but with no indication of the constitution of this higher matter,

¹²⁴ Out of body experiences might provide some evidence of the spirit body, but on the other hand might have a completely different explanation.

As this implies, an SB is a separate entity that stands in a certain relation to an ante-mortem person P1. But what is that relation? Is there a one-to-one relationship between SB and P1? Or will SB go on to relate to P2, P3 etc? Did SB pre-exist P1 or only come into existence when P1 did? These are difficult questions and the answers can only be speculative, but since it is SB that survives, the focus from the point of view of personal survival must be on it and not on P1. If that is given and if SB provides the continuity from the ante-mortem state to the post-mortem state, then, since SB already contains everything of the person, this seems in principle to be compatible with personal survival, at least at some level (such as the level of Psychologically Continuous Personal Survival as discussed in Section 7 above.) The survival process in this case should be described as SB losing its ante-mortem body and continuing to exist with remains R3. Essentially, SB needs to be viewed as a person and not some mysterious entity that suddenly manifests itself at the death of the ante-mortem self, having remained hidden throughout the life of that self.

The implications of this need to be explored a little deeper. For instance, there is the case where the brain has been wiped clean or completely re-mapped. What would happen to SB in this case? If it mirrored the fate of the physical body and had all memories etc wiped clean, then the ante-mortem person would truly be gone - its backup copy overwritten so to speak - but can it honestly be said that a spirit body was cleverer than that? i.e. that it could distinguish between the real original person and this unwanted interference? If such a distinction could not be made then the spirit bodies of unfortunate sufferers of e.g. diseases of the brain would be in trouble, but perhaps in these cases the memories are preserved even if they cannot be accessed and so the spirit body could overcome or take account of partial damage to the physical body. Even in the case of retro-amnesia sufferers¹²⁵ it would be necessary that the spirit body would preserve the memories and have its own way to access

¹²⁵ Bear et al 2001 pages 729-730.

them, again the problem being with the recollection of the memories rather than with the memories themselves. The case is more difficult if the memories are lost, gone forever, perhaps as a result of serious brain damage or surgery. If they were lost like this would the spirit body still retain them? This is very similar to the hypothetical case where the brain is wiped clean that was considered above.¹²⁶ There is at least a logical possibility that the backup provided by the spirit body *will* retain the excised memories - it could for instance be some form of non-overwritable memory: once there it never vanishes. In such a case the spirit body would survive intact the wiping clean of the brain and would then start to accumulate further information from the entity's subsequent experiences. But this is postulating a perfect system that can overcome all ante-mortem problems. Is this a reasonable position to take?

We also have to ask if it is possible for the ante-mortem person to identify with the spirit body in such a way that were the spirit body to be what survives then the ante-mortem person would feel that he had personally survived. This seems problematic at any level other than psychologically continuous personal survival. Even in the ante-mortem state the relationship between the person and the spirit body appears hard to understand. Retrospectively, while it could be accepted that the spirit body had survived would it also be accepted that the ante-mortem person had survived? Would not the spirit body say to itself "I, the spirit body of P1, have survived". The two (SB and P1) could only coincide if, as postulated above, the spirit body is really the person in our everyday ante-mortem world.

11.3 Quasi-embodied survival

The quasi-embodied situation, that is, the postulated survival of some form of spirit remains, is very similar to the discussion concerning disembodied survival in Section 9

¹²⁶ And discussed further in 7.1 above.

above. These spirit remains are supposed in some way to resemble the earthly body, but in a non-material or ephemeral way. They may of course have certain powers that enable them to communicate, in which case there would not be the problems that a pure disembodied entity appears to face, although one may be no closer to understanding *how* they are able to communicate. But as the examination deepens some potential difficulties can be seen. For example, can they see? Are they able to see other spirits and other potential objects occupying the spirit world? If they can, how does that work? How do they move about purposefully? Do they need to eat or otherwise take in energy? Do they form groups and seek out their family members or is it a solitary existence? There are clearly a large number of questions that could be asked and of course it is easy to ask the questions, but much more difficult to answer them.

It is possible of course that some form of re-embodiment for the spirit body takes place in another world, after which life can continue in a more 'normal' way. This is a form of reincarnation, but with the striking difference that the re-embodiment presumably corresponds in some way to the ante-mortem person as they were at or near the time of death. This is much closer to what would be understood as resurrection as it is a full person re-creation (in contrast to reincarnation where only aspects of a person's memory appear to survive).¹²⁷ It has been indicated previously how the information necessary for such a re-creation could be made available, and perhaps this information is in any event inherent in the spirit body remains, but it must be asked in the re-embodiment case how the re-growth into a potentially fully grown adult could occur? Does it occur instantly or very quickly or is the growth period equivalent to that of a human on earth? Is the post-mortem self aware during the growth period, or do they only 'wake-up' once it is complete?

¹²⁷ Although the prevalence of birthmarks and deformities (see Stevenson 1974) that correspond to injuries sustained by the previous incarnation indicates that memory may be the *minimum* to survive, not *all* that survives.

It is clear that the notion of a Spirit Body as the surviving entity of an ante-mortem person raises numerous complications that are over and above those that arise with the other remains types. This may be because a further entity is required and inevitably the question of its relation to the ante-mortem person then needs to be considered. Unfortunately there is not the space to enter further into these considerations in the present paper.

12. Conclusions

The various approaches to post-mortem existence that have been considered obviously all involve some form of existence for a self after its life here on earth is finished. In all cases, with the possible exception of reincarnation in this world, this existence seems quite a strange and mysterious one. The discussion has sought in the space available to elaborate what these various types of existence might be like but it has proved (probably unsurprisingly) quite difficult to make any headway. In so doing there has been an intention not to speculate about the next world (as Price has deliberately done for example) and it is of course as difficult as the question of post-mortem existence itself to determine what that next world might be like. But one feeling that comes across is one of solitariness. Humans are essentially alone with their thoughts here on earth but they do manage to share at least some those thoughts within a social framework of family, friends, colleagues etc. It must be hoped that if there is some sort of post-mortem existence then similar frameworks exist in the post-mortem world, for the prospect of being judged as part of some form of mass resurrection, or trying to communicate with whoever might be 'out there' while in a disembodied state, seems a rather unpleasant and lonely prospect. It would also seem that a form of post-mortem existence based on improvement with its endless (or almost endless) rebirths could come to be rather like the form of punishment meted out to Sisyphus. In these latter instances, it is the final imprint of the self at the point of death that is important for the post-mortem existence (i.e. the cumulative impact of all of the experiences during life), and generally one's episodic and many other memories would be surplus to requirements and may actually hinder what should ideally be a selfless progression.

There is no doubt that the various options that have been considered have some degree of plausibility in that they seem to be at least logically possible. There cannot for instance be agreement with Penelhum that the notion of disembodied existence is unintelligible (even if it

seems very strange and requires various support mechanisms to function). But all of the options (probably out of necessity) involve quite severe physiological mappings or reconstructions of the ante-mortem self which it is difficult to accept whilst still preserving identity. The most complex part would appear to be the problem of capturing the declarative and non-declarative memories, essentially the autobiographical memories, knowledge, dispositions etc. of an ante-mortem self, which are at least partly encoded at a very low level within the physical structure of the brain and are highly personalised. There is also a perhaps inevitable focus on personal survival. But really it is not necessary for personal survival to be so crucial. It is only so where the self feels the need to perpetuate itself and this self-perpetuation is what is of value. If the purpose of the ante-mortem/post-mortem cycle is 'improvement' of the self or progress along a path, then it might be better that there is no recollection of a previous life at all, or indeed of who one's self is (or was).

It can be accepted with Broad¹²⁸ that the vast majority of dead men have told no tales. But this should perhaps be read that they have told no tales *to us*. It does not mean that they are not there to tell any tales to anyone. It is certainly extremely difficult to comprehend how it might work but one or two further insights may perhaps have been gained into some of the issues involved, even if at the end the discussion is no closer to knowing whether it is possible or not. It has certainly not been shown that any concept of post-mortem existence is unintelligible or contradictory and the discussion has perhaps provided one or two areas for further consideration by both those who argue for and those who argue against any form of post-mortem existence.

¹²⁸ 1962 p428.

Appendices

Appendix A: Materiality and Immateriality

Appendix A1: The material/immaterial distinction

The distinction between what is material and what is immaterial arises at various times in this paper so it is worthwhile spending a little time exploring these terms, primarily through examples. For instance would an energy field such as an electromagnetic field be considered material or immaterial? And what about a shadow? And what about binary representations in a computer? Certainly it can be said that an electromagnetic field and similar phenomena are formed of certain electrical charges of particles in the atmosphere and in material objects as a result of being affected by the carriers of electromagnetic force, so they are in effect a particular configuration of existing material and so are essentially a property or state of that material. With a shadow, photons are prevented from continuing on their path by a physical barrier of some sort, so fewer photons pass through the shadowed area than elsewhere. So in this case there is a reduction of a particular type of material compared to elsewhere. In computer memory, at the binary level, a unit of storage takes a value of 0 or 1 depending on its electrical charge, which can be positive or negative. This can be simply represented in everyday life with a switch that is either on or off. It is the same switch; it just takes on one of two orientations, i.e. it has a different property or state in each case.

What is common to all the above examples is that they are dependent on the matter that is affected, the matter involved in the cause, and on the cause itself. There either has to be a switch to register the values of on or off, or there have to be molecules or other particles that are capable of being affected by an electromagnetic field. There also has to be the cause of the state, i.e. something generating the electromagnetic field, a light source causing a shadow,

something putting the switch into the on or off position. So the resulting phenomenon may not be obviously material but it is a state or property of something else that is material. Furthermore, the phenomenon is dependent for its existence on those material objects such that if the cause was not present then the effect would not be present. It can further be asked if there are any phenomena in the world of the type that are being considered that are not material and that are not dependent on anything material in the way described,¹²⁹ or at least might have been so dependent at some point in their existence but could be freed from that dependence? As perhaps with the separation of the mind from the body? Some writers¹³⁰ have argued that you can assert this of the mind but because the mind is *unique*, it is no use trying to look for other examples, the mind provides the only one and given this, it is usual to start from the premise that the mind is immaterial.¹³¹ Note also that successful personal survival does not necessarily imply that the mind cannot be material, since a part of what survives could be a *material representation* of the contents of the mind which is then used as a basis for the mind of the surviving person, whatever form that might take, thus achieving the continuity required from the ante-mortem state to the post-mortem state.¹³²

Appendix A2: Can something immaterial have spatial location?

The standard approach to this question is to say that something that is immaterial and unextended cannot be said to have a spatial location,¹³³ and this applies equally to the mind, which many take to be immaterial and unextended. Does the mind have spatial location?

¹²⁹ Note there are of course pure abstract concepts, also not material, that are not dependent on anything physical, such as Plato's forms, although even these are in a sense dependent for their initial conception on physical manifestations.

¹³⁰ See for example Broad 1962 page 416.

¹³¹ e.g. Descartes reaches this conclusion based on his doubt argument - he can doubt the very existence of his body and of all material things but not that there is something (he) doing the doubting, so it is at least logically possible that the mind can exist separately from the body (see Cottingham 1997 page 34). The argument says nothing of course about whether the mind can and does in fact exist independently of the body. Unfortunately the mind/body problem cannot be gone into too deeply here.

¹³² At least on certain criteria. What constitutes acceptable criteria is discussed further in Section 7.

¹³³ Although it is not as straightforward as it may appear at first sight - see Gideon Rosen's article on Abstract Objects - Rosen 2012.

Ryle, for example, would say not,¹³⁴ but there is a little more that can be said. It can certainly be stated where the mind is **not**, e.g. one's own mind is not located in one's foot, or next door, or in outer space; but this does not necessarily imply that one's mind is not located *anywhere*. In fact surely the general feeling is that it is located in one's head, somewhere behind one's eyes. Whilst the mind's location cannot necessarily be pinpointed precisely, it seems uncontroversial that it is in or in the vicinity of the brain.¹³⁵ This is not to say that the mind could not successfully be somewhere else, but in the normal way of thinking it would not make sense to say that, it just seems logical to say it is in the head. This conforms with one's normal experience. The mind thinks and thinking goes on in one's head, certainly not on the moon or anywhere else. Note that it is accepted that certain physical questions such as 'how large is the mind?' cannot be easily answered, but the issue of how much space a given thing might occupy is a different issue to its spatial location and even in the case of familiar physical objects is not always easy to answer.¹³⁶

It is probably uncontroversial when talking of abstract or ideal things that they do not have a spatial location. It would not be normal to identify a spatial location for the concepts of 'justice' or 'truth' for example, but the mind or what might survive the death of the body are not abstract concepts in the same way.

¹³⁴ See Ryle 1963 page 13: 'minds are not in space'.

¹³⁵ Although it must be said that traditional dualists, such as Descartes, do tend to be of the view that the mind does not have a location at all, one point at least on which monists and dualists may agree, so the argument here is against both positions.

¹³⁶ See Quinton 1965.

Appendix B: Mind and Soul

How is the relationship between the mind and the soul generally thought of? Descartes used the terms mind and soul interchangeably,¹³⁷ as if they were the same thing. Many other philosophy writers make little or no distinction between them. But they do seem different. It would seem to the writer, at least, that in general a person is aware of his/her mind, certainly their conscious mind, much if not all of the time; in essence it is what makes them what they are. But the soul in contrast seems much more hidden and deeply buried. There is a tendency not to think of the soul at all in the normal run of things. If one is asked to identify or delineate the soul, it is hard to do so. If a person were stripped of everything apart from the soul what would actually remain? Would it be their essential being, what that person truly is? Is it something that would be recognised? In general there seems a real distinction to be made between these two concepts and conflating the two seems to be a mistake. However, space dictates that very little is said about the soul in this paper. It is a subject that must remain for another day.

¹³⁷ See Cottingham 1997 page 22.

Appendix C: Communicating in a Disembodied World

It is important to explore how beings who inhabit a disembodied world can successfully communicate with each other. If a system cannot be devised then we have to question whether such a world is intelligible. The following describes a possible method, although it must always be remembered that any method has to function a) between beings who are non-material, and, b) it might have to be allowed that the environment within which they are situated is at least partly material.

Let there be disembodied beings A, B, C, etc. who are seeking to communicate within their world. Initially, none of them know of the existence of the others. A initiates a message in the form, say, of an indiscriminate broadcast (this needs to take the form of a general broadcast because initially A does not know if there is anyone within reach who is capable of receiving the message), which will hopefully be picked up by some or all of the disembodied selves in the range of A, including say B, who decides to reply. B can only reply by sending a similar broadcast response which of course A could pick up and a conversation could start. This assumes at this stage that there is no mechanism whereby B has an *address* or *identifier* of A allowing him to reply directly, although such an address could be included in A's message, assuming A knows what his address is, of course, This is considered more fully in what follows. Also even though telepathy seems to operate in the ante-mortem world without these complexities (as far as is known), this may well be because there is a physical element involved and the communication occurs between physical entities which are clearly not present in the disembodied post-mortem world. Of course C could also respond to A , as could D, E, F, G, etc. This method would work well if a single self responded but if many selves did how would A separate them, assuming A was trying to establish a one-to-one conversation, and issues of privacy need to be incorporated? It is not known if each self has an 'address' or unique signature to facilitate such separation, but some such mechanism is

clearly important. For instance each self could operate at a unique frequency or have a unique address of some sort which would separate one sender or receiver from another, rather like a computer network that operates with equipment E on the network that ignores all messages apart from those messages that have E's address associated with them, or those that are generally broadcast. Disembodied self A needs a mechanism to 'listen' to incoming messages to separate out those that are for A and ignore all others. This could prove onerous unless there is a multi-tasking capability, i.e. disembodied self A can do more than one thing at once, such as filter out messages whilst constructing a reply to an earlier message. A could of course ignore messages (and there will be times no doubt when listening for messages will be switched off) but in so doing A might well miss something important. There also has to be built-in security to ensure that eavesdropping is prevented, i.e. a message addressed to A should not be capable of interception by anyone else.

Even if A and B could establish a satisfactory communication, as soon as there is a gap in the exchanges, when the exchanges were re-established how would B recognise A from before and vice-versa? If their current communication referred back to their previous communications that would help and if the communication followed a certain style that would also help.¹³⁸ It would seem to be a requirement that they would need to utilise a name or other form of identification through some form of *avatar* - a representation of that being, perhaps an image from their bodily existence, although this presupposes that such an image can be transmitted as part of the telepathic communication. In fact it seems essential that as a minimum any transmitted message should start with the name of the sender and the name of the intended receiver, or 'ALL' if the message is intended for everyone, or if the name of the receiver is not known. So it has been identified that it is important for a disembodied self to have and utilise a *name*. Note also that a name really needs to be unique and no one entity

¹³⁸ But both of these assume that the disembodied self has some memory of previous communications as well as an appropriate 'background' as discussed above - this is an obvious point but does pre-suppose that a disembodied entity has this capability.

can be in a position to know if their name is unique - an independent mechanism is required to allocate names or reject any attempt to use a name that is already in use. The only way round this is to associate the name with some form of unique network address but while this prevents network problems it does not help recognition by others. In effect the process would be similar to communicating with someone across the internet or mobile telephone network using a text style of communication, although it could of course be richer in content by utilising a succession of images (rather like using a video telephone call as opposed to a series of text messages). This last requirement starts to introduce sophisticated control over the telepathic messages and routing; effectively a controlling infrastructure. But note also that the method and procedure used for the 'transmission' and 'receipt' of messages needs to be understood and utilised by all participants. Everyone must use a common 'language' and method to communicate. This might happen naturally as in ante-mortem life where entities learn (over time) how to communicate with one another, but not necessarily; again external forces may come into play. This leads to a requirement that all disembodied selves must function within a common framework or protocol if any degree of success is to be achieved. The need to resort to electronic analogies is unfortunate but these appear to come closest to replicating the circumstances that disembodied selves might find themselves in. Nevertheless, they are just analogies. Also, of course, electronic networks require energy and there has to be something of comparable energy within which the processes discussed here can operate.

There is the further point that the telephone network or internet uses devices at each end to communicate to people in language that they can understand and using sense data that they can process. So, for instance, the internet receives text typed by human touch and presents text or pictures for human sight to process and the telephone network receives sounds generated by the human voice and presents sounds for human hearing to process. These

interfaces between machines and human senses need their equivalent in the disembodied world but of course without the intermediate processing capability of the brain.

For a sensible conversation to be held, at least one that supported knowledge acquisition of some kind, there would on occasion be a requirement to check facts with an independent source. After all, it is common for memories to fail us or be confused or for us not to know certain things. How could such checking of facts be carried out in a disembodied state? There clearly would need to be a capability for such referencing.

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