

## IMMORTALITY – ON WHAT CONDITIONS?

***The Platonic World-View.*** The possibility of immortality is above all an issue for beings who may *not* be immortal, for whom this is not part of their definition. The immortality of angels or daemons, of great ideas, or the truth about the square on the hypotenuse serve only to exemplify what we mean by the word. I will therefore focus on the human soul and its possibility of a personal immortality; that is the most interesting and challenging option, and it is one for which Platonism furnishes us with the means of investigating. For us, it must be conditional, at least in any desirable sense of the word, owing to the soul's place in the hierarchy of being.

Platonic philosophy has always offered proofs of the immortality of the soul, but their effectiveness may not be felt unless one first locates them in the Platonic idea of reality in general. That involves a serious divergence from common sense, because the common sense standard of concrete reality is based on that of material objects. If one's thinking is dominated consciously or unconsciously by a paradigm of that kind, proofs of the immortality of the soul can easily appear ineffectual, no matter how well reasoned.

To be rid of this obstruction, one must see how material concreteness is an appearance caused by relations between entities which have only a low level of reality. Material things change, and interact and destroy one another in ways which have an impact on the imagination and the feelings, and so one ignores the fact that these changes signify only a deficiency of reality in material things, and not a plenitude of it, one which reveals their inability to retain their identities and existences.

The resistance material objects offer to one's hands proves nothing, because the hands have the same material nature as they have. The fact that they are concrete to one another is as deceptive as the way two very small equal weights level the balance just as readily as would two large equal weights. In Thomas Taylor's words, this means that ". . .one debile thing falling on another, possesses with respect to it the same efficacy and power as nonentity falling on nonentity." (Plotinus, Enn.III, 6, 6), adding that "the impulsions and concussions" between material bodies arouse "the phantasms of sense," which are taken for reality. In the context of a physical reality as insubstantial as that, there need be no question of the soul's appearing to be a mere reified abstraction, or a ghostly duplicate of oneself.

[Among bodies, it is the inorganic kind which have the least share of reality, since they have no means of self-restoration, whereas organic or living bodies are in a sense halfway between materiality and true being. They can be durable in ways which cannot be matched by any other material entities, because every particle of them is replaceable.]

**The Platonic Arguments.** Plato's arguments for the immortality of the soul are direct applications of the Theory of Forms, and require us to be able to exclude the soul from the class of material things. In the *Phaedo*, (71C-E) he begins with the realm of phenomena, where opposites always appear to arise from one another, as in

the cases of hot and cold, and large and small. It appears to be the same with sleep and waking, life and death as well. The constant one-to-one symmetry in these things is all too evident to sense-perception.

To disengage the soul from such phenomena requires us to accept the conclusion that the soul is not wholly natural, because it is not a compound of Form and matter. It participates in all the Forms, but in a way which does not possess them as material instantiations, and its properties of living and imparting movement are invariable and inalienable in it.

This position was reached after Plato had considered the question of the soul's being simply an entelechy of the body, that is, an organizing principle of the body, inseparable from it in the manner of an Aristotelian Form and not transcending it. In the dialogue this idea was discounted on the grounds that the soul has a range of possibilities which have no equivalents among the possibilities of the body. An example of this, one given by Plotinus, is the change that takes place in the soul when one goes to sleep, while the body remains almost unaltered. By the same reasoning, if the soul were just an entelechy, it would only be possible for us to do things that were required by the body; we should be wholly controlled by its needs, and our actions would be as predictable as those of animals.

However, all such phenomena of natural change consist in combinations of Forms with matter, while the Forms themselves cannot change from one

kind to another, whence they mutually exclude one another in any given object. If one of them, say the Form of Heat, forcibly enters an object, the opposite Form can no longer be instantiated there, and must withdraw from it. This reasoning is then applied to soul and body and the states of life and death, but with the difference that life inheres in the soul as part of its essential nature, whereas life is manifest in the body only in the way in which heat is manifest in hot objects, that is as an instantiation. (see *Phaedo* 79C-E, 80A))

When the material of the body is no longer susceptible to its informing action, the soul therefore can only withdraw from it, as the continuance of its paradigmatic nature requires.

However, this transcendental idea of the soul leaves room for misunderstandings about the soul's involvement in change. If the soul is immortal, it must always retain its own nature unaltered, but that would seem to conflict with the fact that the soul is always subject to processes of change, both from within and from without. It may also undergo corruptive moral changes, which nevertheless do not destroy it, as Plato pointed out in connection with its immortality.

If it undergoes *any* kind of change, along with material things, why should the natural implications of change be neutralized in regard to the soul, but not to anything else? Unlike sense-objects, the soul is only partially in the realm of change because it has the Form-principle of unity in itself, and not an imposed or accidental unity. It therefore has an active and essential unity, no matter

how involved it may be with the countless things which are wholly subject to change and have no unity of their own.

Change therefore affects the soul's consciousness, but not its substance, and that is why we always have the awareness of permanence which is the necessary basis for the awareness of change. This possession of the permanent manifests the soul's unity and transcendence over external things, with the result that it is in the realm of change, matter and multiplicity without being part of it.

The exemption of the soul from destruction by qualitative change also follows from this because, as Plotinus says, (Enn. IV, 7, 11), this kind of change can only happen where Form is taken from beings compounded of Form and matter, leaving only matter. At the same time, the body, like all material things, does consist in a union of Form and matter, which is another reason why the soul cannot be compounded in this manner, or else it would be merely a part of the body. Besides, if the soul had matter in its composition, it could be made visible, and have a measurable weight, and it could be acted on directly by physical methods.

Plotinus approaches immortality from the point of view of unity, drawing attention to the fact that in the multitude of things as we perceive them there is a unity which does not come from that multitude, but from the percipient, through whom alone each part of the perceived is related to all the others. There can be no question here of a multitude of points in the external world

acting on a corresponding multitude in the soul, as Plotinus says "For if it (the ruling part of the soul) had magnitude, it would be co-divided with the objects of sensible perception. Hence if one part of it (the soul) had magnitude, it would be co-divided with the objects of sensible perception. In this case(?) one part of the soul would perceive a part of the sensible object, and nothing in us would have the apprehension of the whole of a sensible thing." (Enn.IV, 7, 6).

If the soul's impressions were received in a material mode, the latest ones would either blot out the previous ones, or else the previous ones would be fixed, and prevent the reception of the later ones. No such thing happens, of course, because the soul is not bound by the hard alternatives which apply to material things. The different senses, relating to the same object, must all report to a central unifying consciousness, and this must be exempt from the separate characteristics of the different senses.

**An Impersonal Immortality.** If we accept the premises of Platonism, we can reasonably accept the proofs for the immortality of the soul as given in the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*, but there still remains a major issue unresolved. Exactly how is "soul" to be understood? The above proofs are based on the soul's essential faculties, primarily those of cognition, and it may be that what is immortal may consist of those faculties alone. Although the condition of the body may worsen in various ways during one's lifetime, one always finds the rules of logic to be equally true, and that constant objects like

the sun and moon, or a familiar old house, always look the same, in which case the core of consciousness must be unharmed by time and change, although it is possible that nothing else in us is.

These essential faculties are by no means the same thing as one's personal soul or self, even though they have a central place in it. If we are right in taking them to be immortal, then, there is no apparent reason why they should not proceed to perform the same functions in other souls and persons after our own. Besides, it could be the case that everything one takes to be one's personality may be caused only by the kind of body one has, with the soul merely giving it overt expression as long as the body lasts. In that case, here again we would have to assume that the soul must proceed to animate other bodies, rather like someone getting new clothes, or an actor learning new roles. (Quote *Surangama Sutra*)

***The Individual Form.*** If there were no intrinsic relation between soul and body, the Platonic proofs would be valid only for an impersonal immortality. The Christian answer to this problem is to confirm the identity in the soul by means of the resurrection of the body, but Platonism has an answer of its own which is given by Plotinus in *Enn.V, 7, 1-3*, where he puts forward the idea that there are Forms of individual persons.

This, he says, is a consequence of the limitlessness of the Intellectual Principle, which is far more than merely quantitative. We could only deny this by putting limitations of our own on the Divine power. Without the individual Forms, the differences between one individual

and another would amount to nothing more than so many different failures to fully instantiate the Form of Man itself. Different selves would be unreal.

As opposed to this, the conception of the individual Form solves the problem of the relation between soul and body, because it means that the soul must be the Form of the body in the Platonic sense, instead of the Aristotelian sense in which "the Form of the body" is used in Scholastic philosophy.

If we follow Platonic principles, then, the qualities making up one's personality must be caused by the soul and not by the body, and therefore the eventual separation of soul from body would mean that the soul will after all possess the personality as well as the purely intellectual faculties; its identity would be essential and inalienable. The material body simply manifests the soul in its physical qualities and behaviour, while nothing is caused by it as such. All its dignity comes from its intimate relation with the soul.

The individual Form differs from all other kinds of Form in that it is capable of only one instantiation. This means that souls have a hybrid nature, being a class of Forms in which the properties of both Forms and individual entities are combined. Being such, they are a unifying bond between the classes of Forms and of particulars which, without them, would be mutually exclusive.

This idea is according to the Platonic principle that there must always be mean terms between all the different



kinds, because the order of being is a continuum. A mathematical illustration of this can be seen where  $A \times B$  is a mean between  $A^2$  and  $B^2$ : this mean has a hybrid nature, combining A and B.

The Forms are all present in the soul, but not as they are in their universal state, but neither are they instantiated in the soul. As possessed by the soul, they are in a state which is intermediate between transcendence and material instantiation, and this corresponds precisely to the intermediate position of the soul between the universal Forms and individual things.

There is another argument which Plotinus does not dwell on, to the effect that if the soul were not a Form, it would not be possible for a Platonist to say that he knows any other persons, because it is basic to Platonism that knowledge is exclusively of Forms. Nobody in fact doubts that they know some other persons, and that must mean that they know the Forms which are instantiated as those persons.

***Individual Forms and Plenitude.*** The fact that the Forms differ very greatly in their degrees of universality, should alert us to the possibility that they could constitute an order in which the final members are not universal at all, but uniquely individual. According to Platonic principles, this is in fact a necessary consequence of the system of the Forms. As Plotinus puts it: "The prior in its being will remain unalterably in its native seat; but there is the lower phase, begotten to it by an ineffable faculty of being. . . To this power we cannot impute any halt, any limit of jealous grudging;

it must move ever outwards until the Universe is accomplished to the ultimate possibility." (Enn. IV, 8, 6), and he affirms it in many other places as well. Every instance of this process involves the principle which in modern times has been called "The Principle of Plenitude" by A.O.Lovejoy in his book *The Great Chain of being*. Proclus presents the same conception in *Elements of Theology* props.25-30.

There is a rather surprising and unusual paradox involved in this, namely, that the individual should be a necessary consequence of the universal, and not a negation of it, and it is a paradox which does not result from a defect in the theory, but rather comes wholly from the internal logic of the Forms or universals themselves.

***Immortal Truth and Immortal Soul.*** In the *Soliloquies*, St.Augustine proves that truth is immortal, and then concludes with the idea that the soul, which knows truths, must be immortal likewise, but this is only proposed, and not proved:

"It (the truth) cries out that it lives in you, that it is immortal, and that its home cannot be taken from it by any death of the body."(ibid. p.91). Nevertheless, the fact remains that whether they have homes or not, eternal truths stand on their own, independently of all minds that know them, or they could not be objective, but everything depends on exactly *how* the truth is contained in the soul.

If the truth were in the soul like a diamond in a wooden box, for example, the imperishable nature of truth would obviously not be shared by the soul, any more than

the properties of the diamond would be shared by the box. In fact, the truth is not in the soul by any crude juxtaposition, so how exactly is it contained? It may be contained in the mind in the way in which the Form of the Circle is "contained" or instantiated in a circular object. This relation is more subtle, but even so, a circular material object by no means shares in the eternity of the Circular Itself. A Form as such is never shared by the material principle, no matter how well the latter may manifest it, any more than a canvas is altered in its essential nature by the picture painted on it. Even more clearly, an eternal truth in words on paper does nothing for the paper.

It has already been shown that the soul has no matter and so cannot be a medium for instantiations of Forms; if it were, it would be of the same nature as the body, and it would not be capable of universal ideas. Thus the truth cannot be in the soul in the manner of a Form in matter. Truth and Forms are nevertheless "in" the soul, but not in any material way, as can be seen from the fact that all the colours are present together in the soul, where they are both combined and yet separate from one another, whereas in a material entity all the colours together would be reduced to dark brown or black. The same goes for the Forms of great and small, heavy and light, true and false, which are present in the mind without any need to become mixed or diluted in each other.

However the Forms are by definition universals, whereas the soul is individual, having only a unique

instantiation, even though it is an individual Form. In view of this difference, one cannot assume without further ado that the soul must transcend time in the same way as the universals do. Psychologically, on the other hand, there is no problem here, because when a truth is understood, it is not felt to come as a reminder of one's own mortality; on the contrary, the satisfaction it brings includes a subjective sense of sharing in the eternal nature of truth. That, of course could not rule out the possibility of rational beings who would not respond in this manner.

The answer therefore must be sought in the essential natures of both souls and Forms, not in subjective responses. All Forms apart from the soul have a degree of infinity, according to which they are capable of being instantiated in an infinite number of things. If the soul also has this infinity, while having only one instantiation, it must take the form of an infinity of intellectual conceptions possible for it; in other words, its power of knowing is its proper mode of infinity.

This degree of infinity implies a corresponding degree of eternity, because the transcendence of finite quantities implicit in infinity must include a like transcendence of finite lengths of time, since they are a sub-category among all the finite quantities which the soul's infinity transcends. In general terms, any entity in which there is an element of infinity is outside the category of things which are finite in all respects, like material objects, whence it must be outside the category of things which can perish.

Finally, the fullest answer to the problem can be found in what was said about the Knower, the Known, and the Act of Knowing in *The Primal Certainty*. In E.T. props.167-169, Proclus explains how the intelligence is an object for itself, saying that "there is an Intelligible in the Intelligence, and an Intelligence in the Intelligible." These two realities are interchangeable, since the mind is able to duplicate itself in this manner for self-reflection. Thus the knowing mind is most of all certain of the intelligence which is its own content. In the words of Coleridge, this involves "a perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into object and subject, which pre-suppose each other, and can exist only as antitheses." (*Bio.Lit.* Ch.XII, Thesis vi).

The next step is to consider further the nature of the content of the intelligence which relates to itself in this manner, which Proclus does in E.T. Props.176 and 177. The content of the intelligence consists of an epitome of all the Forms, which are fused in it without being confused: ". . .then all the Forms, being contained in a single intelligence devoid of parts are united with one another, and all interpenetrate all." (*ibid.* Prop.176). Similarly, it follows that this union means that all Forms are united in the soul: "Every intelligence is a complete sum of Forms." (*ibid.* Prop.177). This does not mean that all the Forms are *equally* present in each soul, nor in the same way, but that the endless possibilities of variation and combination are the grounds for unique personalities.

It can now be seen that the identity of the

intelligence as the Knower with himself as the Known means implicitly an identity of the souls as Knowers with all the Forms as well, and this identity obviously includes the immortal nature of the Forms. In this way, the conclusion indicated by Augustine above is confirmed. His distinction between "the old or exterior man" and "the new or inward man," is a logical result of the difference between the inner self which possesses immortality both naturally and supernaturally, and the physical self, which can only live out its natural life-cycle. (This is in fact Augustine's commentary on what St. Paul says in 2. Cor. 4:16).

This is why he says that the discovery of the truth "renews" us, since this kind of activity vitalizes our inward or "new" self, which cannot age with our bodily nature: "So the inward man is reborn, and the outward man decays day by day." (*Of True Religion*, xl, 74). The nature of truth is demonstrably immortal, because the certainty that there is something true is immovable. He adds: "Wherever this is seen, there is a light which transcends space and time and all phantasms that spring from spatial and temporal things." (*ibid.*) This light is experienced by the soul, but it still does not conclude the question. The relation between soul and intellect must next be considered.

***Intellect and Immortality.*** There is a traditional argument for the immortality of the soul which serves also for the intrinsic merit of the intellectual life. This is based on the close relationship between the soul and the eternal realities, which has already been

considered. But in the real world as we know it, is anyone really made morally better, let alone immortal, as a result of a devotion to intellectual values, and a commitment to the truth-seeking faculty? Although some such thing has long been believed, there is a disturbing lack of evidence for it in the world of today. The most intellectual person could even be the most morally corrupted, and according to C.G.Jung the best qualities of the heart and of the head never occur in the same person. Besides, a strong intellect may be undeceived about an infinity of things and still be deceived about its possessor's relation to any number of other persons or to the purpose of intellectuality itself.

And yet there remains the simple intuition that high and universal matters are far from the mortal realm in which the commonest conflicts and corruptions arise, so that it would seem to follow that such a rarefied pursuit ought to release one from the moral traps into which most people fall. There is the old adage: "as you think, so you will be." But even that truth is endangered when the philosopher takes this to mean that he can attribute the moral purity of ideas to himself by a direct act of choice. Nevertheless, truth and virtue are both essentially supernatural; to separate them is to devalue both of them. But just as clearly, not just any intellectual activity can suffice to realize its spiritual potential and make it a vocation in the religious sense of the word. The exact nature of one's commitment to it is both essential and hard to define.

As St. Augustine testifies, a high spiritual value has in fact been accorded to the life directed to wisdom since ancient times. This can also be seen in from certain passages in the *Philokalia*:

"The intellect manifests itself in the soul, and nature in the body. The soul is divinized through the intellect, but the nature of the body makes the soul grow slack. Nature is present in all bodies, but intellect is not present in every soul; and so not every soul is saved." And:

"The soul is in the world because it is begotten; but the intellect transcends the world, because it is unbegotten."

(*Philokalia*, vol.1, St. Anthony the Great, "On the character of men," 135 & 136.

The attribution of this text to St. Anthony is disputed, mainly because of the idea of some part of us being unbegotten, and therefore presumably uncreated. Nevertheless, something important is being referred to here, namely, that the intellectual faculty in mankind has a perfection equivalent to that of the Forms to which it relates. Even though it is not self-existent as God is, (i.e. its non-existence is conceivable), it does not participate in the relativities of nature as one's bodily life does. We cannot say it is literally uncreated, therefore, but it still belongs to a higher order of creation than that of the creatures in nature, and that can justify what is said of it in the above texts, even though they may be lacking in precision.

I have also referred to the spiritual role of the intellect in *Foundations of Free Will*, to maintain that it could not be part of creation in general and still be meaningful, but rather that a faculty of the human soul



making it capable of relating to intellect is delegated by the Creator to all those whose souls are rational by nature, if not by choice. This special status of the intellect means that it must be above the level of being on which sinful propensities and actions arise. This fact alone would support the conclusion that the more one is involved with it, the more it should remove one from moral and spiritual error. This would clearly support what is said of it in the above text.

The soul's intellectual faculty, or *synderesis*, is a mean between the natural and the supernatural, so that its Divine or supernatural powers are objectively real, and that is why it is equated with God in cultures where God's revelation of Himself is not known. Philip Sherrard treats this reality as follows:

"[patristic] theologians do recognize the presence in man of something which, if it is not divine, is yet not un-divine; which if it is not uncreated, is yet not created." This, he says, is "a point of unity between his (man's) spirit and the spirit of God: some organ on the borders, so to speak, of the created and the uncreated." (*The Rape of Man and Nature*, Ch.1, p.32)

The reason Sherrard gives for this reality is that, without it, a huge amount of recorded Christian spiritual experience would be without meaning and without foundation.

Without the transcendent intellect all accounts of spiritual experience could only be more or less disguised forms of moralizing in relation to the natural life

common to all. Here, then, is the issue upon which the argument of St. Augustine from knowledge of eternal truths (see Soliloquies. . .) comes to a head: the soul is naturally united to the intellectual faculty, and the intellect is outside nature and creation. Augustine did not take the argument explicitly to the above conclusion, that the intellect is as eternal as the eternal realities it knows, and that the soul is so likewise by participation. The True Itself, the Beautiful Itself, the Just Itself are, like all the Forms, divine without any implication that they are God, and the same applies to the rational soul. One speaks of the soul's "intellectual faculty" because it cannot be equated with the *Nous* itself since it is always capable of error.

[This conclusion concerning the *Nous* is also the crux of the difference between Platonism and Christianity on the one hand, and the monistic theory of Advaita Vedanta on the other. Its ignoring of the difference between the divine and God as such makes Advaita doctrine look like a mutilated and grossly simplified form of Platonism].

***Soul in the Hierarchy of Being.*** The four principal parts of the Hierarchy of Being are, from the lowest, the order of material objects or bodies, these being subject to space, time, and multiplicity, and they are wholly contained by those external dimensions. They have no principle of unity in them, but in every case they have only the kind of unity which exists as an instantiation of a Form which is no part of them, and so they are capable of endless subdivision.

The next order is that of souls, which includes many kinds besides the human or rational kind, as all livening things are ensouled. These are subject to time, but not to space, and they have a principle of unity in them because of which they are indivisible. This is what assimilates them to the Forms. Even though subject to time, rational souls are not wholly in it as non-rational ones and material things are, because rational souls can relate to non-temporal reality as well as to temporal. The conscious contents of such a soul are temporal when sense perception predominates in it, but not when it is focused on ideas and values. While souls are always either wholly or partially involved in the passage of time, they are not aged by that, unlike bodily entities.

Thus human or rational souls are intrinsically only half-subject to time, since temporal change affects their mental faculties, but not their substances in which these faculties inhere. Since they are in no way spatial by nature, their principle of unity is outside the objects

of perception. The non-rational souls which animate all the non-human forms of life are the entities which Leibniz called "monads" because of their essential unity, although their consciousness never extends outside time.

These characteristics of rational souls or rational monads have important consequences for them which have no equivalent in any of the other orders of being. Their nature is that of mediator between the realms of matter and spirit, while being subject to no determination as to much they should commit their energies in either direction. A freedom of choice is thus part of their essence, the choice between being influenced or controlled from above or from below their level of being. The self-motive energies of the soul cannot by definition be moved directly for it by other beings, whether above or below its own level; the act of directing its energies is entirely its own. Inevitably, countless possibilities here become grouped under just two headings: the joining of beings with others of a similar nature, or of beings with rigorously different natures.

No one knows this in the earliest years of life, of course, because the possibility that preference can be given to different kinds of reality is learned slowly, if at all.

(A further six lines were added, 21/12/15, but were deleted by Windows Updates).

See Diary for 12/9/15 for extra lines.

***The Problem of Pre-Existence.*** The beliefs in reincarnation and in the long-term pre-existence of the soul are so closely related that the latter is really an expanded statement of the former; the idea that if the soul will continue to exist for endless ages, it must imply that it has already lived on earth in countless embodied existences before its present one. This conception is to be found in wisdom doctrines much more readily than the idea of individual creation at conception. But for all its appearance of intelligence, it can be shown to be based on the following false premise: *that every quantity must be either wholly finite or wholly infinite.*

Although this premise is demonstrably untrue, its untruth was never noticed either by Proclus or by his contemporaries, and it remained unnoticed until modern times. Accordingly, Proclus based Proposition 206 of his *Elements of Theology* on the false premise, stating that the infinite duration of a soul means that it is incarnated an infinite number of times, even though he does not say whether he himself would be reincarnated. He says that "what has no end cannot have had a beginning," and hence what has no beginning has no end. Thus he clearly asserts that an eternal life cannot start from, or finish, at a point in time, just as though this were a self-evident axiom. Final release from cosmic conditions, or salvation as Christians understand it, would be entirely excluded by this.

In reality, there is no need for any infinite quantity to be infinite and nothing else; there are different

orders of infinity, besides which, infinite and finite quantities do in fact combine in all sorts of ways. The idea of necessary pre-existence for the immortal soul depends on the idea of exclusively finite and exclusively infinite quantities: it therefore could not be thought that a progression might start from the finite and rise to the infinite, because that would require a combination of the finite with the infinite. In this case, there would be no alternative to an immortality endless in both directions, and therefore to reincarnation, and that in turn would imply Monism, since it reduces personalities to empty masks. Everyone would be a reincarnation of someone else, and so on *ad infinitum*, and all identities would be transient, illusory phenomena.

Plato himself, it appears, thought that if the soul was immortal (*athanatos*) it must also be uncreated (*agenetos*), because it possessed knowledge "for all time." But this too was because of ignorance of the relations between the infinite and the finite. In this case, immortality could only be impersonal, since there could be no point in asking which one should be immortal among an endless series of incarnations. Once again, only the cognitive principle of the soul could be involved.

That the all-infinite or all-finite options are not valid can be seen from the fact that the series of all numbers extends to infinity after starting from one, so that in fact the series is finite in one direction and infinite in the other; thus in this case infinity is

reached via finites, which does not mean a process of counting. Similarly, the dimensions of space combine the finite with the infinite, where an infinite line has no extension in a surface or a volume; an infinite surface has no volume; and the infinite volume of all three dimensions is just one element in the succession of temporal states. An infinite series in which each term is half the last one has a *finite* sum, as in  $1 + 1/2 + 1/4 + 1/8 + 1/16 . . .$  which converges on a total of 2, as the series goes to infinity. This is a case of a finite which is reached by way of an infinite, and obviously combining them. Finally, there is the fact that there are different "sizes" of infinities, just as there are of finites: the series 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, . . . is just as infinite as the full series 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, . . . even though it contains only one-tenth as many numbers. In this way, finite and infinite could be said to combine in all proportions.

Such interactions between the finite and the infinite prove that there is nothing to object against the idea that each person is created at a moment in time with a capacity for immortality; instead, the truly irrational alternative is the idea that immortality can only be wholly infinite and therefore impersonal. In regard to Plato's conception that the certainty of knowledge by mental recognition, or by recollection, it follows that this does not literally imply an infinity of previous life for the soul. It implies the reality of innate ideas in the soul, of course, but the certainty of such knowledge does not result from the mere passage of time.

One cannot make a false belief become true by holding it for a long time. Thus what the soul knows "for all time" is really what it knows *outside all time*.

The parallel between the infinite series of the integers and the destiny of the immortal soul is in certain respects incomplete, however, because the continuation of the soul's existence is that of a series of states within a single entity, whereas the series of numbers consists in relations between different entities which reside in the conceptual unity of the class "number," and not within an individual substance.

The idea of new immortal souls coming into being during the period of a world, and not just at its creation as a whole, involves the idea that creation was not completed at the beginning, but that new forms of creation continually arise during the existence of the world. It also involves the idea that creation means the creation of spiritual beings as well as material things, and that there is not a fixed number of souls being for ever recycled.

Does this issue create more problems for Platonism than for Christianity, or vice-versa? This is not to suggest that the mere passage of time is the cause of new beings that are in effect solely the progeny of the earlier ones, as with evolution, but rather that the new forms of existence which arise are without dependence on those which exist already, whatever similarities there may be between them. The original state of creation, although complete in itself, is therefore not definitive, but on



the contrary the continuation of creation on a reduced scale is part of the nature of the world.

Thus new possibilities continue to be realized, and that makes the world continuous in quality with its origin.

### ***A View of Mortality.***

I would like to end with an unusual view of mortal life, one of Egyptian origin, given by Maurice Nicoll in *Living Time*. It shows that there is a prospect for the outward or material self beyond that of progressive decay, one which anticipates the Resurrection. What we know about our mortality is almost entirely owing to our sense-perception, and the biggest problem with sense-perception is that it always gives both information and illusion thoroughly mixed. In the world it presents us with, creation and destruction are always *equal*: everything within it begins to exist, exists for a time, and is then obliterated.

Thus everything in this realm happens as though there were two Gods, one who only creates, and another who only destroys. This is the nightmare aspect of sensation, in which destruction is not only equal to creation, but is apparently the stronger, since it always has the last word. The senses continually keep confirming this, until we might imagine that existence itself was something artificial and unstable, and that the only true equilibrium was non-existence.

This can be answered on its own physical level,

provided that a mathematical way of thinking is acceptable. Behind all the appearances of impermanence, everything that exists can be seen to consist of an extremely long series of extensions-of-being, whether of a person, an animal, or a material object, each of which is identified by a combination of spatial and temporal positions, and each of those positions is unique, unshareable, and immovable. The whole existent entity is the unique integral-sum of all these unique elements.

Could such a thing as that be destroyed by an event which occupies but one moment in time? Such destruction can only impinge on one of its countless space-time extensions, that being the last of them, but it can have no power over any of its previous ones, which make up the true body of the person, animal, or material object in question. This shows that the menacing appearance of destruction is owing to the fact sensation can grasp only things which can appear in a passing moment.

This extended mode of being, however, does not add up to immortality, except in a symbolic manner. It is physically indestructible by the natural forces known to us, so that it could be taken as a mean condition between mortality and immortality, but no more than that. The much-extended psycho-physical self it accounts for is still a contingency in the natural order and part of a world with no prospect of immortality of its own. Its exemption from natural forces therefore does not mean exemption from Divine or cosmic forces, when they bring one world-cycle to an end and start another one. True immortality means a removal of the self to a state of

being free from the dilutions of non-being which are always present in nature as we know it. At the same time, this enlarged idea of the self gives a fuller idea of the subject who is capable of immortality.

Sources for the Principle of Plenitude:

Plotinus, Enn. II, 9, 3; II, 9, 8; III, 2, 11;  
III, 2, 14; III, 3, 7; IV, 8, 6; IV 8, 7; V, 4,1;  
Proclus: E.T. Props. 25 - 30