

December 1971

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### Recommended Citation

Griffin, David (1971) "The Possibility of Subjective Immortality in Whitehead's Philosophy," *University of Dayton Review*. Vol. 8: No. 3, Article 7.

Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/udr/vol8/iss3/7>

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# The Possibility of Subjective Immortality in Whitehead's Philosophy

David Griffin

As far as the idea of immortality is concerned, Alfred North Whitehead was primarily interested in the idea of "objective" immortality, the idea that all the experiences, especially all the values we finite actualities achieve, are vividly preserved and treasured everlastingly by the divine actuality. He spoke only rarely about "subjective" immortality, i.e., the issue as to whether the human subject might continue to have experiences after bodily death. However, he did say that his philosophy was "entirely neutral" on this question.<sup>1</sup> By this he meant that his view did not entail that the human soul was necessarily immortal, on the one hand, nor that its immortality was ontologically impossible, on the other.

The purpose of this paper is to explain, as clearly as possible for those unfamiliar with Whitehead's philosophy, how it allows for the possibility of subjective immortality. As Whitehead recognized, if one's ontology is neutral on the question, there is no reason why the question should not be decided on the basis of "more special evidence," if there be any that is trustworthy. But the ontological considerations are not thereby useless, for few of us will accept anything as really being evidence, no matter how well attested, if it falls outside the bounds of what our ontologies, explicit or implicit, allow as possible.<sup>2</sup> If such phenomena appear in disciplines that have achieved respectability, we call them "anomalies;" if they are discovered in a more suspect field of inquiry, we use a less dignified word.

There are many reasons for the decline in modern times of belief in life after death. Of central importance are some strictly philosophical assumptions about the nature of man. The rather common-sense dualistic view of man's soul as ontologically different in kind from material entities, of which his body is composed, fell into disrepute. It was found to be impossible in principle to account for the interaction between material substances, which occupy space, are impenetrable, and operate totally in terms of efficient causation, and a purely spiritual entity, which occupies no space, has no solidity, and must be thought to operate in terms of final causation. Hence, philosophies which began with this dualistic premise were either radically incoherent, insofar as they could not intelligibly account for the interaction of the mind and body (Descartes), or radically incredible, insofar as they tried to overcome the incoherence by denying the reality of the interaction (Malebranche).

Partly because of these difficulties, many have accepted a view of man in which

the mind or soul is not a full-fledged actuality. This may be based primarily on an ontological materialism, in line with Thomas Hobbes, in which case the term "mind" is merely a short-hand designation for some functions performed by the brain, or at most refers to some "epiphenomenon" or by-product of the brain. In any case, the mind is not an entity belonging to the privileged class of the "really real." Or this denial may be based more upon epistemological considerations. Many, in line with the empirical principle that non-experienced entities should not be affirmed, and in fact cannot be meaningfully discussed, follow Hume in denying the experiencedness, and hence the meaningfulness, and thus by implication the reality, of the human soul.<sup>3</sup>

In the later developments of the philosophical tradition rooted primarily in the British empiricists, this denial may be based, ostensibly at least, more upon linguistic than upon ontological or epistemological considerations. For example, it has been claimed that thinking of the mind as a distinct reality is a "category mistake," parallel to thinking of "the University" as an entity distinct from, and thereby in the same category as, its various parts, whereas the truth is that the term "University" simply refers to the *organization* of the various parts. We are said to use the term "mind" simply to refer to the organization of the brain for certain functions.<sup>4</sup>

In any case, whether the starting point is considered to be ontological, epistemological, or linguistic, the implication of much modern thought is the same, so far as the question of immortality is concerned: the mind is not considered as an actuality with even any partial autonomy in relation to the body, but either as in some sense identical with the body or brain, or at least some aspects of its behavior, or at most a non-efficacious by-product of the same. Hence the question of the psyche's survival of the body's death cannot be meaningfully entertained. And as long as some such view of man is held, no potentially falsifying evidence would be accepted as genuine. Even if twelve of the most hard-headed members of the American Philosophical Association were to claim independently to have chatted last evening with Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell, most of the rest of the membership would remain incredulous, seeking some "natural" explanation for the coincidence, and regretting the departure of their twelve brethren from the ranks of the trustworthy.

## I. ACTUAL OCCASIONS AND SERIALY ORDERED SOCIETIES

The first relevant point about Whitehead's philosophy is that he is neither a dualist nor a materialist, and is yet a pluralistic realist. He has only one type of actual entities, and these entities are all *occasions of experience*. "Experience" here emphatically should not be equated with sense experience, or consciousness. Only a relatively few actual occasions have these very high-grade forms of experience. Whitehead's nearest ancestor here is Leibniz, with his monads that were all the same ontologically or structurally, but varied greatly in degree of perception. However, Leibniz denied causal interaction between his monads—they

were "windowless," and hence did not really "perceive" each other. Whitehead holds that each actual entity is temporally short, as well as spatially atomic. Each occasion begins as an open window, so to speak, and unifies the data received from its environment into an experienced unity. Hence, each occasion of experience begins by perceiving (Whitehead prefers to say "prehending") other occasions. And "perception" at this low level is simply the reverse side of efficient causality. That is, if A is one of the efficient causes of B, then B "prehends" A.

What are examples of these actual occasions, or occasions of experience? The only example you know immediately is yourself in this moment. However, Whitehead does not mean that the total figure that you see in the mirror is an actual entity. This way of approaching the "really real" would be to take the data of sense experience as primary, which is precisely what Whitehead is rejecting. Rather he means to point you to that experience which is "you" at this moment—that total experience which brings into a unity your memories, emotions, purposes, anticipations, bodily feelings, and sense experience. This total experience here and now is an occasion of experience, and this is his paradigm for indicating what he means by an actual entity. All other actual entities are to be thought in analogy with this immediately experienced really real thing.

This idea is so different from what we consider common sense that it is difficult to grasp. (My impression is that it is more difficult to grasp, than it is to accept once it has been grasped. But in any case, my purpose in this paper is to try to explain, not to defend.) Whitehead does not suggest that you derive your notions about the real in the first place from what you touch and see. The objects that are experienced or inferred in this way are considered by Whitehead to be mere abstractions or aggregates. Rather than taking some *part* of the content of your experience as the real, or as a basis for making inferences about the real, you should take the total experience itself, with its full content, objective and subjective, and its unity. As Whitehead puts it, "the percipient occasion is its own standard of actuality."<sup>5</sup>

But can one make sense of the world in general, and of the total human being in particular, on the basis of this starting point? If the human body is not an actual entity, what is it? And if the mind is an actuality, and the body is something different, does not Whitehead face the same mind-body problem as Descartes? And what other things could be actual entities, analogous to the psyche? Furthermore, it was said above that that an actual entity is an *occasion* of experience, hence temporally short, whereas "I" seem to endure through time. So is even the mind not an actual entity?

I will begin with the latter two questions. Actual occasions tend to organize themselves into "serially ordered societies," or synonymously, "enduring objects."<sup>6</sup> The human psyche is such. It is a "society" because it is constituted by many actual occasions which have a definite order. This order is constituted by a certain *form* which each of the occasions derives from its predecessors and passes on to its successors. But in each such society there is only one member (actual

occasion) at a time, hence the only order is serial (as opposed to being also spatial). A thing that endures through time, such as a human psyche, is hence not simply an actual entity, but is a serially ordered society of such.

Other examples of serially ordered societies, or enduring objects, are electrons, protons, atoms, and molecules. Each of these would be constituted by a series of electronic, protonic, atomic, and molecular occasions, respectively. Although an electron can no longer be thought of in the old way, as being analogous to a billiard ball, and hence as simply a "substance," in the sense of that which is an ontological unity in the strictest sense, it nevertheless has a real unity, in that each electronic occasion almost totally reiterates the form of its predecessor. Hence, we can say that such and such electron is the same electron we were speaking of yesterday. The self-identity through time is constituted by the common form that informs the energy of each occasion in the series, and the fact that it is passed along causally from occasion to occasion.

There is no absolute necessity that actual occasions be organized into these enduring objects. In fact, what we call "empty space" is filled (or really, constituted) by occasions that are not ordered into these chains, but simply occur chaotically. And Whitehead suggests that the "creation" of our present universe simply involved bringing order out of this relative chaos. The first stage in creation, then, would have involved bringing significant numbers of serially ordered societies into existence.

But why should this order be brought about? The key lies in the *conditions for value*. A large part of what is implied in defining actual entities as occasions of experience is the denial that there are any "vacuous actualities." Although conscious and sense experience cannot be attributed to all actual entities, Whitehead held that value experience can be thus generalized. In line with the Platonic view that to be is good, Whitehead saw each actual occasion as having *intrinsic* value, as being something for itself (prior to its having instrumental value for others). He said, "Value is the term I use for the intrinsic reality of an event."<sup>7</sup>

But if the random happenings in empty space have self-value, why is bringing order out of this chaos necessary? Because actualities can enjoy more or less value. The value enjoyed by occasions in empty space must be thought to be extremely slight. The ordering into enduring objects Whitehead sees as the first step in the direction of increasing the conditions of value. The common form, spoken of above, that constitutes the self-identity of an enduring object, is a form of value. This reiteration of a particular type of value contributes intensity to the individual members of the series, and thereby increases the value experience, even if only slightly.<sup>8</sup> Also, the more intrinsic value an entity has for itself, the more value it has to contribute instrumentally to the intrinsic value of others.

## II. MORE COMPLEX SOCIETIES

The next step in understanding Whitehead's view of man is to consider the more complicated ways in which actual occasions can be ordered. I mentioned

earlier that atoms are enduring objects, which means they are constituted by a series of atomic actual entities. But we know that electrons and protons are in some sense "inside" the atom. Hence it would seem as if actual entities at one level (electronic and protonic occasions) are inside the actual entities at a higher level. Remembering that "actual entity" is Whitehead's replacement for the term "substance," to designate that which is an individual in the strictest sense, this would mean that one individual would actually include other individuals.

And this is exactly Whitehead's view. Besides the most basic unities of nature, there are also unities of unities.<sup>9</sup> The atom is not simply the sum of its parts (in which case it would not be a real unity, but merely an aggregate), but is a new series of occasions at a higher level. It included its parts, without thereby destroying their individuality, and yet transcends them, being a more inclusive unity of experience. Likewise, the molecule is not simply the sum of its atomic parts, but a new level of unity. Hence, Whitehead is akin to the emergent evolutionists, who hold that the evolutionary process does not simply involve more and more complex reorganizations of some primal actualities, but also the coming into being of new, more complex, actualities. And each new stage means an increase in the degree of value attainable. For example, each molecular occasion received value not only from the predecessor molecular occasion, but also from its subordinate parts. The more complex is the organization out of which the occasions of experience emerge, the greater the value that can be enjoyed.

However, up to this point the increase in value must be quite trivial, and we must admit that we are stretching words such as "experience" and "value" almost to the breaking point in applying them analogically to these low-grade entities. (The actual breaking point would be where analogy became equivocation.) Besides, where we speak of evolution, we generally have biological evolution, and therefore life, in mind. How are we to understand the living cell?

Whitehead sees the emergence of the cell as a dramatic breakthrough. For, although entities such as electrons and molecules are not to be thought of as totally inert and vacuous, neither do they really deserve the name "living," since the degree of spontaneity and novelty they embody is almost negligible. For the most part they simply repeat the past. But the cell is called "living" precisely because it is not enclaved to the past. Of course the cell includes molecules, which are enduring objects with little novelty. But in the so-called "empty spaces" of the cell, there occur living occasions. Hence, the cell is no mere aggregate, no mere sum of its molecular parts. It is a new emergent, and in each moment has the unity of an occasion of experience.

At this point the terms "structured society" and "nexus" (plural nexus) must be introduced. A structured society is one that contains subordinate societies and nexus. Nexus is a more general term than society; it refers to any sort of togetherness to merit the term society. Hence, all societies are nexus, but some nexus are not socially ordered. In a structured society, those subordinate enduring

members that could survive apart from the environment provided by the structured society as a whole are called subordinate societies. Those which cannot be thought thus to survive are termed subordinate nexus. Hence the atom is a structured society, and its electrons and protons are subordinate societies. Also the cell is a structured society. The molecules it contains are subordinate societies. Outside the cell they would be somewhat different, since their immediate environment would be different; but they would still maintain their molecular integrity. However, Whitehead did not consider the living occasions of the cell to form a (serially ordered) society, but merely a nexus. There seemed to him no reason to believe that there was a thread of serial order passed along from one living occasion to the next. Rather, each such occasion seems to live for the moment, rather than inheriting a tradition from the past and projecting purposes into the future. Each cellular occasion has an intensity of experience, and achieves a degree of value, greatly exceeding that of any and all of its subordinate societies. But this value experience is "the clutch of vivid immediacy,"<sup>10</sup> without the values involved in repetition, tradition, and sustained purposiveness.

At this point, before continuing up the hierarchy, some more terms must be introduced. There are two ways for a multiplicity of beings such as molecules and cells to be ordered among themselves. On the one hand they can join together into a new society in which all the members are on the same level. The society is hence a "democracy." For molecules this means being ordered into such things as sticks and stones. Democratic societies of cells we call plants.

On the other hand, the entities can be ordered in such a way that a new nexus of occasions, on a higher level, emerges. The emergence of the cell out of the molecules has already been mentioned. When the cells themselves are ordered to provide the conditions for the emergence of a new set of higher-level occasions of experience, the result is a "monarchical society," although people unversed in Whiteheadianese simply speak of animals. The monarch of the society is a nexus of occasions which inherit richly from at least a majority of the subordinate members, and which likewise exercise a dominating influence (although not complete control) over the society as a whole.

Of course, the dividing line between plants and animals cannot be precisely indicated. And yet, except for those beings on the borderline, the difference is rather clear cut, especially when one compares a carrot and an animal with a central nervous system. What is achieved is a new breakthrough. "Psyche" is not simply another name for the brain, or certain of its functions. It refers to a new series of actual occasions just as "real" as electronic, molecular, and cellular occasions. Like Leibniz, Whitehead has only one genus of actual entities, differing only in degree. There is no reason to think of the lower-grade ones as more real than the higher-grade. Whitehead's psyche, monarch, or "regnant nexus" is Leibniz's "dominant monad," except that the coordination between the psyche and its body is not due to a pre-established harmony engineered by a deistic creator, but is the result of real interaction.

### III. THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

The intelligibility of this real interaction, the so-called mind-body problem, is obviously central to whether or not Whitehead's philosophy provides for the possibility of immortality. The view that the psyche is really an actuality is a necessary condition for this possibility. But his view of the psyche as distinct from the brain must be free from the kinds of problems that led to the widespread rejection of the Cartesian position in favor of some type of identity theory.

Thus far the terms "physical" and "mental" have not been used. For Descartes the body was a physical substance and the mind a mental substance. This is what "Cartesian dualism" refers to, and it is *only* to such a position that the term "dualism" should be applied. It only breeds confusion to call dualistic *any* view which holds that the psyche is an entity *distinct* from that multiplicity of entities (cells) called the brain. Leibniz was no dualist, and neither is Whitehead. For him, the terms physical and mental refer not to two different *types* of actual entities, but to two *aspects* of every occasion of experience. The "physical" aspect is the receptive phase of the occasion, the phase in which it, for the most part, simply receives that which is provided for it. The term "mental" is stretched beyond its normal use to refer to the novelty appearing in an occasion. Hence, low-grade occasions are almost totally physical, insofar as they simply receive data from the past, repeat it, and pass it along virtually unchanged. Any novelty is negligible. The living cell is the first level at which significant novelty occurs—hence the adjective "living."

For Whitehead, it belongs to the very nature of an actual entity that it internally takes account of, or prehends, the other actual occasions in its environment. One entity exerts causal influence on another not by bumping into it (as in the old impact theory, based on the billiard-ball analogy), but simply by being there to be prehended by the other. (Although this by itself gives a too static notion of an actual occasion, which is essentially activity. There is a sense in which each occasion "throws itself" at its successors, thereby helping create them: "The creativity of the world is the throbbing emotion of the past hurling itself into a new transcendent fact.")<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, the mind-body problem in its traditional form does not arise. The mind is not a non-spatial, purely mental perceiving thing trying to be related to some spatial, purely physical non-perceiving things that normally interact causally in terms of mechanistic impact. Rather, each occasion of the mind's experience is a unification of the data provided for it by actual occasions in its immediate past, these being primarily the brain's cellular occasions occurring a split-second before. The principle is the same as in all causation. Just as the physical phase of each brain cell consists of a set of prehensions of other entities (such as its subordinate members, adjacent cells and previous occasion of the psyche), the physical phase of the psyche is constituted by a set of prehensions of all the entities in its environment. However, the mental phase of the psyche is much more significant than it is in the cells. Included in the psyche's mental

phase is a set of decisions for the bodily members. The brain cells thanprehend the psyche in terms of these aims, and transmit them with more or less faithfulness to the various parts of the body.

Hence, the facile assumption of many philosophers, that epiphenomenalism and dualism are the only alternatives, so that any view which holds that the psyche is an actuality distinct from the brain must necessarily have all the notorious difficulties of dualism, is shown by Whitehead to be erroneous. The brain is an aggregate (a democratic society) composed of billions of real individuals, bringing the data received from all the actualities in its environment (its own past, the brain cells, God, and perhaps other psyches) into a coherent unity of experience. The principles involved in this interaction are no different from the principles involved in all causal relations: the many become one—a unity arises out of a multiplicity, and this unity then becomes one of the members of a new multiplicity, out of which subsequent unities arise.

Whitehead's analysis of the total human organism as being a monarchy, and not simply a democratic aggregate, is of utmost importance for the issue of human freedom, which, besides being of central importance in its own right, is crucial for the problem of immortality. For, unless the human soul is understood as being in some significant sense a self-determining actuality, the idea of its continuing to live apart from the body would be meaningless. Many who are aware of the change from Newtonian to modern physics will admit that perhaps the person is not absolutely determined by the causal influences of the past, and yet nevertheless hold that the human being can have freedom only in a trivial sense. For even if one interprets the apparent indeterminacy of sub-atomic particles in the most favorable way, this only entails that such things as individual electrons manifest some spontaneity. But when large numbers are involved, the indeterminacy disappears, i.e., the behavior of the group as such can be predicted. Accordingly, it is held, since the human being is composed of a very large number of particles, his behavior is in principle predictable.

But this interpretation rests on the ontological assumption that the human being is simply an aggregate. But if Whitehead's position is correct, then the significance of the fact that there is some indeterminacy (or self-determination) in the behavior of individuals is not cancelled out by the statistical predictability of aggregates. For the human person would really be an individual, not merely an aggregate. Of course, the total human being is composed of myriads of individual cells, and is hence a society. But these cells are subordinated to a higher-level individual, which greatly dominates the society as a whole, giving it the unity of action and reaction that characterizes individuals. Hence it is a "category mistake" of the most egregious kind to assume that the same behavioral principles that apply to a rock, which has hardly any organic unity, are in principle adequate to describe a human being's functioning. Furthermore, as one climbs the evolutionary hierarchy toward the higher actualities, the significance of self-determination (final causation) increases, so that the spontaneity of the chipmunk is not simply the indeterminacy of the electron, while the free self-determination of the human being can greatly

exceed that of all animals with little or no capacity for symbolizing consciousness.

But the question now arises, does Whitehead's solution of the traditional mind-body problem not preclude the possibility of the mind's existing apart from the body? For in his view the terms "many" and "one" are strictly polar—they require each other. That is, the notion of a unity, or a real individual, simply makes no sense apart from a multiplicity of other actual entities, aspects of which are brought into a new unity. In other words, an individual *essentially* is a unification of a many. Whitehead's paradigm for his cosmology is the experience of the "self-enjoyment of being one among many, and of being one arising out of the composition of many."<sup>14</sup> The experience of other things is not accidental, but essential, to an individual. The person that endures through time is not some underlying substance that suffers accidental experiences. Rather, the person is constituted exhaustively of a series of occasions of experience (including their relations, of course).<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the fact that experience of other things is essential to each moment means that it is essential to the very existence of the person. And it is clearly the case that at least a large portion of the data provided to the psyche comes to it through the body. Hence is it conceivable that the psyche could exist apart from this base?

Whitehead's technical term for the psyche is "living person." The double implication of this term can be best seen by contrasting the psyche with the molecule, on the one hand, and the living occasions of the cell, on the other. The molecule has been defined as a serially ordered society. A synonym for serial order is "personal order." Hence, in Whitehead's technical sense, which stretches the modern meaning considerably, the molecule is a "person." But it is not a "living" person. For the molecule maintains its existence precisely by screening out most of the novelty that appears in its individual members. Its character is maintained by virtue of the fact that every occasion prehends its predecessor in terms of "pure physical prehensions." A *physical* prehension is simply a prehension of another actual entity. In a *pure physical* prehension the predecessor is prehended only in terms of its physical phase. Since the physical phase is that aspect of an occasion which simply repeats the past, while it is the mental aspect that contains any novelty that is originated, this means that in a pure physical prehension any novelty that appeared in the predecessor occasion is largely bypassed or ignored by the successor.

Also, the molecule for the most part repeats its predecessor's form at the expense of appropriating much from other entities in its environment. The molecule is a person extremely narrow in its sympathies. It is mostly incapable of being internally affected by the experiences of its companions. It simply carries out its private project. Hence the molecule's self-identity is maintained by the fact that each molecular occasion primarily receives from its predecessor only that which the predecessor had in turn received from its predecessor, and so on. The molecule is the perfect conservative, preferring stability to adventure, the values of the past to the novel possibilities provided in the present.

The cell is the exact opposite. It lives. Each cellular occasion is a highly novel

response to its environment. But, as mentioned above, the cell does not seem to be a serially ordered society. It appropriates the experiences of its neighbors, and lives from and for these experiences. It is the pure romantic, living only for the present. It is a clutch at vivid immediacy. It enjoys the values of the moment, but does not preserve the values of the past. Hence while the molecule is a person but is not living, the cell is living but is not a person.

The full connotations of calling the psyche a living person can now be seen. It combines life with permanence, novelty with tradition. It does this, in Whitehead's technical terminology, in terms of "hybrid physical prehensions." Again, each occasion of the psyche prehends its predecessors. But instead of prehending the predecessor only in terms of its physical side, it also prehends its mental side, and hence includes within itself some of the novelty that was attained. Also, each occasion of the psyche prehends its neighbors, the brain cells, and in terms of their mental phases as well, thereby appropriating the rather significant types of novelty that these middle-grade actualities originate.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the psyche is a "person" due to the fact that a certain abstract character or form is inherited by each member from its predecessors and transmitted to its successors. In this respect the soul is like the molecule. But the person is "living" because this abstract form coming from the physical aspect of the predecessor does not come near to exhausting the content of the individual occasions of experience. The novel data coming from the preceding occasions, and from the rest of the environment, are at least equally important.

Hence the human soul combines the best qualities of the molecule and the cell, "best" in the sense of being conducive to the attainment of value. There is real value in permanence, in retaining a character through time. In Whitehead's words:

The World of Fact would dissolve into the nothingness of confusion apart from its modes of unity derived from its preservation of dominant characters of Value. . . . The World of Change develops Enduring Personal Identity as its effective aspect for the realization of value. Apart from some mode of personality there is trivialization of value.<sup>17</sup>

But also the experience of novelty is necessary for significant value to be enjoyed. The living person realizes value through both of these means. Furthermore, because of hybrid prehensions of one's own past, the novelty of one moment can become an element in the permanent form constituting the person's character or essence. The human being's essence is not a completely static thing, set once and for all, but can be constantly enriched. That is, the distinction between essence and accidents is relativized. That which is in one moment an accident can become part of the enduring essence constituting the person's self-identity. To some extent, we create our own essences. And the repetition over and over of that which at first was a novelty results in a greater increase in value than is the case where novelty is enjoyed and then fast forgotten.<sup>18</sup>

#### IV. THE POSSIBILITY OF IMMORTALITY

It is now time to pull together the various features of Whitehead's thought which suggests that the human soul might survive the death of its bodily organisms.

First, the psyche is an actuality, a personally ordered series of actual entities, and hence just as "real" as the most primary types of enduring objects. These most primitive enduring objects are series of occasions of experience. Hence it is not inherent to the nature of strands of experience that they require the support of a more basic, non-experiencing material body. (Of course, we know of no higher level experiences that exist apart from the support of lower-grade societies, which serve as the material support. But the question is precisely whether it might be possible for the human soul to be an exception in this regard.)

Second, the fact that living occasions of the cell cannot exist apart from the support of its non-living parts seems to be connected for Whitehead with the fact that they form merely a temporal nexus, and not a society. But he sees the human psyche to be not simply a nexus, but a full-fledged personally ordered society. The fact that the soul is tied strongly to its own distinctive past, and anticipates its own future, gives it a partial freedom from that kind of total dependence on the present contributions from its immediate environment that characterizes the cell.

Third, the human soul differs from the soul of other animals in the same way. Of course, Whitehead posits no absolute difference between the human soul and that of animals. He says, "It is not a mere question of having a soul or of not having a soul. The question is, How much, if any?"<sup>19</sup> Although in the lower forms of animal life he saw no basis for supposing the dominant occasions to be ordered into a living person, he did think we should conjecture a soul in the higher animals. However, once this point against absolute dissimilarity is made, the point about real discontinuities needs equally to be made. The world's hierarchy does not manifest simply a gradual increase, but real jumps. The difference between life and non-life is not an absolute difference, but a real one nevertheless. Living beings are capable of all sorts of things completely impossible to the non-living. The emergence of clear consciousness out of mere awareness represents another such emergent, opening up vast new possibilities. The closely related emergence of beings capable of understanding symbols rather than mere signals again is a major breakthrough, freeing one from the chains of the immediate present and allowing him to participate in infinity. The point to pull from this at the moment is that, although the difference between the human soul and that of the other higher animals is not absolute, it is considerable, and in some sense a difference of kind. Included would be the degree to which the human soul is capable of being constituted in the present by its prehensions of its own distinctive past, whereas other animal life is in this respect more like the cell, being dependent for its experience almost entirely on the body. Hence, it would not be entirely implausible to suppose that the human psyche could survive apart from the body, even though one did not suppose the same for all animal life.

Fourth, the fact that each occasion of experience is something for itself, enjoying intrinsic value, as well as being something for others, contributing instrumental value, is important to the question. Whitehead certainly agrees with those who stress the pragmatic function of human mentality, that its functioning is related to the welfare of the total organism. But he also holds that at the human level the mental experience is also often enjoyed for its own sake, that the soul enjoys many experiences and is involved in many activities that are irrelevant to any biological needs. Accordingly the notion that the soul's immortality is really unthinkable, since the psyche *essentially* is the directive agent of the body, is relativized. It does belong to the essence of each occasion of the soul that it arises from a prehension of others, and that it in turn influences others. But it also belongs to its essence that it experiences self-enjoyment. Also, all pure physical prehensions are of the immediately contiguous occasions. Hence it is natural that, since the soul is located in the body, most of its experience will be derived from, and most of its influence exercised upon, the body.

Accordingly, the psyche's influence on others does not constitute its total essence. And insofar as this instrumental functioning does belong to its essence, there seems to be no absolute necessity that it be exercised on the same environment in which the soul originally emerged. Whitehead's theory does seem to require that an actuality as complex and sensitive as the human soul could not have emerged except by being located at the focal point of a highly complex, coordinated animal body, so organized as to contribute the majority of its data to this focal point, and in turn to be receptive to influence from this point. But it does not seem to require that this high-level actuality, once it has fully emerged, would be unable to survive, and even flourish, in another environment.

Fifth, while the third point built upon the way in which the human psyche is similar to the molecule, the way in which it differs therefrom is equally important. As discussed above, rather than blocking out most of the novel data contributed by other actualities, the psyche thrives on these experiences. These other actualities include not only the brain cells, but also God and, at least in principle, and probably sometimes in fact, other psyches. As to whether these latter might provide a sufficient environment, Whitehead himself suggested the possibility that the soul might find "a support for its existence beyond the body" by its prehensions of God, so that "in some important sense the existence of the soul may be freed from its complete dependence upon the bodily organization."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, although not mentioned by Whitehead, it is consistent with his position to suggest that the important role now played by the body in providing experiences for the soul might be filled, after separation from the body, by a society of other souls. It has been suggested by others, of course, that the body, while supplying the soul with certain experiences, also serves to block out one's direct perception of other souls, at least for most people in modern civilization most of the time. The same might be somewhat true in relation to our experience of God. Since God is in the environment of every finite occasion of experience, He is necessarily prehended. But man's experience of God may be somewhat hindered

by the strength of the data contributed by the body. This idea has also, of course, been suggested by many.

In sum, while neither molecular occasions nor cellular occasions are thought to be capable of existing apart from the subordinate societies included in the respective total structured societies, the human soul might be capable of existence apart from the total structured society in which it emerged. This possibility is due to the very high degree to which the human psyche's self-constitution by its positive prehensions of a large variety of others can be combined with a very high degree of personal identity. In fact, the practice of allowing oneself to be partly constituted by the values received from an increasing circle of others can itself become central to one's self-identity. This is one of the important implications of the fact that one's essence can be partly created by contingent decisions.

Hence bodily death, which would mean the loss of an extremely delicate and finely coordinated instrument for the reception of certain types of highly valuable experiences, as well as for the expression of emotions and purposes, might also result in the opening up of new kinds of experiences, such as more intense and intimate experiences of God and other selves. Just as the person in the body can have a strong sense of individuality, of himself as distinct from his body, and yet be intimately related to the body, feeling its experiences sympathetically, and even in a strong sense as his own, so one might in a future existence keep a strong sense of individuality and yet overcome some of the feeling of overagainstness and externality in relation to other selves that so characterizes our present existence.

Although Whitehead himself was evidently not much interested in this kind of question, this type of understanding seems compatible with his thought. According to his view, God's purpose in the world of finite actualities is to bring about ever higher experiences of value. The evocation of novelty and new types of societies is subservient to this purpose. Hence, if a new society could be formed of human souls, a society in which new and even higher types of value experiences were possible, this would be in line with the general thrust and purpose of creation. However the fact that something is in line with God's purpose does not settle the question as to whether it is or will be actualized. God cannot do, by definition, that which is impossible. It has been the purpose of this paper to lift up some of the principles of Whitehead's philosophy that suggest that subjective immortality may be a real possibility. The fact that Whitehead himself was little interested in this question really increases the weight of his support rather than decreasing it, since it can hardly be claimed that he developed his principles precisely in order to give this support.

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## REFERENCES

- 1 Whitehead, A. N., *Religion in the Making* (1926; Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1960), p. 107.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Hume said: "When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other. . . . I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception." Then he adds the much stronger and more doubtful claim, "and never can observe anything but the perception." *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Sec. 6.
- 4 Ryle, Gilbert, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1949), pp. 11-24.
- 5 Whitehead, A. N., *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929) p. 219.
- 6 Whitehead, A. N., "Immortality," P. A. Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1951), pp. 682-700, esp. p. 688.
- 7 Whitehead, A. N., *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926), p. 136.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 137, 278.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 10 Whitehead, A. N., *Process and Reality*, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
- 11 This is an important difference between Leibniz and Whitehead. The former thought of his monads as completely mental, which entailed their being non-spatial. It was difficult then to account for the fact that aggregates of monads were spatially extensive—a million times nothing is still nothing. For Whitehead every actual entity is spatially as well as temporally extensive. He agrees that the mental phase of an actual occasion is in some sense non-spatial; but this aspect is always conjoined with the physical aspect, which *is* spatially extensive. Cf. *ibid.*, 165.
- 12 Whitehead, A. N., *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), p. 227.
- 13 Cf. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-62: "When we come to the larger aggregations of matter, the organic unity fades into the background. It appears to be but faint and elementary. It is there; but the pattern is vague and indecisive. It is a mere aggregation of effects. When we come to living beings, the definites of pattern is recovered, and the organic character again rises into prominence. Accordingly, the characteristic laws of inorganic matter are mainly the statistical averages resulting from confused aggregates. So far are they from throwing light on the ultimate nature of things, that they blur and obliterate the individual characters of the individual organisms. If we wish to throw light upon the facts relating to organisms, we must study either the individual molecules and electrons or the individual living beings. In between we find comparative confusion."
- 14 Whitehead, A. N., *Process and Reality*, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
- 15 A comparison of Whitehead's view of the self with Hume's is instructive. The latter said of men that "they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity." He said he could find no satisfactory theory of personal identity because of two principles he could not renounce: "That all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences." He then adds: "Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple and individual, or did the mind perceive some real connexion among them, there would be no difficulty in the case," Hume, *op. cit.*, italics added. Whitehead is able to affirm a soul which has significant personal identity through time. This is closely related to the fact that he does not take *sense* experience with its clear and distinct deliverances to be the primary mode of experiencing, and is thereby open to recognizing a direct experience of real causal connection from one occasion of experience to the next.
- 16 Whitehead, A. N., *Process and Reality*, *op. cit.*, p. 183.
- 17 Whitehead, A. N., "Immortality," *op. cit.*, pp. 690, 693.
- 18 "By [hybrid prehensions] the mental originality of the living occasion receives a character and a depth. In this way originality is both "canalized"—to use Bergson's word—and intensified. . . . Thus life turns back into society: it binds originality within bounds, and gains the massiveness due to reiterated character. . . . Thus, though life in its essence is the gain of intensity through freedom, yet it can also submit to canalization and so gain the massiveness of order." Whitehead, A. N., *Process and Reality*, *op. cit.*, pp. 163, 164.
- 19 Whitehead, A. N., *Adventure of Ideas*, *op. cit.*, p. 267
- 20 *Ibid.*