

REFLECTION, GOODNESS, AND IMMORTALITY

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What follows death? No one can quite report his or her own death. We talk about “near death” experiences. Nor does reason seem to satisfy us. Our culture is almost as prejudiced against arguments based on pure reason as it is to arguments based on examining the entrails of chickens.

In recent years accounts of “near-death” experiences have packed the bookshelves. No doubt they break relatively new ground because medical science has made it possible for people, who formerly would have been not just “clinically dead” but dead without qualification, to be restored to normal life.

These cases, however, expose the logic of the problem. If you come back, you are not now dead. Were you ever dead? Certainly not in the sense that people used to mean.

The data are interesting, especially as they show that very many people share the same experience patterns when they are nearly dead: We now all know about the journeys down tunnels, the light at the end, and the friendly faces that await one. But all these experiences, perhaps, can be engendered by the activity of one’s brain even if that brain is running poorly and nearing its end. For we do not know very much about the outputs of brains in this condition or as much as we sometimes like to think about the relation between brains and experiences. We have, again, a logical difficulty. When we study the effects of brain states on experiences we have to examine the brains in question. Then we have to correlate what we find with what people say about their experiences or with what they do when they are in this condition. There is an inherent dualism about this kind of neurophysiological study. Without talking to people we can’t make the correlation, and so, traditionally, much brain exploration has had to be done with conscious patients. But in these near death moments neither an examination of the brain nor a conversation with the patient is likely to be possible. Studies must

almost certainly follow along behind the events, and so produce inconclusive results.

The logic of the problem is even more difficult than it looks at first sight. Suppose one has a good case of a return after death. Could one generalise from it?

Christians believe they have such a good case. They believe in the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday morning and Easter Sunday must be the most stirring of days for them. But they also believe this case to be unique, or almost so. It is not even clear that the case of Lazarus counts in the same way. Was Jesus ever actually dead in the sense that you and I will be? And afterwards was he alive in quite the same sense that you and I are? According to John, Jesus seems to have been able to pass through closed doors after the resurrection. Furthermore, even Mary Magdalene who knew him well, mistook him for the gardener on that morning. And, again in the Fourth Gospel, we learn that he said something strange: "Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father." Christians have not expected to follow his example, at least not until the day of the last judgement.

The problem is logical. If you are alive you are not dead in the ordinary sense. Jesus did not seem to be quite alive in the ordinary way though he certainly was not dead in the ordinary way, either. It does not trouble believers that Jesus is a special case, for his uniqueness is central to their belief. But his case does not answer all the questions that many of the believers have, either. Some have found ways to write the problem off. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote: "I suggested a possible account... in which the 'body' of the risen Jesus was in fact the apostolic community itself, discovering grace in its life together.... I confess that I find this an attractive and plausible reconstruction."¹

I doubt that someone whose best friend or wife has just died, will find that very helpful. Most believers, at least until recently, have thought that Jesus came to life and spoke to Mary Magdalene, not that the apostles were experiencing some helpful psychological uplift. Some have believed that they must await a similar though not identical awakening at, as it were, the end of time. Others have supposed that a new life in some form begins at the end of this one. Both these sides seem to draw their inspiration from the New Testament. But I think

¹ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection, Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1982, p. 106. The best recent account of the resurrection phenomena is in Philip Wiebe's *Visions of Jesus*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 111-149.

no one expects to rise up on the third day, demand a refund from Forest Lawn, and then walk through closed doors. There are near exceptions: Diane Kennedy Pike, the third wife of the Episcopal Bishop of California, James Pike, reports that she saw her husband rise directly into heaven on the third day,² but this does not seem to have influenced many theologians. Rather, the usual view has been that the resurrection in a very important way gives credence to the hope that we will be taken care of. It is not supposed to lead us to believe that the resurrection of Jesus will be repeated for each of us in exactly the same way.

In the New Testament one will not find a travel guide to the next world with instructions on how to pack and what the hotels and bed and breakfasts are like there. Such guides have existed. The ancient Egyptians, for instance, were aware of what the soul might need in the next world but, again, the situation seems odd. It seems that one could not pack one's own bag. Others had to do it for one after one's demise. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* gives useful advice about what doors one might meet on arrival in the next world, which ones to avoid and so forth but the advice is only for one's arrival, a sort of passing through the celestial customs. After that one is apt to be on one's own. And philosophers like St. Thomas and Cardinal Cajetan have wondered how one could even get this far in anticipating one's condition. How will we have our normal sensory experiences without a body? Will we not have to have a new way of knowing and how could we anticipate it? Perhaps our best guide is Dante. He has little trouble identifying St. Thomas and Siger of Brabant in paradise and many of his enemies are clearly in hell. If you could describe the next world you would, like Dante, have to describe it as a person with normal sensory inputs would see it. But will one have normal sensory inputs?

The logic in this is that we seem to want to describe experiences which we could not now know about unless like Dante our gifts include poetic insight. It appears that we are up against an impervious wall that cannot be scaled.

It is the purpose of this paper to ask how there could be a gate. I want at any rate to examine the logic of the claims to find ways through the wall. I think there are two routes. Each will strike at least some of you, perhaps many, even all, of you as unacceptable. But I will urge that the reasoning is valid and that the premises on which it depends are premises that can only be abandoned at a significant cost. And so I will ask you to ponder the situation.

² Diane Kennedy Pike, *Search*, New York: Doubleday, 1970, pp. 125-131. Mrs. Pike reported that Bishop Pike was welcomed into heaven by a large crowd that included Paul Tillich and Bobby Kennedy. Pike (1913-1968) was the fifth Episcopal Bishop of California.

One of the arguments has to do with a region of experience that is the same for all of us, that each one of us knows about, and that has always posed problems for philosophers and, in a sense, natural scientists as well. The other has to do with the nature of goodness and with the logic of its relation to evil.

The first begins with two simple facts. Each of us looks out at the world from a centre of experience. Each of us is aware of this fact, reflects on it, and takes account of it in everything we consciously say and do. Even in our dreams this centre of experience stays with us.

This centre of experience is not the awareness of some region of one's brain. The centre of one's brain is the join between the two hemispheres of the brain. It can be and sometimes is severed in the surgical treatment of epilepsy. For a time it was thought that nothing resulted from this surgery by way of disorientation, but eventually it was learned that when one severs the corpus callosum one hand no longer knows what the other is doing. It is difficult to join one's hands behind one's back. But one still has a single unified experience.

This is a continuing centre. If you like, it is the referent of the first person singular pronoun. One cannot replace the sentence "I am looking out my study window and seeing St. Pancras Station" with the sentence "Leslie Armour is looking out his study window and seeing St. Pancras Station." For I may only think that I am Leslie Armour in the way that some more sensible people think they are Napoleon or Paul Martin, whereas in some sense I cannot be mistaken that I am myself, whoever I am.

Part of the reason, indeed, is that each of us has a unique perspective through which all our experience is filtered. This unique perspective cannot be analysed out into the causal consequences of my neurophysiology. For, though brain cells differ from person to person there is nothing in principle unique about them. Each of us has quite distinctive DNA, but not absolutely distinctive DNA. The police are aware that they are dealing with statistical probabilities when they identify people in this way. In any case, cells can be transplanted from one person to another. How many cells would I have to transplant before you woke up in the morning thinking that you were – depending perhaps on your sex – David or Victoria Beckham or the Archbishop of Canterbury or Caroline Chartres, the wife of the Bishop of London? The answer is surely that this would never happen but, *certainly*, you would *never* develop two centres of experience. Even "multiple personalities" have only one centre of experience at a time.

Logically, a centre of experience is the wrong sort of thing to be a neurophysiological state. It is a way of focusing things. It is singular in an absolute way. The brain in fact filters out most of the information that comes to it. If it did not you would be overwhelmed. The self that is the irreducible centre

of this experience is better thought of as the user of this information, the distinctive awareness that is protected by the brain and given organised information by it. When your brain behaves poorly, of course, you get a lot of confusing information. What if it ceased to function altogether? Would you be overwhelmed by information and feel like Gerontius in Newman's poem and Elgar's oratorio? Gerontius dies and finds the light too bright. Who knows. But there is more to this story, and it helps a little with our predicament.

This consciousness is a kind of reflection. I am aware that I am aware. Bertrand Russell argued that there were two kinds of knowledge, knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance. I have argued that there must also be knowledge of acquaintance. You cannot know anything if you are not aware of your own awareness. Josiah Royce argued that this power of reflection goes on to infinity.³

I will not pursue this issue just now. Infinity will enter into our discussion shortly. But notice that what is involved is standing back from the immediacy of experience. It is not just that a red patch is there in my field of vision. It is that I know that it is and this knowing involves a link across time. I know that it is because I am at home in what David Hume called the "theatre of the mind"⁴ and I see what comes and goes there. Perhaps, indeed, it is the theatre that is singular, and as Hume thought I do not really experience the "I" as a kind of object. Rather the "I" is created as a figure in an ongoing drama within the theatre. For a subject cannot also literally be an object. Hume said of course that we do not experience the "theatre," either: "They are the successive perceptions only that constitute the mind." But about this he was wrong for there is always a single pool of experience whose horizons, if uninterrupted, form a circle with ourselves in the centre. When something stands between us and this horizon it is just like a piece of stage furniture.⁵

³ See the Supplementary Essay "The One, the Many and the Infinite," in *The World and the Individual*, London: Macmillan, 1900, Vol. 1, pp. 473-588, especially pp. 501-507. My account of knowledge of acquaintance is in *The Rational and the Real*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961.

⁴ See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London: John Noon, 1739. Ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised P. H. Nidditch, from the posthumous edition of 1777. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 253, pp. 439-440 of the 1739 edition.

⁵ A dedicated empiricist devoted to a "sense data" theory of experience may make a bad phenomenologist because his pre-commitments get in the way of seeing how things are. But Hume is often better than most. In the end he casts doubt on his own account of the experience of selfhood (Appendix, *Treatise*, Selby-Bigge and Nidditch, p. 633 ff. The British Library Copy catalogued as the original Vol. III was published by Thomas

But in this theatre of the mind things are organised in an interesting way. I can hear the clock chime twelve. When I do I need to remember the first eleven chimes in order to grasp that the twelfth is the twelfth. It is not just that something triggers some neurons which fire off eleven shots. If that were what happened I would hear a single giant bong.” Nor is it enough that memory should repeat the original experience. For then I would have the original problem. Rather I must stand outside the time of the chimes and face them, as it were end on. I stand in a kind of eternity and look at time, indeed, as one sits in a theatre in one’s time and watches the play’s internal time unfold on the stage. One may be drawn into the play, especially if it is a good one as one is drawn into a novel as one reads it. But still, playgoer or reader, one is also in one’s own time, and one goes home to read student essays or feed the dog. To see the times in relation one must reach beyond both the psychological time of one’s own public life and the internal time of the play.

The theatre of the mind itself is committed to no one time and so offers us a kind of induction into eternity. But, then, think about it: The events as they happen are in a kind of eternal present. We organise them into time and also stand back from it.

The neurophysiological story that has been hanging about in the background of this discussion is one of the ways we have of organising data. But all the neurophysiologist knows is what he sees when he or she looks at someone’s brain and what emerges from discussions with patients. We couldn’t do neurophysiology without correlating these two things. The brain looks like oatmeal porridge or the inside of a Scots Haggis. So to find out what happens to our minds and our experience when we excise parts of our brains surgeons have had to keep their patients conscious and ask them. Some parts of the brain of course simply run parts of our bodies and sometimes – but by no means always – we can tell that without talking to the patient. But sometimes we must ask if the arm or the big toe of the patient responds to the “I.”

Longman in 1740. The Appendix begins on p. 283.) I use “phenomenologist” just to mean one who studies phenomena. The word was first used, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, by J. Hutchison Sterling in his *Secret of Hegel*, London, 1865, Vol. 1, p. 19 “He who shall make it his business to watch the gathering of the materials for the seething... will be the Phenomenologist.” The “seething” that Sterling talks about is the flux and flow of ideas that generate disciplines like “English Literature” and “German Philosophy” as opposed to settled disciplines on which we look back. But there is a similar flux and flow in our own minds and we watch it pass through the “theatre of the mind.” The followers of Edmund Husserl who sometimes make proprietary claims on the word “phenomenology” are given their own “sense” by the OED.

What do we mean when we ask about arms and toes as opposed to experiences of arms and toes? Are they the real “substances” behind our doings? Locke noticed that there are “powers” and that when we talk about “substances” we mostly mean our experiences of them, but if we ask for more than that we get a mystery. Locke had an entry for “Substance” in the index to his *Essay*, but he wrote “S. no idea of it.” If you follow his instructions and look it up you’ll find that he says that substances are best conceived as “powers.” We do have experiences of powers.⁶

Of course, there are experiences that are rightly interpreted as experiences of people’s brains. Accounts of these fill textbooks on neurophysiology, neuropharmacology and so forth. But what do we mean by our claims about these textbooks when we say “this is a good account of the cerebral cortex?” I think we mean “this is a good reading of the experiences of competent investigators.” And it is a *reading, an interpretation*. The words don’t just describe. They convey theories about what people have seen and probed.

There are good stories that we tell ourselves in the theatre of the mind. From a prospect in eternity we arrange the eternal present into what Plato called “likely stories.”

They are none the worse for that, and not to be denigrated. But I think the structure of this stage play in the theatre of the mind is just like the stage setting in the theatres we usually think about: Stage settings are backgrounds for dramas that bring out the significance of human life and when we reflect on them one of the conditions of that drama is that we are in eternity.

The fact is that we can distinguish between descriptions of experience and a variety of interpretations of experience – so that one and the same experience can be read as the workings of an aware mind and as the presence of the objects in a constructed world. But this does not mean that we are committed to some impossible kind of metaphysical dualism in which two radically different kinds of things mysteriously interact. Locke found that he could stay within the domain of experience and get all the knowledge of the world that he could imagine a human being having.

⁶ See John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, London: Awnsham and John Churchil and Samuel Manship, 1690; Ed. P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975. See the index reference and Book 2, Chapter XXII Sections 1 and 8, Nidditch pp. 295 and 300. Locke’s own index (reproduced by Nidditch with new page numbers) has a mixup and does not direct one to the crucial p. 300.

He worried that there might be something else “out there,” but it is enough, of course, that what we meet are symbols of one sort or another and that they can be read as stories about knowing subjects and known objects. We need no more.

One of Locke’s sparring partners, John Norris,⁷ thought that there was something out there – but it was the mind of God, and that we have our being, essentially, in the divine consciousness. Locke’s beloved Lady Masham, Damaris Cudworth, made rather fun of Norris, because she thought being in the mind of God was somehow to miss the real world and that ordinary things in life would be less important.⁸ But Norris thought that the things in the mind of God were not less but more real than anything we might imagine, and that our present world is only a shadow of things to come. And Damaris would not really have disagreed with that.

In any case what we have to deal with are experiences, and the basic experiences are those of an inquiring subject – a subject capable of knowing. This brings us a step further along the line. It is here that we meet Jacques Maritain and philosophers like him.

But let us pause just for a moment and notice how the unfolding story tells us something about our present concern: As it is now we confront complex experiences. They are understandable as a world in which we confront symbols

⁷ See especially *A Philosophical Discourse Concerning the Natural Immortality of the SOUL, Wherein the Great Question of the Soul’s Immortality is Endeavour’d to be Rightly Stated, and Fully Clear’d. Occasion’d By Mr. Dodwell’s Late Epistolary Discourse*, London S. Manship, 1708. He says that the soul is a “simple, incorruptible, immaterial being,” p. 37. But matter is “every whit as immortal,” p. 73. This sounds puzzling, but of course matter also lasts through the time frame of the world in which we live, though it is not part of the “ideal world” which in Norris’s philosophy is its background. Matter is transformed, but annihilation, he says, is unknown. The argument that he thinks is finally important appears on pp. 113-121, and has it that God has our happiness in mind and it is natural for us to “adhere to him by all the Unions of Love” (p. 118). It is because the soul is the expression of divine love and concern that it is immortal. It need not be. Natural incorruptibility figures as the basis for reciprocal love. The soul is naturally attracted to the divine love. The issue of the book is whether the soul is naturally immortal or only immortal by the gift of God. Norris claims that this is a false dichotomy – the nature of the soul is to be the expression of the divine love, and that is why it is immortal. This is an important argument that deserves its own special treatment. (Henry Dodwell had argued against the natural immortality of the soul, Samuel Clarke, among a dozen or so others, also replied to Dodwell.)

⁸ See *Discourse Concerning the Love of God*. Awnsham and John Churchil, 1696. See also *Occasional Thoughts in reference to a Vertuous Christian LIFE* (caps as in original). London: A. and J. Churchil [one l] at the Black Swan in Paternoster-Row, 1705.

that we can read as containing our self-awareness in a context in which the inflowing data passes through a filter and comes to us in a way which limits us to finite contexts that we can manage, and to pools of data which we can absorb. (We will see the significance of this finitude shortly.)

We think of the filter as consisting of hard physical objects formed into brains and such. But these are interpretations we give to the data we receive. We cannot get beyond experience. And that may be all that there is. It may be like the virtual realities that we create with computer programmes, but it may not be “virtual” in the sense that there is any other reality. That other reality, as Locke may have suspected and Bishop Berkeley thought he knew, may be just a myth based on a category mistake. The things in the world are just what they seem to be.

Still, the things in the world can be seen from two perspectives – as elements in the temporal process and as bits of an eternal present shaped by agents themselves in eternity. Either way, what reason is there to suppose that it all ends with our deaths? More likely the real subject just keeps on – but it will face different data, and we don’t know what those will be.

We should notice on this account, though, something that we may become confused about. From one perspective we are beings whose place is in eternity. Our immortality is here and now, though we don’t easily grasp the fact.⁹ On the other perspective we are actors in the story that is forged by ordering the eternal present in time. On this second account our immortality is a state of affairs which we shall grasp in the future. But it is because we are actors in the story as well as the authors of the story that we are apt to be confused and uncertain.

But even suppose what I have been saying about time, the eternal present and our base in eternity is all wrong: Suppose that the world is full of real hard lumps of things. Even so, if the brain is just a filter even if there are hard things out there, then we may still be like Newman’s Gerontius and face the bright light.

What more can we say? Jacques Maritain approached these questions in more than one way, but the most interesting from our point of view is his account of the human intellect.¹⁰ The human intellect, he says, surpasses space

⁹ See Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of Immortality*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922, p. 45. Notice “as well as,” not “instead of.”

¹⁰ See Jacques Maritain, *Approches de Dieu*, Paris: Alsatia, 1953. Tr. Peter O’Reilly, New York: Harper, 1954, as *Approches to God*. Reprinted in Vol. 10, *Oeuvres complètes de Jacques et Raïssa Maritain*. Fribourg, Suisse: Éditions Universitaires de Fribourg, 1985, pp. 14-99.

and time. It gives us access to the divine and allows us to surpass the merely natural if by that we mean the world analysed by chemists and speculated about by physicists. Maritain in some moods turned mystical; but in this argument, he hoped to reveal the human condition in a way which would draw on things that we all take for granted. Maritain would not deny the suggestion of Bérulle and many others that God must be in all things just as all things are in God, but in *Approches de Dieu* he concentrates initially on the specifics of human thought and expression. Thought transcends the limits of space and time. Free of those confines, there is a glimmering of the infinite which we share with God. Thought, however, must be expressed.

Maritain talks about thought, but perhaps the simplest example which makes the point is the word. Words are not exhausted by any or all of their expressions. One cannot wear out a word, though one becomes tired of hearing and reading it, and one sometimes wishes a word would go away. We know that we cannot destroy it, yet a word is nothing over and above its expressions. It cannot live alone in some Platonic heaven. It has to be expressed. So, though thoughts are not bundles of electrical energy, they are also not some ghostly thing which lives in another world.

Maritain insists, therefore, that we must be individuals in space and time, members no doubt of the biological or some other natural order. (It is not impossible that people may someday exist all of whose parts have been replaced by bits of plastic. But they will continue to express themselves in the natural order.)

Yet we share in the infinite because we have intellects that are not limited by space and time. This is another way of saying what I have been arguing: We have a locus in eternity. But we express ourselves and tell our stories about ourselves and the world in time.

Something of us, then, will survive our deaths. We only worry about that because we conceptualise ourselves and the world in a way that confuses the stories we tell about the world with the story-teller. But what will survive?

We need to ask in a different way what sorts of things survive.

To start with, only what is less than perfectly real can perish. We sometimes think that mental images and dreams, for instance, simply vanish when we stop being aware of them. I am not sure this is so, but if it is it can only be because they are in some way derivatively real. They depend for their existence on something else. Automobiles rust away, but the stuff of which they are made doesn't just vanish. Vegetable marrows will rot if left too long in the garden, but their stuff remains. It will be there in the spring to help fertilise the next generation.

Certainly, all these things may just disappear in the very end. The matter in the stories told by physicists is like the coach in Cinderella, only in a worse state still. It depends on some power or other, as Locke noted. When the fairy godmother withdraws her spell, the coach turns into a pumpkin. But when the energy runs out, when entropy is maximised, the material stuff of the universe just isn't there – at least if matter and energy are convertible as the story tells us.

Its reality depends on something else or else it just comes and goes for no reason at all. That it should come and go for no reason at all is a possibility but one that it is hard to deal with. For it is not even like possibilities that would change everything dramatically – the possibility that, say, inverse cube laws will be prevalent tomorrow. If things just come and go for no reason, then anything is as likely as anything else and all our explanations will collapse.

What are the other possibilities? One is that the world derives, as Plato thought, from the form of the good. One can paraphrase Iris Murdoch who has raised the question in more up-to-date terms and say that the concept of the good is a controlling concept, taking logical precedence over all others.¹¹ But I will put it in my own terms, neither quite Dame Iris's nor Plato's. The argument may jar the contemporary mind and we shall end up close to John Norris, Ralph Cudworth and the generous-minded Platonists of the late 17th Century. But I will set it out and then try to explain it.

Things subsumable under other concepts all lack something. Evil, for instance is essentially a parasitical concept. There is no perfect evil. Goodness puts things in order, the right order. A perfect evil would have to display an order, too, but then it would be imperfect. It would have something of goodness about it. Rather, things are evil in so far as they depart from goodness. But so it is with all things that decay and disappear. They all lack something and are left vulnerable. One cannot pin one's hopes on them. We all know that if we desire passionately objects subject to corruption, they will in the end let us down, A million dollars is no help at the last moment of your life. As Russell said, men (and women too) mysteriously desire power. But as Lord Acton reminded us, all power tends to corrupt. If one has the power to make others do one's will, they can only magnify one's own failure. What is transient has flaws.

In a Hegelian sense such things are doubtfully real. They are only passing through. Part of what we think they are is in the past and is already gone, and

¹¹ Among Dame Iris's many writings on this subject see her succinct essay "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts," in *Iris Murdoch: Existentialists and Mystics*, Ed. Peter Conradi and George Steiner, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1998, pp. 363-385.

part is in the future and may never come. But something must be real. Not everything can be a shadow, an illusion, or an object that plays hide and seek with reality. An illusion is not an illusion if there is no reality about which it misleads us.

So if to be perfectly real is to be perfectly good, something must be good. Christians suppose that that must be God; Platonists of the most traditional sort thought that it must be the form of the good itself. At any rate, what is good in this sense – the sense of lacking nothing – can never perish.

One argument, therefore, is that, in so far as we share in it in a way that reflects its real nature we can never perish. This claim, though, opens a vast set of issues. In one sense everything shares in the good and, again, Christians have claimed that we can find God in every element of creation. Aquinas and Bonaventure, rival visionaries of the high middle ages, disagreed about many things, but they agreed about this.

Each of us is a centre of experience, open, as Maritain insists, to an infinity of knowledge. In this sense we are necessarily good. That is, in respect of this *capacity*, we lack nothing. We are capable, as Christians insist, of the beatific vision. At the same time our knowledge is activated as Locke thought through our sensory experiences. We can think of Hume's missing shade of blue but we need to have seen at least one shade and probably two if we are to do so. Locke, indeed, insists that much of our knowledge comes from "intermediate ideas,"¹² but they need a beginning. We build a picture of the world by using Locke's "logic of ideas." But we fall short of a totality. Indeed, since there is an infinity of ideas to be explored there *is no* totality.

We might ask, if we are theists, why this limitation should exist. If we are not theists we shall, equally, have to ask how it can be that we *both* have the capacity that Maritain speaks of – a capacity to range over infinity – and find ourselves restricted to a finite experience.

If the good is the controlling concept, and it seems to be, for reasons that we have seen, there turns out to be an explanation. All our experiences suggest that the highest order values are not sensory pleasures. For these are short lived and, oddly enough, despite much of Mill's talk of "the greatest happiness" defined in terms of pleasure, pleasures cannot well be added up. There is no greatest happiness any more than there is a largest possible pile of coal and, anyway, the pleasures in question do not accumulate. Most pleasures are ephemeral. The pleasure that one gets from eating a chocolate sundae alas erases the pleasure one has obtained from a glass of good wine. But notice that the insight – perhaps

¹² *Essay*, Book 4, Chapter XVII, Section 2, Nidditch, p. 669.

a transforming insight – that comes to us from Elgar’s violin concerto is by no means erased by the insight that comes from reading a poem by Shelley and that the pleasures associated with these insights may well be cumulative.

The highest values, as Aristotle thought, are surely the contemplative ones. But they come not from our private certainties but from the sharing of minds. For it is only in sharing that we can get beyond our obvious and frustrating limitations. We are wired for contemplation. Human beings differ from other mammals in that the pleasure centres of the brain are wired to the cerebral cortex, the part that we use to think. But simply rattling around in our minds is unsatisfying. Kurt Gödel, who may turn out to be the greatest logician of our time, was reclusive and often insisted that communication with him take the form of notes pushed under his office door in the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton. And yet he got his greatest pleasure from his wife, no intellectual, with whom he enjoyed hot dogs on the beach at Coney Island, and when she died he refused to eat and died of self-imposed starvation. The insights and pleasures of companionship can also go together in the contemplative life.

So it is not just thinking, surely, but a meeting of minds that counts most. It is not, I think, a mere sharing of the results of solving a quadratic equation, (though Gödel very much wanted to convince his mother with his essentially mathematical proof of the existence of God). Intellectual demonstrations enter into the ultimate scene, too, but what counts is a sharing of the whole mind, of intellect and feeling. It is this which we usually call love. It is love in this sense that sums up all the things that we think valuable.

Like G. E. Moore we may still ask: How is it that you know that this is good?¹³ He meant that “good” is in principle indefinable. But the answer is forthcoming if we ask how goodness is related to its denial, evil. For evil is parasitical on goodness for logical reasons, and the relationship reveals that evil is always a lack of something. So goodness is, as we have seen, what lacks nothing. What lacks nothing might be God. In this sense Ralph Cudworth said not just that God is love but that love is God. But the union I am speaking of might just be the full meeting of finite minds that, in meeting, finally lose their finitude.

If so, one who achieved this state would be at one with eternity and in that sense immortal. What can survive of us must be what cannot vanish. And so I suppose we may well be immortal in so far as we achieve such a state. Part of us must survive. For the centre of our experience is in itself unqualifiedly good and depends on nothing beyond itself.

¹³ G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1903.

Philosophers have wondered if we would recognise ourselves in such a post-mortem state, or, rather they have wondered if we could possibly know who we were in this state. But what matters, I rather think, is whether the good survives.

But does all this make any sense? There are strong reasons which compel us to rethink it. I sketched a simplified prototype of this argument one day in Paris when I was working with a very intelligent young researcher¹⁴ at the Bibliothèque Nationale. We were waiting for the librarians to find some early 17th Century books by and about women philosophers, books that had been largely lost through time, and we had been troubled by finding some razored pages and having to look for alternatives. My colleague was watching over my shoulder as she waited and I typed. “It would be rather embarrassing,” she said, “if someone found this on your computer.” She did not mean, I *think*, that it was *necessarily* a bad argument, though it did not look good, for we had not analysed it. But rather it seemed that this argument moved outside the sport as our colleagues played it, as if one kicked the ball in baseball – not necessarily illegal but neither usual nor likely to be successful. It did not seem to begin with experience or “scientific facts” and its premises did not quite look like necessary truths.

So let us reconsider. The claim implied is that there is a controlling concept for our systems of concepts, that it is the concept of goodness, that goodness belongs beyond time, that we share in it, and that its proper expression is through the sharing of finite minds in a way that allows them to by-pass their finitude.

That is, the argument begins with a claim about how our knowledge must be organised. If there is a hidden premise it is that knowledge is a unity; that every true proposition is connected to every other. What would be the consequence of denying this? It would be that two contradictory propositions could both be true, one in one system and one in another. A further consequence would be that all our logics that require a universal “not-x” would be ruled out. This is the consequence that led Quine to reject Russell’s ramified theory of types.¹⁵ Another consequence is that there would be unbridgeable gaps in our knowledge. And we couldn’t really tell if any inferences held across them because we would have no way of knowing where the gaps were.

¹⁴ Suzie Johnston. The date according to my computer was August 2, 1994.

¹⁵ See W. V. O. Quine, “New Foundations for Mathematical Logic” in *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953, pp. 80-101: “-x ceases to comprise all members of x, and comes to comprise only those members of x which are next lower in type than x,” p. 91-92. [-x = not x]

But if knowledge is unified there is some concept that expresses this unity. It cannot be the concept of something simply in the world, like the concept of material object. For these are things that there might or not be. And we could not find out that there were none if no concept could reach beyond them. Concepts like “mind” suffer equally.

The controlling concept has to be something *necessary*. This suggests that it might be mathematical. And indeed Quine thought that one might be a Pythagorean or a mathematical idealist,¹⁶ though he recommended against such reductions because their logic is precarious and pragmatically they provide a poor balance between experience and our stock of useful concepts. But such a universe is surely too thin. We might get its structure in mathematical form. Can we get the richness of feeling and art that way?.

Goodness, however, seems to be necessary in some sense which is related to the sense in which the number two is necessary. You can’t destroy it. You can destroy good things but goodness itself is indestructible. There is of course a dialectic involved. Goodness is nothing without an instance, but the instances are nothing without it. That is, nothing is just good. Things, actions, and people are always something else through which goodness is expressed. There has, though, to be something to be expressed through them. But this allows goodness to be an explanation for the world: Things exist because they ought to, as John Leslie has argued.¹⁷ For, again no other explanation will do. If we explain the world by reference to a being in the world – whether one of those Gods the Greeks admired, or a large turtle, or the primordial explosion, the big bang, one can always ask: “What caused that?” But goodness does not need this kind of explanation. If so, it is not goodness but evil that needs to be explained – no easy task, I admit.¹⁸

¹⁶In *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, Columbia: The University Press, 1969, pp. 59-63, Quine says Pythagoreanism is possible, i.e., if we follow the Lowenheim Skolem theorem’s implication and all entities are denumerable. The trick is done by dropping all entities whose deletion will not falsify propositions expressed in our notation. But this involves “proxy functions” and he is doubtful that they are always forthcoming.

¹⁷This doctrine is known as axiarchism. One version of it is defended in my “Values, God and the Problem About Why There is Anything at All,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, (New Series) 1 (1987): 147-162. A slightly different version is to be found in A. C. Ewing, *Value and Reality*, London: Allen and Unwin; New York: Humanities Press, 1973. A third version is in John Leslie, *Value and Existence*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979, and is developed in Leslie’s *Infinite Minds*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

¹⁸My best effort is in “Evil & The Transformation of Time,” *Science et Esprit*, 54 (2002): 5-24.

Still, the claim is that goodness manifests itself principally in a certain form. But it has to be, as I argued, a value that includes all other values and what choice is there?

Is this a good argument that we can come to understand? Is it a bad argument for some logical reason? Has it a false premise or an inference that doesn't follow according to some logic we are prepared to defend? Or is it that we cannot now get our minds into the mental state that moved Cudworth and Norris?

If we can't put ourselves in the mind sets of Cudworth or Norris, why not? I don't think it is because we have discovered something they didn't know. Can it be as Samuel Butler feared, that the machines are taking over and that our minds have been developed so that we can only understand arguments that machines can grasp?¹⁹

I leave it to you, but bear in mind that the first part of this paper – the argument about our lives as centres of experience and our being in eternity does not depend upon it. If you reject the argument about goodness you are merely in the dark about what happens after your death. You might think that that is the human condition.

If the argument is sound we may expect that what is good in us will survive and what is not will not. Interestingly, this dissolves an old dispute in theology.²⁰ There have been those who thought that we only survived at all if God chose to revivify us, and those who thought that our immortality is natural. But, of course, if God is good, the good will be saved, and so it comes to the same thing.

¹⁹ See Samuel Butler, "The Book of the Machines" in *Erewhon & Erewhon Revisited*, London: Dent, 1932, pp. 14-163.

²⁰ We have come back to issues that exercised people in the late 17th Century. Henry Dodwell and Samuel Clarke conducted a debate about this issue. Dodwell, in *An Epistolary Discourse Proving from the Scriptures and the First Fathers that the Soul is a Principle Naturally Mortal*, London: R. Smith at the Angel & Bible, without Temple Bar, 1706, claimed that Scripture showed that our immortality was simply a divine choice though he believed that we would all survive but many of us would do so in hell. He cites not only Scripture, but many ancient authorities, as well. He says what he calls "benefit of mortality" is not open to anyone. Samuel Clarke, in *A Letter to Mr. Dodwell*, London: W. Bosham for James Knapton at the Crown in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1706, answers that Dodwell misuses his authorities and misunderstands them, but the main argument seems to be that Dodwell wants both to unite us with the spirit of God and to allow that we can be separated from it. I think Clarke wants to say that it must be the same security that is in us and is in the divine. God creates us by sharing his spirit.

The axiarchic hypothesis I have suggested – along with A. C. Ewing and John Leslie – is really also a piece of Neoplatonism. If it is true, then the good is not eternally frozen like the number 2 or the first prime number after two million and six. It is active. It tends to manifest itself. Our own minds, as I have argued, are not substances modelled after material substances, but are tendencies to have experience.²¹ The successor to any experience is always another experience. Even when you are under anaesthetic you dream, though we often think we don't.

So we will tend to find more expressions, more experiences. It is only a question of whether there is anything in the universe through which our centres of consciousness can be expressed. The human brain is such a thing, but as I suggested, it may only be a filter. And anyway it exists in the scientific story we build for ourselves, not in the eternity from which we tell the story.

There is no way of knowing what to pack for the next world. Perhaps like Coleridge's ancient mariner we should begin by thinking kindly of ungainly creatures.

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²¹ Leslie Armour, *The Rational and the Real*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961, pp. 89-90.