**Life and Death**

* Distinctions between body and soul, as expressed in the thinking of Plato, Aristotle, John Hick and Richard Dawkins;
* Other concepts of the body/soul distinction;
* Different views of life after death: resurrection and reincarnation;
* Questions surrounding the nature of disembodied existence;
* The relationship between the afterlife and the problem of evil.

**Introduction - Does the notion of life after death even make sense?**

Anthony Flew: *In the ordinary, everyday understanding of the words involved, to say that someone survived death is to contradict yourself… For when, after some disaster, the ‘dead’ and the ‘survivors’ have both been listed, what logical space remains for a third category?*

(*Merely Mortal: Can You Survive Your Own Death?, Promethus, 2001.)*

* For Flew notion of ‘life after death’ is meaningless as can’t test empirically and so can neither be verified of falsified.
* When Moritz Schlick (1882-1936) claimed that it was imaginable that you could witness your own funeral, Flew argued that if ‘you’ are viewing your funeral, then what you are witnessing is not you but your body. This is in a sense playing language games, but does allow for some meaningfulness to the notion of life after death. A dualist would argue that they can answer Flew’s criticisms.
* Flew - words such as ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘her’, ‘Peter’ refer to physical organisms and have meaning only in this context. They indicate objects that you can point at, talk to and touch, therefore it is not meaningful to apply them to an immaterial or a spiritual body newly created by God.
* A.J. Ayer commented in *The Central Questions of Philosophy* (1973) that there is *‘no reason why the meaning of words should be indissolubly tied to the context in which they were originally learnt’ and* ‘*If there could conceivably be* ***disembodied*** *spirits, the fact that it would not be correct to call them persons would not perhaps be of very great importance.’*
* Peter Cole - confusion in language doesn’t automatically mean concept being expressed has no reality.

**Plato on the Soul:**

* Dualist – substance dualism (the body and soul are separate, but they interact.
* Soul is a ‘spiritual substance’ not a material one
* Soul can know the truth and understand the Forms through reason; body learns through sense experience, but this is inferior as the physical world is in a constant process of change
* Soul is unchanging – it exists after death and it pre-exists before birth. When we learn, we are actually remembering ; intuition is memory. If we feel we instinctively know what is good or just, it is because we have encountered these qualities in their ideal form before birth
* Developed the ideas of the Greek Philosopher, Thales, who referred to the ‘psyche’ as the breath or soul of life, which allows a body to move itself
* Psyche included person’s hopes, motives, opinions and emotions and was the immortal ‘real’ part of a person
* Soul is made up of three elements:
  + Reason - (the highest) allows us to gain knowledge, experience right from wrong and understand the Forms
  + Emotion - allows us to love and inspires acts of courage (can lead to conceit and reckless behaviour)
  + Appetites - encourage us to look after the physical needs of our bodies (can lead to hedonism and a life little better than that of an animal)
* Charioteer driving a chariot pulled by two winged horses: *"First the charioteer of the human soul drives a pair, and secondly one of the horses is noble and of noble breed, but the other quite the opposite in breed and character. Therefore in our case the driving is necessarily difficult and troublesome.“ Phaedrus, section 246B*
* The Charioteer represents intellect, reason, or the part of the soul that must guide the soul to truth; one horse represents emotions or moral impulse; while the other represents the soul's passion or appetites. The Charioteer directs the entire chariot/soul, trying to stop the horses from going different ways, and to proceed towards enlightenment.

## Summary of the Myth of Er:

1. Solider called Er dies on the battlefield
2. Body recovered for funeral ten days later, does not appear to have decomposed
3. On day 12, as the body is placed on the funeral pyre, Er comes back to life and says he has experienced the afterlife
4. After death, he had journeyed to some judges, who rewarded and punished the souls of the dead
5. The morally good went upwards to a place of reward, the immoral were punished equal to ten times the pain they inflicted on earth. Some would never be released from punishment
6. Souls choose for themselves a new life before rebirth, either as an animal or as a human
7. Some made bad choices, e.g. choosing great power, without thought for what they would have to do to achieve it
8. Some learnt from their experiences and chose more wisely
9. The philosophical, who understood the importance of choosing a life of peace and justice, benefitted from the cycle; others went from happiness to misery, reward to punishment
10. Once souls had chosen their fate, they drank from the River of Forgetfulness and forgot their previous life and their experience of the afterlife. Only Er was freed to return to his funeral and teach his friends

## Possible criticisms of Plato’s understanding of the soul:

1. Doesn’t seem to match our experience; we perceive ourselves having a single, unified mind and personality.
2. These ideas rely on an acceptance of Plato’s theory of Forms, which many argue has no basis in reality
3. Dualism can lead to the neglect of the body. The separation of soul and body leads people to downplay the value of the physical in favour of the “spiritual”.

## Advantages to Plato:

1. Dualism does recognise the tension between what we know we *ought* to do and what we *actually* do.
2. Many people consider themselves to something more than just a mind and body.
3. Concept of separate “soul” gives substance “life after death” – this can live on after bodily death.

**Aristotle on the Soul:**

* Rejected dualism, considered a materialist (sees the body and soul as a unity, but does see them as different)
* Uses the same terms as Plato, but means very different things by them
* Soul and body are inseparable. Uses the example of a wax tablet with a stamp pressed on it – the stamp is inseparable from the wax, just as the soul is inseparable from the person
* Soul is the ‘substance’, ‘essence’ or ‘real thing’. It is its pattern, the thing that makes it what it is or what it will become once it realises its potential (e.g. life cycle of a frog)
* Everything is made up of soul or form, and matter. Matter is what makes a thing up, but soul or form is the specification that makes it what it is. Anything needs matter to make it what it is, but matter needs the soul to define what makes the thing what it is.
* Aristotle thought soul could be explained purely in natural terms, with no reference to a supernatural realm
* *De Anima (On the Soul)* ‘The soul is in some sense the principle of animal life’
* Recognised different types of soul:
  + Plants have a ‘vegetative’ or ‘nutritive’ soul, focused on getting nourishment and reproducing
  + Animals have a ‘perceptive’ soul, they react to the world around them and can experience pleasure and pain
  + Humans have a higher soul, because they can reason and can distinguish right from wrong
* Vardy and Arliss note whilst Aristotle’s ideas don’t seem to allow for the idea of the soul surviving after death of the body, his thoughts did develop over time but are obscure and hard to follow and some texts have been lost. A small fragment seems to indicate that he did think that the human soul, unlike the soul of anything else, could separate on death. This is a disputed text and is not universally accepted as Aristotle’s view. *“To attain any assured knowledge of the soul is one of the most difficult things in the world” De Anima,* Book I

Possible criticisms of Aristotle’s understanding of the soul:

1. We can disguise our emotions and pretend to be something we are not – surely this suggests more of a distinction between the body and the soul than Aristotle is allowing for?
2. Doesn’t allow for an afterlife, which is in conflict with the views of many religious teachings
3. Possible text, which implies Aristotle did believe in the immortality of the human soul – can we really know what he thought? (His texts are notoriously hard to follow)

**Richard Dawkins on the Soul:**

* Dawkins is a hard materialist, who believes that there is no part of a person that is non-physical.
* No separate soul or consciousness; we are the sum total of our genes and nothing exists except matter.
* No consciousness after death, since consciousness is a physical phenomenon; brain dies, consciousness ends.
* Concentrates of the idea that humans are merely carriers of information and DNA and argues that the only conceivable theory of the development of humans is that of evolution. We are as we are because of our genetic make-up, not the efforts of our soul to guide us towards the realm of ideas; each change is due to evolution. There is no soul which continues, there is only the survival of DNA, the function of life.
* In *The Selfish Gene* (1976) - humans are nothing more than ‘survival machines’, Dawkins directly discounts the idea that humans have a soul distinguishing them form other species. Humans, like all living creature, are the ‘vehicles of genes’ only interested in replicating themselves to survive into the next generation. Genes do not actually have thoughts or intentions, to talk of their ‘intentions’ or their ‘selfishness’ is simply to use metaphor and analogy. Human beings are ‘*survival machines – robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes.’*
* In *River out of Eden* (1995) Dawkins asserts: ‘*there is no spirit-driven life force, no throbbing, heaving, pullulating, protoplasmic, mystic jelly. Life is just bytes and bytes and bytes of digital information’* however, this does not mean that life has nothing awe-inspiring about it. He emphasises that the whole process of evolution is in itself awe-inspiring, as are the great achievements of many men and women. No supernatural soul is needed, though, to explain this.
* Dawkins does not deal with the concept of the soul, but instead looks at the idea of consciousness and self-awareness.
* He argues humans have developed self-awareness as is has evolutionary advantages; it allows deliberate choices to be made.
* We feel a sense of individuality due to the fact that our genes are working together in ‘colonies’ (again, he is talking metaphorically.)
* We cannot perceive ourselves as a colony but as a whole, but an individual person is really a ‘colony’ of genes working together in such a complex away that it has become aware of itself.
* This allows us to perceive ourselves within the world, to think ahead, imagine the future (hence the evolutionary advantage.)
* This working together of our genes is based on the desire for survival of those genes.

The Development of Consciousness according to Dawkins:

If an act has bad results the animal will not repeat it

If an act has good results the animal will repeat it

Ultimately the colony of genes needs a central control in order for it to function so the colony develops the brain

Animals evolve so behaviour is no longer trial and error but they develop the capacity to predict the results of certain actions. This enables them to choose how to behave.

Dawkins on religious views of the soul:

* Argues (like Bertrand Russell) ideas such as an immortal soul have no sound basis and are simply the ‘wish-fulfilment’ of those who struggle with mortality and fear death
* Consciousness does not give humans special status as the ‘image of God’, but is simply a wonderful aspect of evolution

Some possible criticisms of Dawkins’ theory:

* His theory does not explain things like emotions. According to his theory, emotions would be a mistake since they are usually inefficient, and often only get in the way of genetic progress.
* People can hide their feelings and can mimic the behaviour of another emotion. Are these not a conscious decision of the person? More than just a chemical response? Or environmental stimuli?
* Relationship between consciousness and brain does remain a mystery; maybe neuroscientists will one day understand how the chemicals in our bodies lead to self-awareness and personality, but will we ever know for certain that consciousness is no more than physical chemical changes?

**John Hick on the Soul:**

* Arguably falls within the ‘monist materialist’ tradition as a soft materialist.
* Identifies the whole of the earthly life as ‘a vale of soul-making’ *(think back to the Irenaean Theodicy),* which could be seen as giving a Platonic view of the soul, in which the soul and the body are distinct. However, Hick gives a more traditional perspective, claiming the soul needs a body to continue its journey into the afterlife.
* Unlike Plato, Hick holds that the soul is not unchanging, but rather it has to grow and develop, just as the body does in its earthly life. This is an evolutionary process, by which people continue to learn and exhibit free will, until such a time as they are ready for a full relationship with God.
* Hick holds that the most coherent theory of life after death is that of a physical rebirth.
* He proposes a ‘replica’ theory, in which he claims that it is possible that a person dies to their earthly life, however a duplicate person comes to life in heaven as an exact ‘replica’ of the person who died here in earth.
* His theory allows for the avoidance of the complexities of the relation between the soul and the body: the person who survived death would be recognisably similar to the one who died and would have the same memories as the deceased individual. *(see later detailed notes on ‘replica’ theory)*
* Hick argues in *‘Death and Eternal Life’ (1976)* that the immortality of the soul (in a ‘replica’ body) is not something that can be proved in this life, but argues that it is not an unreasonable belief and something that a rational person could accept.

Some possible criticisms of Hick’s theory:

* Hick’s views are based on his theodicy that evil is a necessary thing, willed by God, as it the only way to achieve the aim of developing human souls. Is this a price actually worth paying?
* **Vardy** challenges Hick over ‘repliac’ theory - would John Smith be the same person? Hick argues that he would if he thought of himself and others thought of himself as the same person, but is this enough? It is a ‘replica’ the same person?
* **Vardy** - if there is a break in continuity, can the replicated person be considered the same person?
* **Bernard Williams** - Hick’s portrayal of an endless life of replications would be a meaningless, boring life.
* Just because something is logically coherent and there is no evidence to the contrary, it doesn’t mean that it actually happens. Logical possibility does not equate to factual possibility.

Additional Philosophers of note:

Richard Swinburne *The Evolution of the Soul*

* There are fundamental truths about humans that cannot be explained in physical terms.
* Most important and significant aspects of us which give us our identities can’t be found in our physical bodies.
* The human soul is unique, in that it is capable of logical, ordered and complex thought. It is aware of choices and moral obligation.
* Souls allow us to recognise goodness and to have consciences identifying when things are right and wrong.

Keith Ward *Defending the Soul*

* Responds to the scientific claim that humans are just physical beings.
* Argues that there will be problems for humanity if we abandon belief in the soul as morality would simply become about personal taste.
* We need the moral claims that the soul recognises as coming from God in order to have the dignity of being human and not simply animal.
* Without a soul, humanity lacks any sense of final purpose.

*The Bible puts it supremely well when it says, ‘The Lord God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it: he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils, and the man began to live.’ Man is made of dust; but he is filled with the spirit of God. He emerges from the simplest material forms, but finds his true kinship in the goal and fulfilment of his existence, the supreme Goodness.*

**Dualism: (Plato), the Christian Tradition, Rene Descartes, (Richard Swinburne and Keith Ward)**

The soul is the real me and is trapped in the body, which it drives like a ghost in a machine (Gilbert Ryle, who goes on to reject this view)

**Within the Christian tradition:**

* God gives people a ‘divine spark’ so that they are made in God’s image. Animals are formed from the ground, but God puts something of himself into humanity ‘and breathed into his nostril the breath of life and the man became a living being’ Genesis 2:7
* Many Christians believe the soul will be judged by God after death
* Soul goes beyond mental intelligence, whilst also including it. Can set aside reason and argument and experience God in a ‘cloud of unknowing’

**Debate about where the soul originates from:**

1. Platonic idea, souls are pre-existence and survive death, passing to a different realm where they are perhaps united to a new body. (See Wordsworth ‘Intimations of immortality from recollection of early childhood’) Not a mainstream view.
2. Creationism (not here to do with the literal truth of Genesis) suggests God creates each soul and attaches it to the growing foetus at a certain point. (This view has a bearing on embryo research, fertility treatments and abortion.) This remains the most popular Christian view on the origin of the soul.
3. Traducianism is the belief the soul is inherited from our parents. Early leaders thought it could help to explain the concept of original sin – we deserve punishment for sin as our inherited souls are already tainted. Tertullian saw the soul as the substance, which God breathed into Adam and which is passed down through different generations by continuous division. Later considered heresy.

**Rene Descartes (Meditation VI):**

***“… on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it.”***

* **If I am not my body, the demise of that mortal object need not entail my extinction**
* **People are made up of immaterial and physical stuff and it is the immaterial side of people that makes them individuals.**
* **If X and Y are separate, what happens to X does not necessarily happen to Y**

**Problems:**

1. **Just because you consider yourself something, does not mean that this is the case. (Davies – I might consider myself to be sober, but it doesn’t mean I am.)**
2. **How do souls and bodies interact? (Descartes held that this was through a little gland at the back of the neck called the pineal gland, but this has been discredited.) How does the soul ‘drive’ the body?**
3. **What is the relationship between the soul and the mind/brain? If drugs/accidents/operations can alter our personality and memory, what happens to the soul? Can the soul survive, even when the brain does not?**
4. **Could there be a society of disembodied souls? H.H. Price describes this society as a dream world, in which we are trapped in our individual memories, creating our own internal heaven or hell. We might communicate telepathically with other disembodied souls, but would not speak, hear, feel or experience in any other way. It is possible, but not that attractive, as little creativity or ability to interact with one’s environment.**
5. **Vardy questions how one’s soul can be them? If a living person has a body, brain, sensory organs, emotions and feelings, how can a disembodied soul with none of these attributes still be me?**

**Monist Materialism: Gilbert Ryle** The view that a person is a person and cannot be analysed into bits.

* **Gilbert Ryle argues that when dualists talk of a soul they make a ‘Category Mistake’ e.g. example of showing a foreigner round or university or a cricket match. The mistake is to think ‘university’ or ‘team spirit’ are on top of the things the foreigner has seen. The soul is not on top of the actions of a human person but is about the way a person acts and responds to others.**
* If we take a holistic view of what it means to be a person, we must survive death with our present identity retained, as whole persons.
* We can talk about a ‘soul’, but as formed by interaction with relationships with others. We can turn away from developing a soul ‘She has no soul and doesn’t care about anyone’, but we are talking about personality.
* Monists might (as soft materialists) uphold a belief in the resurrection of the body, despite the evidence of rotting and decaying bodies. They might support their ideas with the example of Jesus – he did not appear as a disembodied spirit, but as a resurrected person, who could walk and talk, and eat with his friends.

**Hard Materialism: (Aristotle), (Dawkins), Identity Theory, Behaviourism, Functionalism** Insists on importance of bodies, to the extent that persons are nothing but bodies. Materialism is the view that only that which we can know empirically (i.e. through the senses) is real; a separate soul as it cannot be verified. It is based on and understanding of the universe that has one substance only, that being material, and generally a belief that the universe is governed by cause and effect.

* Identity theory - mind is simply the brain. It is a family of views on the relationship between mind and body. Type Identity theories hold that at least some types of mental states are literally identical with some types (or kinds, or classes) of brain states. The earliest advocates of Type Identity—U.T. Place, Herbert Feigl, and J.J.C. Smart —proposed their own version of the theory in the late 1950s to early 60s. David Armstrong later made the radical claim that *all* mental states (including intentional ones) are identical with physical states, causing philosophers of mind to divide themselves into camps over the issue.
* Behaviourism is based on position that all things that organisms do—including acting, thinking, and feeling—should be regarded as behaviours, and that psychological disorders are best treated by altering behaviour patterns or modifying the environment. Individuals' response to different environmental stimuli shapes our behaviours. There are no philosophical differences between publicly observable processes (actions) and privately observable processes (thinking and feeling). Originated with John B. Watson.
* Functionalism developed as an alternative. It holds that mental states (beliefs, desires, being in pain) are constituted solely by their functional role, that is, they are causal relations to other mental states, sensory inputs, and behavioural outputs. It is concerned with the effective functions of the brain, through its organisation or its ‘software programs’. Mental states are said to be realised on multiple levels; they are able to be manifested in various systems, even perhaps computers, so long as the system performs the appropriate functions. While computers are physical devices with electronic substrate that perform computations on inputs to give outputs, so brains are physical devices with neural substrate that perform computations on inputs which produce behaviours.

**Soft Materialism**: **(See John Hick*)***A person is not divided, but is more than a sum total of genes. Unlike Dawkins (a hard materialist) soft materialists believe in life after death.

**Life after Death: Reincarnation**

**Hindu Beliefs in Reincarnation**

* Reincarnation is a key feature of Hindu beliefs
* Each person has an essential self, known as the ‘atman’
* The atman is eternal and seeks unity with God (Brahman) whence it came
* A key message of the Upanishads (Hindu sacred texts) is that spiritual wisdom comes to those who recognise the identity of the atman with the Brahman
* Brahman manifests himself in the atman of each individual person
* Through the cycle of samsara and a succession of birth, death and rebirth a person eventually comes to understanding and an ultimate union of the atman with Brahman
* From this point onwards, it is not necessary for an atman to continue in the cycle of samsara, and the atman is released from the cycle. This liberation is known as moksha
* The physical body is simply a vehicle for the atman
* The atman holds a person’s true nature. It leaves a body at the time of death and enters another at birth
* This process of birth, death and rebirth is controlled by the laws of karma.
* Each deliberate action a person performs has ‘fruits’ or ‘consequences’
* A good action will bring good consequences; a bad action will bring bad consequences
* The ‘fruits’ of one’s behaviour can be experienced within a lifetime – kindness to others often leads to kindness in return; selfishness or violence often leads to the same in return
* It is not always true, however, that someone seems to get the just deserts of their behaviour, however seemingly undeserved bad fortune is explained as being due to the karmic fruits of their behaviour in their previous lives. To respond to suffering bravely and without complaint will help to generate good karma and will lead them ultimately closer to moksha
* The laws of karma work in the universe in the same way as any other natural laws (such as motion or gravity.) The punishments associated with karma are not seen as judgment from God, but as an evitable consequence of one’s own behaviour. People are reborn entirely because of their own behaviour and everything that happens to them is something they deserve
* The balance of good and bad karma attached to each atman determines what quality life an atman is reborn into – good karma will lead to health, strength and affluence; bad karma might lead to poverty of disability
* The laws of karma could be seen to make Hinduism a religion lacking in compassion for the poor and weak; they are, after all, only suffering as result of their own behaviour
* Hindus generally understand this differently, as compassionate behaviour leads to karma benefits (good behaviour will bring about good karmic consequences) and, because everyone has an atman, everyone is ultimately connected to God (Brahman – the divine essence.) The beggar you ignore might have be your own child or parent from a past or future life
* In practice, these beliefs have not always led to compassionate behaviour and the Caste system has now been outlawed in India

**Buddhist Beliefs in Reincarnation:**

* Buddhists have no belief in the soul. Instead, Buddhists teach the doctrine of ‘anatta’ (no-self – think “no atman”)or ‘soullessness’
* There is no God and no individual self; belief in the ‘self’ is an illusion and encourages selfishness and egotistical behaviour
* Each person is made up of the five skandhas (strands) of matter, sensation, perception, volition (wilful acts) and consciousness, which are woven together to make a person who attracts karma. There is nothing beyond these five strands and any sense of atman is purely an illusion
* Life is unsatisfactory as it involves suffering (dukkha) caused by our inability to experience satisfaction due to craving - craving to be an ‘individual self’ and to have more of everything
* Buddhists believe that the ultimate goal is to reach ‘nirvana’. This is not really a place, but a state of being. It is a state reached when we have overcome craving (our desire to be and our perpetual state of dissatisfaction) and have merged entirely with the universe
* ‘Nirvana’ involves no longer being an individual self and not having anything all
* We are trapped on a Wheel of Life.We will be reborn many times to give us the opportunity to reach nirvana, which will lead to freedom from suffering
* Buddhists do share with Hinduism a belief in the cycle of karma and rebirth. Just like Hinduism, actions have ‘fruits’ or ‘consequences’, which lead to rebirth in future lives. There is an additional question for Buddhists regarding this process – if there is no essential self or soul for karmic fruits to attach themselves to, what is it to be reborn? How can one person be said to be a reincarnation of another, if there is nothing that stays the same from one life to the next?
* Buddhists argue that the person is neither the same nor different. Buddhists believe in a life force that is passed on and use the popular image of a row of candles. As each burns down, it is used to light the next in the line
* Buddhists (like Hindus) believe that your rebirth is the result of your karma and may cause you to return in any of the realms in the Wheel of Life
* When a person is able to reach full understanding of the meaning of life, that is enlightenment, they will escape from rebirth to nirvana. This is a state of higher consciousness and of perfection.
* Buddhism teaches that the first requirement is for each individual to recognise the cycle of life: the great Wheel of Life, the inevitability of death and the inevitability of reincarnation
* A central teaching in Buddhism is that everything changes and a Buddhist must recognise death as a temporary end to a temporary span on earth – at death a ‘life principle’ (a term used by Vardy) moves to another body. This might happen immediately or involve a gap of years, decades or even centuries
* Most human minds are uncontrolled and they flit from one thing to another. Through sustained meditation, it is possible to control the mind to the extent that it is no longer distracted and death no longer has control over it. An uncontrolled mind can be absorbed into any body, whereas a controlled mind allows a ‘life principle’ to live actively through death, to control the experience and to make choices regarding reincarnation. (The Dalai Lama, for example, says that when he dies he will not choose to be reborn in Tibet as it is under Chinese rule, making it difficult to practice as a Buddhist. This type of control is very hard to exercise and make take many lifetimes of meditation to develop)
* Focusing on the inevitability of death allows for a release from suffering, for example as material possessions or appearance simply do not matter. What is left is a need to develop compassion for others, through the recognition that everyone is destined for death. To learn how to die, is to learn how to live
* Death needs to become a friend, something one should think about actively every day. Death, when it comes, will then not be a surprise and the compassionate selfless path can be followed
* Whilst most people do not remember previous lives, Buddhists do hold that many people can. To those who insist on empirical evidence of reincarnation, Vardy notes, a Buddhist might say that a reincarnated life principle is not a physical thing. Would you deny the existence of radio waves simply because one cannot see them inside a radio set?

*Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (University Press of Virginia, 1974) by Ian Stevenson

Who was Ian Stevenson?

What does the study involve?

Case Study 1 – Swarnlata of India

Case Study 2 – Imad of the Lebanon

Possible explanations:

1. Fraud
2. Cryptomnesia
3. Genetic memory
4. Extra-sensory perception

What did Stevenson conclude from his study?

Criticisms of Belief in Reincarnation:

1) Religious reasons. A Christian or Muslim would disagree on the grounds that it contradicts the teachings of their own holy books. There are those that argue in favour of reincarnation simply because this is what their religion teaches. Is this enough? (Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains may all fall into this category)

3) Much evidence for reincarnation come from cultures in which belief in reincarnation is already prevalent.

4) Shared memory is not the same as shared identity. How can two separate ‘individuals’ be the ‘same person’?

5) Is the notion of karma and rebirth actually fair?

6) Is it right to punish someone for crimes or faults they cannot even remember committing?

**Life after Death: Resurrection**

**Christian Views**

* Jesus’ resurrection gives up the prototype
* Jesus died on the cross and his dead body was placed in an empty tomb
* After three days, the same dead body came to life once more and Jesus appeared to his disciples looking the same as before he died – indeed one of his disciples, Thomas, would not believe in the resurrection until he saw the mark of the spear in Jesus’s side and the marks of the nails in his hands and feet
* Jesus could be seen living, eating, and breathing in full bodily form. After quite a short time, Jesus ascended into heaven – again a literal reading suggests this took place in a bodily form.
* However, there are times in the New Testament accounts when it seems that Jesus was not recognisable (Luke 24: 13-32) and that his body was not limited in the way that earthly bodies are; it seems that it could pass through matter (John 20:19) and disappear (Luke 24:51.) John 20:17 also suggested that Jesus’s ascended body was different in some way. The model of Jesus is, in itself, open to interpretation, as is, therefore, how human continued existence might work.
* Most Christians use an interpretation of the model of Jesus to accept the belief in some form of resurrection after death. They believe that an immortal soul lives on in some way post-mortem; God breathing life at the moment of creation is regarded by many as evidence of the existence of a soul that gives humans their individuality:

*The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.* Genesis 2.7

* Although Christians accept a belief in an immortal soul, they do not agree on whether the resurrected form is identifiable with the person supposed to have survived death:
  + literal interpretation of Jesus’s experiences of resurrection in an identical bodily form
  + some, even if Jesus did rise and ascend as described, what would it mean for other human beings to have ‘life after death’ given that their bodies do not survive in the way Jesus’ is claimed to have done?
  + some, there needs to be continued existence in a consistent physical form to aid identification with the person we knew in this world.
  + Problems of how a physical body can survive death has led many other Christians to argue for a different form of resurrection and that, as earthly conditions are absent, there may be some other means by which identification takes place. Perhaps some aspects of our inner natures can be recognised, or maybe God ensures that we are recognised in the next world? St Paul taught that after death the body will be raised, but it will be transformed and will become a spiritual body, as unlike its earthly form as the seed is from the plant into which is grows (1 Corinthians 15:35-44):

*The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.* 1 Corinthians 15:35-44

This is used by some to explain how an individual can keep their personal identity but be able to overcome the problems of a physical resurrection and achieve life after death in a bodily form.

Questions raised by Physical Resurrection:

“If Christians are in a physical, resurrected state and physical environment, will they have to queue to see Jesus? Where will this physical existence be? And what will they be doing all the time?”

Peter Cole, *Philosophy of Religion* (Hodder Murray, 1999)

1) There are spatial issues involved in physical resurrection, which are difficult to resolve.

2) If our post- death existence involves having a body, this implies that heaven must be a physical place. What would this be like?

Questions raised by the separation of the body and soul and a purely spiritual resurrection (Peter Cole):

1. Is our identity only the result of memories and actions in the mind?
2. What about the causal effects between mind and body?
3. Modern science has shown links between the mind and the brain, so how can the mind survive on its own?
4. If minds are non-physical objects, how can the mind cause anything to happen in the physical world?

**Replica Theory**

**John Hick (1922 - 2012)** argued for religious pluralism; famous for his soul-making theodicy and replica theory

**Cosmic Optimism**

Religious belief carries a ‘cosmic optimism’ that one day we will have the chance to improve ourselves to overcome our failings and reach the potential that we could have achieved on earth if we were not so flawed. The Eastern traditions understand this as rebirths back into the physical world; Western traditions translate this into belief in eternal life in heaven (or for some in hell.)

**Problem of Evil**

In our future, improved life, we would look back and recognise the importance of the challenges and sufferings we have faced as contributing to our spiritual development. Our pain will be justified by the outcome and we will understand what it was for and what it was leading to. (Uses John Bunyan’shero’s journey towards the Celestial City.) Accepts life after death is not provable, but argues that it is also not unreasonable and, if we do continue on a journey after death, this allows for a coherent explanation of the problem of evil.

**Hell**

Hick rejects the doctrine of a traditional hell as incompatible with God’s omni-benevolence. Argues traditional belief in hell was developed as social control, encouraging people to obey those in religious authority.

**Pluralism**

Sees religious belief as largely culturally determined – someone brought up in central India is likely to find their needs met by Hinduism, someone in France is equally likely to seek God through the Roman Catholic tradition. Argues for a pluralist understanding of the truth of religion, where people find truth within their own faith. Emphasises love of God and argues that God would not prevent people from the possibilities of eternal life simply by their membership of one religious group or another, which could be largely based on the circumstances of their birth. Every religion puts forward a valid attempt to understand ‘truth’ and everyone should have the opportunity to continue their development into the next life, regardless of their current place in the world.

**Continuity**

For those (like Hick) advocating continued existence, there is a serious issue: if nothing continues through death, then in what sense can one say that it is the ‘same’ person after death? MacKay – analogy of a chalk message written on a blackboard and then erased. Just as the message can be rewritten using chalk or some other material, or even spoken, so God could recreate us after death. If God recreates us after death, in what sense can we be considered ‘the same’? It would be more accurate to refer to the ‘recreation’ as a replica.

**Replica Theory:**

Hick acknowledges the problem, but yet he argues that it is meaningful to call it the same person if someone dies and appears in a new world with the same memories, etc. He uses the word ‘replica’ in inverted commas, because he is using it in a very particular sense – it is not logically possible for the original and the ‘replica’ to exist simultaneously or for there to be more than one ‘replica’ of the same original.

***Death and the Eternal* (1976), Hick gives three examples to explain his theory:**

**Example One:**

***Someone suddenly ceases to exist at a certain place in this world and the next instant comes into existence at another place. They have not moved from A to B by making a path through the intervening space, but disappeared at A and reappeared at B.*** (Perhaps there could be some form of “teleportation”).

Hick uses the example London to New York: ***The person who reappears is exactly similar in body and mind to the one who disappeared. There is continuity of memory, complete similarity of bodily features such as fingerprints, stomach contents and also beliefs and habits. The person would be conscious of being the same person though would not understand how they now come to a different place.***

Hick argues that it is reasonable to call this person the same person as the one who disappeared.

**Example Two**

The person in London dies and a ‘replica’ of him appears in New York. Again, Hick argues that it would be reasonable to regard the replica as the same person who died – odd thought it would be.

**Example Three**

The person dies and reappears in a different world. Hick likens this to waking up from sleep. The person then would regard themselves as the same person as the one who had died.

Hick hopes to demonstrate the logical possibility of a living person ceasing to exist at a certain location and a being exactly similar to him in all respects subsequently coming into existence at another location (i.e. in the next world.) It is not logically inconceivable to suppose that when we die a ‘replica’ of ourselves survives death and lives on in a new form of life. Hick argues that it is valid to say that this is the same person. For Hick, a person is an indissoluble psycho-physical unity and therefore the body is a necessity.

**Responses to and Criticism of Replica Theory:**

1. Terence Penelhum = only automatic and unquestionable identification when there is bodily continuity.

Brian Davies agrees:

*Knowing that a replica of myself will be wining and dining somewhere is not at all the same as knowing that I will be wining and dining somewhere. For the continued existence of a person, more is required than replication.*

1. If the two people are not entirely the same person (as Penelhum and Davies suggest) how is divine judgment on the second being fair?
2. If an exact replica of a famous work of art could be created, so that there was no physical difference at all between the two versions, would they be worth equal amounts of money? Would you be happy to exchange the original for the replica?
3. Inconsistent with mainstream Christian teaching, which centres on the importance of Jesus’s death on the cross and his resurrection. If you can get to heaven whether you accept Jesus or not, surely this makes Jesus’s death pointless?
4. Other religions would argue that these beliefs are inconsistent with their teachings. Most consistent with the Hindu and Sikh approaches, which argue for tolerance to other faiths and rebirths in which one can improve, but both believe in rebirths into this world, rather than the resurrection of a ‘replica’.
5. Removes the incentive to struggle to fulfil one’s potential and behave well. If we are all going to get there in the end, even if this is within the afterlife, why bother to struggle now?
6. It is overly optimistic to argue that all earthly sufferings will make sense through the lens of the afterlife. Dostoevsky argues through Ivan Karamazov that nothing makes innocent suffering worthwhile; it would have been better of God had created no world at all.
7. Surely Hick’s notion of universal salvation suggests a lack of free will? If we are all ultimately saved, even if it takes some of us considerably longer than others, do we have any real choice?

**Questions surrounding the nature of disembodied existence**

1. **Is disembodied existence a logical belief?**

**No:**

Brian Davies - just because we can conceive of ourselves as being disembodied, this doesn’t make it an actual possibility. We can conceive of all sorts of things – I might imagine that I am able to fly. The things that make up human persons are linked to us having a body; survival without a body is, in his view, impossible.

**Yes:**

Richard Swinburne - it is possible to imagine us existing without a body. If we can imagine it, then it is a coherent concept. Others agree - in the English language we say that we ‘have’ bodies not that we ‘are’ bodies; we recognise ourselves to be separate and distinct from the purely physical. It is not possible for scientists to tell from brain activity what someone is thinking and perhaps we will never reach this point. Perhaps there is something of our mental ‘inner’ lives that goes beyond the physical, which makes it sensible to suggest that consciousness might be able to exist on its own, without the body?

**H.H. Price** (1889 – 1984)

Discussions about afterlife need to be pre-empted by attempts to establish whether the beliefs are meaningful.

* Disembodied, or discarnate existence is not inconceivable
* Gives a picture of what this afterlife might be like
* Draws a comparison with dreaming, which feels real as we can ‘see’, ‘hear’ and ‘feel’ things and have the sense that we have bodies - afterlife might be like dreaming. It might involve vivid mental images and people might not understand that they have died and mental images might seem like real perceptions
* Doesn’t have to mean the end of personal identity, as the mental images which survive death might include memories, desires and ways of looking at the world. People’s mental images after death giving a sense of physical sensation would be enough to create a sense of identity
* Whilst the world would not be ‘real’ in the sense of having its own independent physical characteristics, it would seem ‘real’ to those who experienced it, which would be enough to make it ‘real’
* Analogy of silver and brass plated silver; the brass is not ‘real’ silver, but it is a real object – the only sense in which it is unreal is that it gives the impression that it is something, which it is not.
* The location of this ‘other world’ is a different kind of consciousness, rather than a different place. It would seem like it had space and objects within in a spatial reality, however they would not have a location in terms of being able to measure the distance of one thing from another
* The afterlife is composed of the mental images; a person would in fact make their own future life. People might revisit unpleasant or traumatic experiences as well as more pleasurable ones.
* Implies a strong degree of subjectivity, possibly without any connections between different individuals; Ahluwalia notes that one’s afterlife might contain famous people they are familiar with, but it is unlikely the afterlives of these people will contain them! Price argues that it might be that telepathy works easily in an afterlife unrestrained by physical laws. There could be ‘shared worlds’ of like-minded people, but there would be many worlds, rather than the traditional notion of a single heaven, for example.

Not claiming to prove the existence of an afterlife, simply to show that it was a possibility.

Argued for evidence to support his ideas, e.g. mediums claiming to have telepathic contact with the deceased, which often describe an afterlife which is very similar to this world, with the people contacted having similar interests and concerns to those experienced in their earthly lives.

Perhaps the dreams we have in this life are evidence of this ‘other world’ of consciousness – maybe we already slip into these other worlds when we are asleep?

Criticisms of H.H. Price’s Disembodied Afterlife:

1. Inconsistent with traditional Christian teaching, or other religions. Why hasn’t God communicated this?
2. Big difference between a plausible theory, and that theory actually being true.
3. Religious believers might object to a kind of dream-like world, with no contact with an ultimate reality of God. The afterlife is understood by many as a time to come face to face with God, be judged and to enjoy being in God’s presence. Price’s vision is rather disappointing in comparison.
4. What about people whose mental processes are insufficient from them to be able to have memories and desires? What about babies who live for just a few hours? If someone has been blind from birth, will their afterlife contain any visual imagery? What about those suffering mental illness, delusion or depression? It does not fit with our sense of justice that those who had to suffer in this life should continue their suffering into to next.
5. Might lead us to think that we should surround ourselves with comforts and pleasures and avoid the unpleasant. We would have to turn away from negative images about suffering in order to avoid having to come face to face with them again.

In defence, Price never suggests his afterlife is good or fair, determined by a good God, or in any way compensatory for earthly sufferings. Perhaps he might argue that a more virtuous person will assemble a more pleasant set of images than someone who had led a criminal life?

1. Feuerbach might point out the elements of wish-fulfilment in Price’s view. Is imagining our wishes come true in the afterlife because of our childish inability to cope with reality?
2. In *Death and Eternal Life,* Hick argues against Price, stating that, if we all live in a world created by our own mental perceptions, we would have little genuine contact with each other. Hick questions the quality of this life and the extent to which this is actually living?

(Hick, however, does approve of Price’s suggestion that during life after death the individual might continue to grow and to learn, as this fits with his own belief in ‘the vale of soul-making.’)

1. **What evidence is there for disembodied existence?**

**Psychic Evidence:**

Modern advances in science have supported a more scientific, materialist view of the world. The growth of secularisation has also led to the rejection of traditional religious beliefs and a rejection of the supernatural.

Vardy and Arliss -if talk of a disembodied consciousness which interacts with our bodies is valid, this hypothesis needs to offer explanations for things which materialists cannot provide. This evidence could come from psychic research. In 1882, the Society of Psychical Research was founded to investigate evidence for the paranormal (known also as parapsychology.)

Vardy and Arliss - seven possible phenomena that, whilst not provable in the scientific sense, are widely reported and believed by many and which are best accounted for if there is a disembodied existence:

1. **Freedom**

*If the brain is the same as the mind and if consciousness is entirely a matter of material states, then it seems difficult to explain human freedom. Most people accept that human beings are free, and that talk of moral praise or blame make sense - this seems to make it more likely that the mind and consciousness is more than simply the product of a series of electrical impulses, however complex these may be.*

1. **Sixth Sense**

*Sometimes animals are said to have a ‘sixth sense’; the same can apply to human beings as well.*

1. **Telepathy or ESP (Extra-Sensory Perception)**

*Claimed power of one person to be able to read the mind of another, or to sense their thoughts or distress, when no physical means exist for this to be explained. (In 1934, Dr Rhine at Duke University in America published results of tests based on Zener cards. These are packs of 25 cards showing five each of several symbols: plus sign, star, circle, square and three wavy lines.) Have been criticisms about the nature of the experiments and the interpretation of the data. Hick concluded (in Philosophy of Religion, 1983, p129) ‘it is difficult to deny that some positive factors and not merely “chance” is operating’.*

1. **The Ability to Move Objects (Psychokinesis)**

*Claimed power to be able to move objects without touching them or to affect physical objects when there is no physical link between the body and the object.*

*(Dr Rhine also made a study of this area and Helmut Schmidt, his successor, produced a machine for testing this ability. The experiments seem to indicate that some people have succeeded.)*

*Russian housewife, Nelya Mikhailova, who separated the yolk of an egg from its white.*

*Uri Geller has convinced some that he can bend metal spoons with the power of his mind. Others consider him to be simply a skilful magician.*

1. **Spiritualism/Paranormal Phenomena**

*e.g. Tarot cards and Ouija boards claimed to provide information that could not be obtained in a physical way. If there is any truth in these claims (even admitting that there are frauds) then the adequacy of a purely material explanation for the human mind seems open to challenge.*

*Both 4 & 5 are seen to support spiritualism where, through a medium, contact is said to be made with the afterlife; if it is possible to pick up messages from people’s minds, it may be possible to pick up messages from the dead.*

*This possibility suggests the dead have a real-life of their own and continue to develop through time as persons, occasionally taking the take time to visit a medium. Hick argues this is not correct as the spirits seem very much what they were in this world. He argues it’s more likely to be residual memories that exist after death that some people are able to ‘pick up’.*

*Other possible explanations of spiritualism include telepathy (the information is gained by the extra-sensory perception from the living, not the dead), evil spirits (the traditional Christian view, this is a masquerading evil spirit whose aim is to confuse and mislead people about the afterlife and God) or psychokinesis (poltergeists are really the unconscious psychokinetic abilities of a living person in close proximity to the manifestation.)*

1. **Out of Body Experiences**

*In almost all societies have reports of people leaving their bodies whilst in meditative states and being able to see things which they could not otherwise have seen as they were nowhere near the events in questions when they took place and they had no access to the information.*

1. **Near Death Experiences**

*When people who are very close to death or who have actually died have experiences of leaving their bodies. Sometimes the person will look down at the room in which their body is lying or see the doctors working on their body, often the person will experience being greeted by close friends or relatives who have died and being surrounded by a tremendous sense of light and peace and not wishing to return to their bodies, but feeling that they must do. Often those who have these experiences are totally changed as a result.*

* *claimed by people who have been considered to be clinically dead*
* *many have been sceptical about the possibility of such experiences occurring*
* *One of the earliest studies was ‘Life after Life’ by American Raymond Moody in 1975, which coined the phrase ‘near-death experience’. Records more than 100 accounts of people who claim to have had NDEs*
* *number of subsequent scientists have attempted to establish a scientific basis for the study of NDEs. Kenneth Ring conducted studies, including into blind people who reported sight during NDEs and out-of-body experiences. His research suggested NDEs were not related to a person’s religious conviction and seemed to have a lasting effect on those who experienced them, in that they no longer feared death, became less materialistic and more appreciative of the world and the people in it. This led him to the conclusion that life after death is a genuine reality and the NDEs offered the potential to be of great comfort to those approaching the end of their lives.*
* *In 1995, Peter Fenwick detailed a study of over 300 NDEs in ‘The Truth in the Light’. He lists 12 common features (although not in a specific order and with recognition that few people experience every event):*
* *Feelings of peace*
* *Out of body*
* *Into the tunnel*
* *Approaching the light*
* *The being of light*
* *The barrier*
* *Another country*
* *Meeting relatives*
* *The life review*
* *The point of decision*
* *The return*
* *The aftermath*
* *more recent study 15 December 2001 in The Lancet. 13yrs study of 344 patients in ten different Dutch hospitals who were resuscitated after a cardiac arrest. 18% could recall some portion of what happened when they were clinically dead; 8-12% reported ‘near-death’ experiences.*
* *2003, Dr Bruce Greyson described a three-year study of 1595 patients hospitalised in a cardiac care unit. 10% of patients with cardiac arrest and 1% of patients with other heart problems reported NDEs. Established the NDE Greyson scale, which identifies the stages in a NDE:*

1. *Experience of being in a tunnel with a light at the end.*
2. *Changes in thinking processes – thinking gets faster.*
3. *Changes in emotional state – sense of peace, unity, love, warmth, safety.*
4. *Paranormal or psychic component – sense of leaving the body. Extra-sensory perceptions of future events.*
5. *Transcendental phase; sense of being in a different dimension.*

* *It is reported most of those who have had such experiences have found their lives radically changed, so that money and material things no longer mattered to them and people became central to their lives.*

*Scepticism about NDEs:*

*Dr Susan Blackmore, a leading atheist psychologist = NDEs are a function of the brain. The brain is just billions of neurons and an NDE is an illusion created by the brain. She maintains that:*

1. *seeing a light at the end of a tunnel is due to the way the cells in the visual system are arranged.*
2. *The ‘feel good factor’ is created by the emotional effects of the person being in the situation of being close to death. Under stress, in shock and with lack of oxygen, the body releases a massive surge of endorphins.*

*NDEs are the product of the brain that cannot happen when the brain is dead. She argues they occur during the period when the person goes into unconsciousness and in the time during which they come out of consciousness.*

*Possible Evidence to Counter Dr Blackmore’s View:*

*It would be necessary to show that, whilst unconscious and brain dead, the person had acquired experiences which could not have been obtained from memory or from the normal sense organs of a person either just before ‘death’ or immediately after brain activity starts once more. Vardy and Arliss suggest two case studies which seem to answer these challenges, from the BBC documentary February 2003 ‘*The Day I Died’*:*

1. ***Pam Reynolds***

***CAT revealed an aneurysm in the base of her brain. Underwent an ‘Operation stand still’ procedure, which involved reducing her temperature to 10-15◦C, her heart and brain stopped and blood being drained from her head. She was put to sleep, had her eyes taped shut and monitors which clicked put into her ears to register any brain activity.***

***Had a NDE in which she could be specific about a drill, which looked like an electric toothbrush and a conversation between doctors. When a subsequent doctor verified the information he found that the drill did look like an electric toothbrush and, when he checked with her surgeon, he found that she had accurately recorded the conversation in the room. It was confirmed that she could not have seen the drill or the bits as she went into the operating theatre, as the box is not opened until the doctors are ready to use it. The conversation she heard was the doctors discussing that the arteries in her right groin were too small to drain the blood from, so they had to use the other leg. Her doctors were astounded and agreed that there was no way that she could have observed or heard with her normal senses whilst in that state. Some kind of extra-sensory perception must have occurred to allow her to hear and see accurately what was going on.***

*If these events happened, best explanation would appear to be that the woman’s consciousness separated from her physical body. Her experience of the drill and of the conversation in the room could not have happened in states of borderline consciousness.*

1. ***Vicky Noratuk***

***Blind from birth. Had been in a car accident and was aware of being in a hospital room. Suddenly she found herself looking down at her body. She could SEE her body but did not recognise it, as she had never been able to see. She only realised that the body was hers as she recognised the engraving on her wedding ring, which she knew by touch. She heard the doctors saying that they could not bring her back. She then experienced going up through the ceiling, saw trees and birds and light for the first time. She then went to a place where there were people in white. She felt that this was a place of all knowledge and that she could bring forth any knowledge she wanted. Then she went back into her body and felt heavy and sick.***

*Vicky’s brain could not have supplied her with sight as she had no memories on which to draw and the brain alone may not be able to explain this experience. It may be that our understanding of the brain is far too limited.*

*Vardy and Arliss propose that at a quantum level, the laws of common sense no longer seem to apply. It may be that at the quantum level the brain produces quantum particles the counterparts of which can exist outside the brain. If these particles could remain together then consciousness in the brain could also be “quantum consciousness” outside the brain represented by the quantum equivalents for the brain events. This would enable a person’s consciousness to leave their body in a very similar manner to that in which the ancient Egyptians thought occurred or in a similar manner to the way in which Plato and Descartes talked of a soul.*

*Vardy and Arliss argue that, if the theory of quantum consciousness should prove to be valid, this could support the Buddhist idea that, in life, what is needed is to train the mind so that, after death, the quantum consciousness could persist. What is clear is that there is a whole new field of science opening up which raises the possibility that ideas of survival after death which were previously dismissed now have to be revisited and taken much more seriously.*

*Suggested possible explanations for NDES:*

1. *NDEs only happen to a small proportion of those who experience a period of clinical death.*

*In defence, maybe not everyone wants to talk about or is able to remember their experience once they recover?*

1. *Cultural differences. Carol Zaleski researched medieval NDEs and found that subjects were obsessed with the pain of hell and included vivid accounts of being eaten by dragons, attacked by serpents and toads.*

*In defence, cultural differences do not necessarily disprove all notions of afterlife, or it may be that these experiences are not representative of others that could be considered to be more literal.*

1. *It does not show life after death, since the subjects are not actually dead*

*In defence, the definition of ‘death’ here is questionable. How does no brain or heart activity differ?*

1. *Experiments have been conducted to see whether anything does leave the body, e.g. infra-red detectors and magnetometers, none of which have identified anything at all.*

*In defence, it could be argued that this is hardly surprising if the soul does not have physical properties.*

1. *Madelaine Lawrence designed an experiment where an electronic screen in a cardiac rehabilitation ward displayed a randomly changing sentence, and could only be seen from a ‘bird’s eye view’ of the ward. This did not show any evidence of patients who reported NDEs being able to read the sentence correctly.*

*In defence, it might not be appropriate to subject ‘life after death’ to testing in this way and that there is no reason that the person experiencing the NDE should focus on performing an arbitrary task such as this.*

1. *Psychoses, hallucinogenic drugs and oxygen reduction to the brain can cause similar feelings and sensations, yet the people are not necessarily near to death.*

*In defence, Peter Fenwick of the Institute of Psychiatry has commented pilots do not recount NDEs when they suffer loss of oxygen in simulation practice.*

1. *The effect of seemingly looking from above is really the creation of our world from memory.*

*In defence, this does not explain the experiences of those such as Vicky Noratuk.*

1. *People are now so aware of and so fascinated by NDEs that there are expectations of what ‘ought’ to be experienced.*
2. *NDEs feel real to the person experiencing them, but so do dreams, hallucinations and psychoses.*
3. *It is a psychological response – a defence mechanism to disassociate our selfhood from our dying body.*
4. *Accuracy of accounts may be due to extra-sensory perceptions or to knowledge of hospital life.*
5. *The dark tunnel effect is the dim memory of transit through the birth canal.*
6. *Quantum consciousness (see above) can perhaps explain out of body experiences and NDEs?*
7. *The fact that people experience positive personality transformations after NDEs does not necessarily indicate that they have encountered the afterlife. Other experiences (such as that of the novelist Naomi Alderman, who was prompted to pursue her passion for writing when she witnessed the planes hitting the twin towers and she realised she could have died) can also be life-changing.*

**Remembered lives:**

Peter Cole also cites ‘Remembered lives’ as evidence of disembodied existence. This can be a spontaneous remembering, though the most dramatic evidence has come from hypnotic regression. Arnall Bloxham has produced examples of people recalling their past lives under hypnosis, subjects have taken on a different personality, speaking with different voices and sometimes even in a different language. Some historical details, when checked, appear accurate and not the sort of details that the subject would be expected to know.

Various explanations have been suggested:

* Cryptomnesia – the memory of the sub-conscious.
* Genetic inheritance of information
* Telepathic sensitivity to deceased people and an identification with them

**Overall discussion on the evidence for disembodied existence:**

**No concrete scientific evidence for any of the claims above, but many of these points would be accepted by a significant number of people. If any of them are true, the materialists face a considerable challenge.**

**Materialist critics will argue that these claims cannot be verified in laboratory conditions, but dualists might reply that this is to impose as a condition for verification a scientific methodology which may actually rule out the possibility of exactly the results that are claimed to arise. If there is a spiritual side to a person, it could be argued that this spiritual side cannot be detected by material tests.**

**It is not necessarily possible to conclude that a person does have a spiritual dimension, but it may mean that the notion that it is entirely illogical and irrational to say that they do needs to be challenged. There are these widely attested phenomena that the materialist understanding of the mind cannot explain, Vardy and Arliss argue that this leaves room for meaningful talk of a soul.**

# The Problem of Evil

1. The Problem Itself

The occurrence of evil, the appalling extent of physical and mental pain experienced in the world, presents perhaps the most powerful and persistent objection against God.

Christian doctrine defines God as:

OMNIPOTENT, “all-powerful”: God has unlimited power to bring things about.

BENEVOLENT, “perfect goodness”: an intrinsic attribute of his nature. God acts well always. Moral evil can never be predicated of his being.

OMNISCIENT, “all-knowing”: God is aware of everything that is past, present, future.

“Either God cannot abolish evil or he will not; if he cannot then he is not all-powerful; if he will not then he is not all good.” (St Augustine)

“Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? The he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence the evil?” (Hume)

1. Kinds of Evil

MORAL EVIL is the suffering caused by free actions of human beings.

NATURAL/PHYSICAL EVIL refers to those aspects of nature itself which imposes suffering upon sentient beings independently of the free actions of any human agent.

1. Theodicies

A theodicy can be defined as an attempt to justify the goodness of God in spite of the presence of evil in the world, in other words to find an intellectually (philosophically and theologically satisfying) acceptable solution to the problem. Theodicy comes from the Greek: Theo = God, Dike = Justice.

1. Some Preliminary Considerations
2. The unreality of evil: one approach to a theodicy results in denying the real existence of evil. God is not held responsible for something which is unreal.
3. Evil is an illusion
4. Evil has no substantial reality:
5. It is possible to exaggerate evil

Question: surely the fact that six million Jews suffered in the Holocaust does make it worse?

1. Dualistic Theories: Favoured by many primitive and Eastern religions. Two opposed but equally powerful deities, one being the source of good, the other the source of evil, vying on equal terms eternally in mortal combat. (By asserting that evil is subordinate to good Christianity rejects the concept of duality.)
2. The Free Will Defence: God chose to create beings who were genuinely free moral agents. Evil is explained as a consequence of human freedom. This explains moral evil but it does not entirely explain natural evil. To be a person is to be a finite centre of freedom, self-directing, genuinely responsible for one’s own decisions, this involves being able to act wrongly as well as rightly. God could not prevent the consequences of human free will without interfering with human freedom itself. This is not a limitation in his power. Even God cannot make a round square, achieve the logically impossible. However some philosophers, notably D.L. Mackie and Anthony Flew, suggest that it would be possible to create a world in which man could freely choose good. Others argue our freedom could have led to less dramatic consequences e.g. a cough rather than influenza or injuries, but no Holocaust. Or God could have chosen to create no world at all!
3. Harmony Theories: some theodicies include the theme of universal harmony. This is either harmony which exists in the present, which we cannot see because we are finite creatures not able to see the universe in totality; or it is a harmony that will come into being at some point in the future. Evil as well as good is necessary for total harmony, just as a painting is formed out of darker and brighter areas.

But the problem of evil is presented as a moral problem. How could a moral God allow such terrible suffering? A certain of amount of shade might be necessary for the harmony of a picture, but why this intensity and extent? Can this be justified in terms of some future harmony?

1. A Limited God: if one rejects the omnipotence of God, the problem of evil is dispelled: the evil can be attributed to God’s limitation in power. This is the line taken and developed in process theodicies.

**The Main Theodicies:**

**1) The Augustinian Theodicy**

This theodicy has dominated western Christendom, both Catholic and Protestant, since the time of Augustine himself (354-430 CE.) Augustine is not concerned so much with the existence of evil but with the origin of evil.

1. Augustine believed that the universe is a creation of a good God for a good purpose. The universe itself was good.

*“God, the Good, hath created all things good. He indeed, the greater and chiefest good, hath created these lesser goods; still both creator and created all are good”* (Confessions)

1. Evil is the privation of that which is essentially good. It was not set in the world by God, but represents the going wrong of what is inherently good. Evil has no substantial status of its own but always consists of the malfunctioning of something that is good in itself.
2. Evil originated in the levels of the universe which involved free will (*link to Free Will Defence*) i.e. the angels and human beings. Some of the angels turned away from God to lesser goods, thereby rebelling against their Creator. This rebellion against God is the origin of evil. These angels in turn tempted the first man and woman to fall. This fall of angelic and human beings was the origin of moral evil (sin.)
3. Natural evil is explained as being pedagogical or punitive, i.e. a punishment for sin. Thus Augustine could say, all evil is either sin or punishment.
4. At the end of history there will come the judgement when many would enter into eternal life, and many others (who in their freedom have rejected God) enter into eternal torment.

“*Since there is happiness for those who do not sin, the universe is perfect; and it is no less perfect because there is misery for sinners… the penalty for sin corrects the dishonour of sin.* ”

There is a principle of moral balance in which sin is justly punished and thus cancelled out, and no longer mars the perfection of God’s universe.

1. The Creator is cleared of responsibility for evil by loading that responsibility on the creature. God created ex nihilo. Because man was made out of nothing he was mutable (capable of change) unlike his Creator, who is immutable. Man, like the agency of fallen angels or devils, has the capacity to turn away from God. It is the turning away which introduced evil into the world. The fallen angels were lost forever, but God entered into the realm of fallen humanity in the incarnate form of Jesus to redeem mankind. Those who reject Jesus are eternally lost, but those redeemed by faith enter a realm higher than before the fall and can relate to God in a love relationship unknown by angels and unknown even before the fall.

Criticisms:

1. Surely finitely perfect creatures in a finitely perfect environment should never fall into sin? The idea of a perfect creation going wrong spontaneously is a self-contradiction. Fredrick Schleiermacher (1768-1834) the German Protestant theologian/philosopher.

BUT could say God did not produce evil, he foresaw it and allowed it because he knew that redeemed mankind would enter into a fuller and richer relationship with God. It remains hard to clear God entirely of responsibility for evil, since he chose to create a being who he foresaw would do evil.

1. Mackie’s contention - it was logically possible for God to have created free beings who would never fall.

BUT if people were in any way pre-programmed to do the right thing, they wouldn’t be completely free.

1. Modern scientific evidence suggests that humans have gradually emerged out of lower forms of life with very limited moral awareness and crude conceptions.

BUT Modern scientific accounts may be our own myths reflecting our own messages about the universe

1. Evil deeds do cause suffering and distress to the sinner, it is often the innocent who suffer, e.g. book of Job and the New Testament stories of the Tower of Siloam (Luke 13) and the man born blind (John 9.)

BUT whilst the Bible rejects the notions of individual suffering being attributed to individual instances of sin, it does not reject the idea that sin generically is the cause of suffering generically.

1. The idea of the reward of heaven or more significantly the torment of hell can be criticised as a primitive idea serving no constructive purpose.
2. If everything depends on God for its existence, God must be causally involved in human actions.
3. Animal suffering can’t be understood either in terms of sin or punishment for sin.

Strength:

Theodicy is God-centred, rather than man-centred – although the idea of eternal punishment may seem unacceptable, it acknowledges that God is just/righteous as well as loving/merciful.

**2) The Irenaean Theodicy -** Named after St Irenaeus (c. 130-202 CE) one of the early Hellenistic Church Fathers.

1. Man as still in the process of creation and perfection. Distinguishes between two stages of the creation of the human race, the ‘image’ and the ‘likeness’ of Genesis 1:26 “Then God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”
2. Man exists in the image, but with the capacity for immense moral and physical development. They were immature creatures at the beginning of a long process of growth. This image is being transformed into a finite likeness of God through free responses (link to the Free Will Defence.)
3. The reason why God should have created us as initially immature and imperfect creatures, rather than as a race of perfect creatures, is centred on the positive value of human freedom: human goodness that comes about through the making of free and responsible moral choices, through times of real temptation and severe difficulty, is more valuable than a goodness that has been created ready-made. Man has to be entirely free to fulfil God’s purposes.
4. The process of man becoming the perfected being is not taking place by a natural and inevitable evolution, but through a hazardous adventure in individual freedom. Because this is a pilgrimage within the life of each individual, rather than a racial evolution, the gradual fulfilment of God’s purpose does not entail a corresponding gradual improvement in the moral state of the world.
5. The bulk of actual human pain and suffering can be traced to misused human freedom. Natural evil seems to be built into the very structure of our world as God’s purposes could not easily be fulfilled in a permanent hedonistic paradise (from the Greek “hedone” – pleasure.)
6. The world’s value is to be judged, not primarily by the quantity of pleasure and pain occurring in it at any particular moment, but by its fitness for its primary purpose of soul-making.
7. The Irenaean Theodicy points forward to the subject of life after death in three ways:
   1. soul-making must somehow continue beyond this life into another, if the divine purpose is to achieve more than a partial or fragmentary success.
   2. endless enjoyment of a fullness of life and joy beyond our present imaginations will make worthwhile all the pain and travail of the journey toward it.
   3. all human beings will eventually attain the state of perfection.

**Hick’s Views:**

John Hick is probably the most cogent modern exponent of the Irenaean Theodicy. He recognises that at the heart of it is the free will defence and this raises difficult questions in its own right:

Why did God create beings with free will? Why did God create beings capable of developing morally and spiritually? Why did God create anything at all?

(Martin Heidegger, the existentialist philosopher, said that the fundamental philosophical mystery is why is there something rather than nothing?)

We simply have no answers to those questions and they are by nature unanswerable. There are inherent limitations of human knowledge and Hick concludes that the problem of evil ultimately ends in mystery. Hick remains committed to the idea that the purposes of a loving God are just.

* Develops the Irenaean Theodicy further, particularly the fact that people created in God’s presence would have no real freedom from their maker.
* Emphasises the ‘epistemic distance’ between man and God, not a distance in terms of space, but in terms of knowledge.
* As can be applied to the Irenaean Theodicy, Hick’s ideas are often referred to as ‘The Vale of Soul-Making Theodicy’, John Keats – “Call the world if you please ‘the vale of soul-making’… do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?’”)
* Hick holds that we become better through our encounters of evil and suffering; evil and suffering may not be evenly distributed, but this will be resolved after death.
* Moral and natural evil are the price we pay for our freedom and it’s a price worth paying.
* Again these ideas point to life after death in the same three ways:

1. soul-making must continue beyond this life, if divine purpose is to be more than a partial success.
2. endless enjoyment of a fullness of life and joy beyond our present imaginations will make worthwhile all the pain and travail of the journey toward it.
3. all human beings will eventually attain the state of perfection. Hick particularly emphasises the development of the soul continuing to take place after death, linking to his ‘replica’ theory

**Criticisms:**

1. Rejects some of the traditional doctrines, such as the fall of man and the final damnation of the wicked.

BUT Irenaeus does claim biblical support for his theodicy, albeit in a less systematic way than Augustine.

1. Edward Madden and Peter Hare have criticised it because of three fallacies:
   * 1. All or Nothing: is our present world the only alternative to paradise? Is the epistemic distance entirely necessary?
     2. It Could be Worse: there is another alternative, one in which we would experience good things to be followed by further good (or better?) things.
     3. The Slippery Slope: God should be able to start on the slippery slope and stop at a suitable point where there is less wasteful and gratuitous suffering.

BUT the counter-arguments raised by Madden and Hare centre on the following statements:

* 1. God could possibly have created a world with no evil at all
  2. God could possibly have created a world with less evil that the present world exhibits
  3. God could possibly have created a world with a better balance of good and evil than the present world exhibits; that is, a world with as much good, but less evil.

The third statement can be contended. Alvin Plantinga - not possible to prove God could have created a world with as much moral good but less moral evil than present.

1. Can the bliss of a future world justify wasteful and gratuitous suffering?
2. Can so painful a creative process be said to be the expression of divine goodness?

Other defences:

1. Irenaeus’s ideas can be more easily reconciled with modern thought and in particular with evolution.
2. It may seem that the suffering is not productive of any good end, but it may simply be that it is difficult for humans to detect the end.

**3) The Process Theodicy**

* Background is that evil arises as a result of a limitation in God’s power e.g. John Stuart Mill
* The major names in the Process Theodicy are A.N. Whitehead (1861-1947) and David Griffin.

1. God acts non-coercively - not because He withholds power, but because He is limited by the basic laws of the universe. Griffin “God does not refrain from controlling the creatures simply because it is better for God to use persuasion, but because it is necessarily the case that God cannot completely control the creatures.”
2. The creation of people – came about in a struggle with chaos. Divine purpose is only imperfectly written into our nature.
3. The ultimate reality is creativity – God is using His influence to promote creativity. God offers the best possibility to each occasion, but cannot enforce His will as He is not omnipotent.
4. God’s power over each occasion is necessarily limited - God offers the best possibility to each occasion, but the occasions are free not to conform to the divine plan.
5. Two kinds of evil and good –

- HARMONY versus DISCORD. If something fails to attain harmony it exhibits the evil of discord.

- INTENSITY versus TRIVIALITY. If something fails to attain the highest appropriate intensity it exhibits the evil of needless triviality.

Harmony and intensity are in conflict; greater richness of experience also makes possible new dimensions of suffering. Evil is thus a part of the creative process.

1. The Divine input – God works to maximise harmony and intensity in the future.
2. A theodicy is still required – God’s responsibility for evil is less than it would be if it were unlimited, but God is still encouraging the situation in which there are greater possibilities for evil as well as good. The theodicy proposed is:
3. The good could not have come without the evil
4. As in all theodicies, there is a sort of “greater good” principle, and God’s goodness is justified on the grounds that a sufficient quantity and quality of good has been produced to outweigh and render worthwhile the evil that has been produced.

**Criticisms:**

1. Unacceptably elitist as it suggests that the same complex process which has produced so much suffering has also produced the cream of the human species. By what standards do we judge whether production Plato or Einstein or Gandhi was worth the gratuitous suffering of millions of lesser beings?
2. No focus on hope of future heavenly fulfilment. Possibility of life after death is not ruled out by process theologians, they just do not consider it necessary to justify God’s involvement in the universe.
3. Principle is an aesthetic rather than an ethical one, as it focuses on the criteria of harmony and intensity. Charge of the problem of evil is a moral one, therefore the Process Theodicy seems to shift the grounds of the argument.
4. Traditional Jewish/Christian thinkers reject the Process Theodicy because it denies the basic Christian and theistic belief that God is infinite and omnipotent. Is this God worthy of worship?

Defences/Popular Appeal:

1. Successfully avoids the problems arising out of a belief in divine omnipotence.
2. Rallies people in appeal to engage on God’s side in struggle against evil to attain harmony and intensity.

**4) Is earthly existence followed by an afterlife the best of all possible worlds?**

**Richard Swinburne:** evil is necessary for our freedom and for us to have virtue; God could have given us knowledge rather than us learning for ourselves, but this would have also removed our freedom as His existence would have become obvious. Mass-suffering (e.g. the Holocaust) can’t be prevented by God without compromising human freedom. Death (which is the cause of great suffering) is necessary because without mortality we couldn’t be responsible for our actions as there would be no consequences.

Problems:

* God appears to use humans as a means to an end and allowing some to suffer so others learn lessons.
* D Z Phillips says that a God that allows evil and suffering and planned it into the design of the world would be an evil God; if God knew that a free world would involve evil and suffering then He could have chosen to create no world at all, which would have been preferable to a world full of suffering. The potential offering of a reward at the end is not enough.
* Dostoyevsky, in his final novel ‘The Brothers Karamazov’ rejects the world that God has created because it is built on a foundation of suffering; he says that God should not have given humans the "burden" of free will. “God didn’t need to create a world of freedom; he could have created no world at all…” Again, for Dostoyevsky the afterlife is not compensation enough for worldly sufferings.

**Some conclusions:**

* Theodicies offer different attempts to reconcile God to a world containing moral and physical evil, some rely on the promise of an afterlife in order to do this, others don’t:
  + Augustine offers the reward of heaven and the punishment of hell
  + For Irenaeus and Hick, the afterlife is needed as a continuation of the ‘vale of soul-making’
  + Process Theologians don’t need the afterlife at all to justify their position
* The various theodicies seem to suggest that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God needs evil, for example, to:
  + show the value of eternal life
  + enhance our relationship with God
  + Allow human beings to attain perfection
  + maximise good in the world
  + allow humans to develop moral qualities
* Each theodicy is weakened by their criticisms – here some key criticisms are:
  + Does the reward of heaven justify such gratuitous suffering?
  + Is the fear of hell a rather primitive control mechanism?
  + Is the promise of freely formed, genuine, fulfilled relationships with God enough?

(For D.Z. Phillips, and Dostoyevsky this is not the case)

Overall - Does the end justify the means?