

The Writing on the Wall #2: “Who Do You Think You Are? Anyhow?”

J. Harmon Grahn

Copyright © 2011 J. Harmon Grahn.

This essay may be freely shared for noncommercial purposes,
with attribution, provided this notice is included.

The Writing on the Wall #2: “Who Do You Think You Are? Anyhow?”

is set in 12 pt. Linux Libertine, available through the Libertine Open Fonts Project

[<http://linuxlibertine.sourceforge.net/Libertine-EN.html>]

with title, charts, and illustrations (if any) set in the Komika family of fonts, developed and
made generously available through Apostrophic Labs

[www.apostrophiclab.com]

URLs (Universal Resource Locaters for Internet addresses) are set in Latin Modern Mono.

Published by

THE WELLSRING PUBLISHING GROUP

[TheWellspringPublishingGroup.com]

June 11, 2011

Contents

0	Preamble	1
1	How Do You Know?	2
2	A Childhood Experience	4
3	The Mystery of Existence	6
4	Memory and Amnesia	7
5	Another Childhood Experience	9
6	Will the <i>Real</i> Reality Please Stand Up?	12
7	An Adult Experience	13
8	Another View of Transcendental Memory	18
9	So, What Does It All <i>Mean</i> ?	28

0 Preamble

What follows is a somewhat inquisitive inquiry into the nature of what we call “reality.” The discussion meanders considerably, because . . . well, one of the many things we humans seem to be is *connected to everything else*: so that nothing about us can be considered in isolation, without setting in motion a cascade of related inquiries that may lead in surprising directions—which naturally feed back to influence who, and what, we think we are, and what we think everything “else” is too; which adds fresh fuel in turn to our inquiry . . . and so on.

The result may be in some ways like standing near a bend in a river, and observing the flow. The current comes into view from upstream, rolls past our vantage point, and disappears from view around the bend downstream. We can imagine—and can explore the river physically, if we wish—how the stream springs as a small trickle from the toe of a glacier in the highlands; how it is fed in its course by many tributary streams rising from similar sources in other high places; and how it eventually wends its convoluted way to the sea. And even that is not the “end of the story” of the river we are observing: for its watery content then mingles with the waters of the ocean. Some of it evaporates into the atmosphere, and condenses again in the form of clouds and weather systems in the upper air, where prevailing winds shunt it across mountain ranges. There it cools further, and falls as rain or snow upon the highlands, and in part, nourishes the glaciers, and the tributary streams that flow into the river we are observing, and imagining. “Where does it all begin?” we may muse. “And where does it end?”

The following discussion is something like that. It includes, but is not limited to, a consideration of the idea that we humans particularly, and all life generally, may—in some ways as water takes various forms in the course of its circulation about the planet—have existences prior to our physical, bodily manifestations; which may continue existence after our physical manifestations dissolve. It arrives eventually, and surprisingly, but not finally, at what I believe to be a viable, and a very simple basis for a *moral principle*—something I had not thought possible, and had not consciously intended.

The intent of what follows, like the intent of a river, is not to arrive at a particular “conclusion,” but—again, as in many ways a river is—to be a source of nourishment, for thought, speculation, exploration, and favorable evolution, for those whose lives it touches.

1 How Do You Know?

At birth, our parents tell us what they think we are: because of course, it is what they think they are, as told to them by their parents, and by the society in which they were raised. And naturally, we believe them, because after all, they are older, bigger, more experienced, and we imagine, wiser than we, who start out knowing and understanding virtually nothing of who and what we are—or so we are told.

However, as we grow and gain experiences of our own, our beliefs and understandings imbibed from infancy do not always remain perfectly congruent with those of our parents, or with those of our inherited larger society. We can, and sometimes do reach slightly or significantly different conclusions about some things, from those handed down to us by our elders.

And why not? Our experiences, and the lessons we learn from them, are not the same as those of our parents and elders; and who's to say that our elders would not have reached different conclusions too, had they had our experiences instead of their own? Differences of opinion, from one generation to the next, are not necessarily hostile, disrespectful, or insubordinate.

If this much may be said, then it may be questioned further: What is the reliability, in general, of our inherited cultural beliefs about "how things are?" Obviously, among human cultures, there are wide spectra of varying beliefs about "reality," among which there are many apparent contradictions. If one view of things is "true," then logically, a contrary view of things must be "false;" yet generally, most people are quite confident that *their* views of things, whatever they are, are "true," and that contrary views are "false." And that is about as close to "agreement" that people of contrary views are likely to get: that is, all parties to the argument "agree" that "I" am "right," and "you," and "they," are "wrong"—if that may be called any kind of "agreement" at all.

What if, just for the sake of speculative discussion, the entire spectrum of human beliefs were in fact not even close to how the "real reality" actually is? Most reasonable people are willing to admit that they have at times been subject to error, and that their views of things have not always been uniformly correct, and have benefited at times by slight or significant adjustments. That is, most reasonable people are willing to admit that they have sometimes been "wrong," or "mistaken" about some things they have believed, and have found it beneficial to correct their errors.

A prominent official during the Reagan administration has been quoted as saying, "We'll know our disinformation program is complete when everything the American public be-

lieves is false."¹ Well, what if that objective has already been achieved, or has long been a pre-existing human condition, not only among the American public, but among all human residents of the planet—even including said prominent official? What if everything *everybody* believes is false, and is far removed from “how things really are”? How do you, or I, *know* that this is not in fact the case? This is not, it seems to me, a trivial, or a “paranoid” question: Simply, *how do you know that you know what you know?*

As already mentioned, one thing every honest man knows by experience is that he is susceptible to being deceived. We have all been fooled, some time or other, and have discovered, and corrected, at least some of our errors—or maybe replaced them with different errors. Yet before such discovery, and after such corrections, we have been quite confident that we were not (or are no longer), at all deceived, but held, and hold, a true and accurate perception of “how things really are.”

Conversely, you can probably with little effort call to mind someone you know, or know about—such as the entire congregation of a religion other than your own—who is obviously seriously deluded about something. You, of course, do not share their delusion, because it is transparently false; and the biggest mystery to you is how *anybody* can sincerely believe such errant nonsense. However, what assurance have you that you are not just as transparently deceived about something you firmly believe, the reliability of which you naturally feel certain? After all, if others can be so thoroughly deceived, what basis have you for any claim that you cannot be deceived as well?

So the question, *How do you know that you know what you know?* is no joke, and is a matter for serious consideration. Do you know for sure who you are? Do you know *what* you are? Do you know where you are going, and where you are now? Do you know whence you came? Are you sure? How do you know? Sure, you may be able to locate yourself with pinpoint accuracy at a physical address, or a latitude and longitude on the face of the Earth. But, *where is that?*

These questions, although possibly unsettling if you do not dismiss them out of hand, but instead give them your attention, should also be kept in a kind of perspective: for they apply alike to everyone, everywhere. Yet the people to whom they apply somehow manage to accomplish most or many of their intentions, get to where they are going, without bumping into walls, or lamp posts, and are usually able to survive from one day to the next, regardless of whatever they actually *believe* about the world in which all this is happening. There seems usually to be a generous margin for error in most people’s lives, and abundant opportunity to recover from errors that do result in unintended consequences.

¹William Casey, former Director, Central Intelligence Agency; quoted widely on the Net, among others, here: www.questionwar.com/QuotesPowerful.html; and here: wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/quotes.html#casey.

However, sometimes the margin for error turns out not to be as generous as it may have seemed; and the consequences are more severe than anticipated (if anticipated at all), or are impossible to deal with anyway. So there are rewards for having an accurate appraisal of “how things are,” and penalties for errors.

Additionally, there is another side to the coin: Supposing one were to reach the carefully considered conclusion that “things,” including ourselves, are not at all like just about anybody thinks they are? Supposing one were to penetrate through consecutive layers of illusion, and discover to his own conviction and dismay that the way(s) practically everybody views “reality” are almost complete illusions, and that the “real reality” is something else entirely?

It could be that such clear-sighted vision might give the clear-sighted visionary scant advantage, and maybe significant disadvantage among his peers: for the reason that he might be considered by his hopelessly deluded fellows—who at least enjoy agreement amongst themselves that their illusions are real—to be “mad as a hatter.” It is a sobering possibility, and more than a few intrepid explorers of “alternative realities” have come to seemingly sticky ends because of it. Socrates of Athens, Jesus of Nazareth, Joan of Arc, and Immanuel Velikovsky, spring to mind as possible examples.

Which returns us to the ever-present, quiet question: How do you know when you have, or have not, achieved an accurate appraisal of “how things—including yourself—are?” To which may be added the complementary question: Under what conditions is it, and is it not, an advantage to have (or at least to advertise) an accurate appraisal of “how things are?” These are questions no one can answer for anybody else; yet they are germane to the conduct of everybody’s life.

2 A Childhood Experience

This line of inquiry recalls to my mind a momentary experience from my childhood, which I have pondered from time to time since then. The event occurred in the midst of my sixth grade grammar school class, when I was supposed to be paying attention to my lessons, but as usual, was not. Instead, the thought entered my idle mind, I know not whence, prompted by I know not what: which, as clear as a whisper in my ear, said, “*What if everything were entirely different than you or anybody else thinks it is?*”

Eh? Different? What do you mean, “different?” Different, how? Hay! Who is this, anyway?

There was no reply, and no further elaboration; and I had no idea what to do with this unsolicited thought. So, I more or less forgot about it, and went on about the seemingly

more important business of being a young lad. However, I have thought about it from time to time since then, and have not been able to make a whole lot more of it than I was while seated in my sixth grade grammar school class.

Lately, this very thought has been emerging repeatedly, with much greater insistence, and accompanied as well by further elaboration: for I am now able to imagine quite clearly, at least some “ways of being” that are significantly if not entirely different from how I and everybody I know have habitually perceived “how things are.”

The perception, for example, that we are all *spiritual beings*, and retain a single identity through a succession of biological forms that are born, and die, is significantly different from the perceptions of most people—including even the great many who believe in some form of “life after death,” or “reincarnation,” through a succession of “lifetimes.”

The reason it is different is that most people seem to *identify with their bodies*, instead of with the spiritual being that may animate the body—even if they profess to believe that such an animating spirit exists. A common way of putting this is, “I *am* a body, and I *have* a spirit.”—which is analogous to a “talking automobile” saying something like, “I *am* an automobile, and I *have* a driver.” Isn’t this rather like putting the cart before the horse? In the absence of a driver, what after all is an automobile, other than a heap of inert matter?

When expressed so, it sounds somewhat ludicrous; yet if I am not mistaken, this is a quite common pattern of thought among a great many contemporary and historical humans, going far back into our psychic history. That is, people generally identify ourselves with our bodies, even if we profess to believe that we have a spiritual existence prior to our birth, and extending beyond the operational “lifetime” of our physical bodies. This may be said to be a significant part of a widespread human consensus about “how things are in the real world.”

Supposing, however, that part of “how things *really* are in the real world,” is simply that we are *not* our bodies at all; but are “immortal spiritual beings,” who sometimes *have* bodies, and sometimes do not; and in any case whose real identity has nothing more to do with our bodies, than it has to do with the clothes we happen to be wearing (if any) on a given day?

As simple as this “minor tweak” may sound, it is a perception of things significantly removed from a widespread consensus about “how things are.” It leads to a closer examination of *existence* itself—which is not very easily done, because it provides “nowhere to stand” where such an examination may be “objectively” conducted. That is, one exists: which seems to bias from the start one’s examination of existence. The question is nevertheless important, because its “answer”—“right,” or “wrong”—furnishes the context for *my existence*, and informs me about *who I think I am*.

3 The Mystery of Existence

Our Western, Roman/Anglo-Saxon heritage includes a great many shared beliefs about the nature of reality, and these go 'way back to our earliest identifiable cultural beginnings: beliefs that seem so self-evidently obvious to everyone, at least of the Roman/Anglo-Saxon heritage, that virtually no one would ever think of questioning them; and even if he did, he might find it difficult to imagine plausible alternatives to them.

The Creation Myth² is one of these. All people of our heritage, it may be said, share a creation myth about how "Life, the Universe, and Everything"³ came to be. The myth takes many forms, yet has a number of elements in common. The myth is stated for those of the Judeo-Christian tradition in the Book of Genesis. The "Agnostic-Scientific" branch, we might call it, of the same heritage substitutes the Standard Cosmological Model, which commences with a "Big Bang!"

Just for illustrative purposes, and simplifying considerably, the main element these two versions of the Creation Myth share in common is that "Life, the Universe, and Everything" *came from somewhere*: At some "time," they did not exist; and then, they did.

In the Judeo-Christian version, a pre-existing God proclaimed, "Let there be light: and there was light." (Genesis 1:3) For awhile, this event was widely believed to have occurred in the year 4004 BCE; but that view has since been largely depreciated.

In the "Agnostic-Scientific" version of the same myth, a pre-existing singularity of zero size and infinite mass commenced expanding in a "Big Bang," about 15 billion years ago.

In our shared culture, some believe one of these versions of the myth, and others believe the alternative (and of course branching from both of these two main tributaries there exist numerous subsidiary streams, some of which mingle and intertwine). In either case, it just seems inescapable that *existence* was "caused" by something; which is imagined as having occurred as a decisive event somewhere, sometime. I mean, how else could it have been? Our cultural way of thinking about existence does not have provision for very many plausible alternatives.

I've spent a good deal of time mulling all this over, and the best I've been able to come up with is the "inconclusion" that *existence* is fundamentally, and as far as I "know" (not very far), impenetrably *mysterious*. How is it that anything exists at all—not to mention *everything*?

²See *The Writing on the Wall #1* § 3 for a discussion of human beliefs, myths, and superstitions.

³Douglas Adams, *Life, the Universe and Everything*, 1982.

In our shared cultural way of thinking, the question leads inevitably to an irresolvable paradox: because if *existence* includes everything that exists, then it could not have “come from” anywhere “outside” of itself: for by definition, no such “where,” or “when” exists.

For me, neither of these alternative myths is persuasive. Everything that exists now, or in the past, or in the future, simply exists; and to me, this is a mystery without a satisfactory “explanation” whatsoever.⁴ The myth consequently fails to enlighten me about who I think I am: the being who animates a particular body now, beginning at or near the moment of that body’s physical birth, and ending the moment that body ceases to function mechanically.

If the being who animates the body is no more identified with that body than anyone is identified with the clothes we wear today, and cast off tonight, then our existence must rely upon a different basis than our physical bodies. What is that basis? When, if not at physical birth, did it begin; and when, if not at “death,” will it end? Or does it even have a beginning, or an end?

These may sound like rather abstract questions; yet our answers to them—“right,” or “wrong”—bear significantly upon who we think we are, and how we actually conduct our daily lives.

4 Memory and Amnesia

What if every morning you awoke with no memory at all of how you spent the previous day, and without even a clue about the nature of today’s planned agenda? Don’t you think that a life lived in such a way would be so futile and pointless that it would not even repay the effort required to sustain it from one day to the next? Is this not a picture of total, pointless futility?

It is a caricature of the widespread myth of *reincarnation*: the idea that we are spiritual beings who live many successive lives through the immensity of time; yet we never seem to learn anything permanent from our repetitious experiences of life.

The reincarnation myth has many believers, whose reasons for believing it are often related to fragmentary memories of prior lives; or understandings of things that cannot be accounted for by the experiences one has had in his current lifetime.

Wolfgang Amadeus Chrysostom Mozart, who lived from 1756 to 1791, furnishes a striking example of this: How and when did Mozart acquire the musical skill and creative genius that enabled him to begin touring Europe as a professional musician at the age of six; and

⁴Well . . . here is a “candidate explanation,” of sorts: Things that exist only in the future do not exist *yet*. So maybe that is “where everything comes from.” And where it “goes” is into the past. No? Oh well. . . .

by the age of 35 complete a musical career seldom equaled, before or since, in any length of time?

Experiences and sensations of “having been here before” are so common among living humans, that we have a name for them: *déjà vu*, the sensation that one has had the same or a similar experience before, outside the context of one’s remembered lifetime. Such experiences are so common and widespread among people everywhere, that it is likely that those who cannot recall a single instance of this kind are probably outnumbered by those who can. If so, why?

The only value of experience—so obvious that it hardly needs to be stated—is that one *learns something by it*. To have the experience of touching a hot stove is of no value whatever, if you keep touching hot stoves again, again, and yet again, never remembering that—oh yes, that is an excellent way to get yourself burned!

Yet this is evidently the cumulative result of passing like an idiot through many successive lives: little or nothing is remembered, from one life to the next, and we traverse “lifetime” after “lifetime,” making the same mistakes, and relearning the same lessons, over and over again—as recorded in broad strokes in our histories.

This result is so widespread among humans, and so seemingly pointless, that if one really is more than “a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more,”⁵ and like an actor who appears in multiple dramas, in as many different roles, passes instead through multiple lives in successive bodies and periods, then our amnesia demands some kind of explanation. If we live consecutive lives, there must be some way to account for the fact that we remember virtually nothing, from one life to the next; except under extraordinary circumstances, such as hypnotic regression, or sometimes, vivid dreams, or experiences of *déjà vu*. Without an explanation, these phenomena must hide an “alternative reality,” as yet apprehended by very few, if by any at all. In any case, the commonly accepted human understandings of “how things are” are surely far from being complete.

How do you recognize a bizarre anomaly, when neither you, nor anybody you know, or have ever heard of, has ever experienced anything different? Well, Mozart experienced something different; and there have been others as well. Yet Mozart was and is considered to be an anomaly: an exception to the rule. Mozart, however, only demonstrated the simple ability one would naturally expect: the ability to remember and expand upon something he had evidently learned prior to his birth. Mozart was surely an exception to the rule; yet if his musical career was indeed founded upon skills he had mastered in prior lives, it is the rule, not Mozart, that must be the anomaly, and demands an explanation.

⁵*Macbeth* V, v.

Why, if we are spiritual beings with the experience of successive physical lives, are we such thorough amnesiacs? Why are we crippled by the inability to make practical and reliable use of our cumulative experiences and skills, in the course of our endless succession of lives? If we are not momentary, meaningless beings who wink into and out of existence with the condensation and evaporation of our bodies, then this is a question that really needs an answer; and if we can understand a sensible answer to it, perhaps we can also bring within practical reach remembrances of what we have learned, instead of forever “reinventing the wheel.”

That is what Mozart seems to have done, and he is not alone. Michelagnuolo di Lodovico Buonarroti (“Michelangelo,” 1475-1564); Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727); and Nikola Tesla (1856-1943), are three individuals who may plausibly have retained as much from prior lives as they learned by the experiences of inhabiting the physical bodies in which they are historically remembered. So we may have examples to show us that it can be done: which implies that we too may be able to remember more than the brief span of our bodily lives.

How would you like to regain access to all you have learned in the course of thousands of years of successive human lives? Instead of having to start out all over again every few decades, with toilet training, and learning how to walk? Do you think we humans might learn how to get along any better with each other, and with our world and Cosmos, if we could remember how to live like that?

5 Another Childhood Experience

Although “life after death,” or the “transmigration of souls,” are widespread human beliefs, with perhaps persuasive reasons supporting them, I also know by my own direct experience—as well as I know anything—that “I” and “my body” are distinguishably different entities: for I had in my early childhood a vivid and spontaneous “out of body experience,” as have many of my fellows.

Mine lasted for only a fraction of a second, when I was three years old; yet I have retained throughout my life a vivid memory of the event, which I have only recently recognized as an actual out of body experience.

I was alone in my room in the little house my parents had rented in Santa Fe, New Mexico, after having moved from California a couple of years earlier. The time was a mid-summer afternoon, and as frequently happens at that season in Santa Fe, a spectacular thunder storm had gathered. The house was struck by lightning, accompanied by a deafening clap of thunder that sounded like a canon going off in the same room with me. I was terrified, and ran screaming to the arms of my mother, who comforted me, and told me that

it was lightning, that fire had shot out of the kitchen faucet, and that everything was alright now. All this I have remembered clearly, ever afterward. And I remember something else as well, with equal if not greater clarity.

I somehow retain in my memory the vivid image of the lightning bolt that struck the corner of our house, *as viewed from outside the house*: an irregular braided discharge of brilliant light slanting down a lead-colored sky to the house corner—which I believe would have been the outside corner of my own, or my parents' room—and something like a huge dandelion puff of sparks, feet or yards long, radiating in all directions from the point where the main electric arc struck the house.

This image has the quality of a *memory*, not an artifact of my imagination. In fact, I very much doubt I was yet experienced enough at the time to have been able to imagine what I saw the instant our home was struck by lightning.

After careful consideration, I have realized that the most impressive element of the episode is that my image of the lightning bolt is one I could not possibly have witnessed from anywhere within the house: its point of view was located in the back yard, ten or fifteen feet away from the house.

If so, then "I," who observed the lightning stroke the instant I heard its terrifying thunderclap, must have left my body in my room, yet retained the senses necessary to register the image in my memory. I could not have taken my eyes through physical space (and through the wall of the house), for they evidently remained with the rest of my physical body, where they remain to this day. Yet I saw something actual, as clearly as if I had eyes to see it with, within the span of "no time," or as near to it as makes no difference.

It is natural that a thunderclap virtually at his elbow would prompt a three-year-old child to "have a look," if possible, to determine what caused it. It is singular, however, that I was actually able to "have a look," during the instant the lightning flash remained visible.

In retrospect, this experience demonstrates to me a number of things:

- I (not my body) am capable, at least potentially, of moving through space and solid walls instantaneously;
- I am capable of responding in this way, at least in a perceived emergency, "in no time;"
- My sense perceptions are not exclusive to my bodily sense organs, but are part of "me," the entity that animates, and is distinguishable from, my physical body;

- I did not *learn* how to perform this feat during the three years I had then been occupying my current physical body;⁶ I was innately capable of it already, and was able to respond “in no time,” with no prompting from anyone besides myself;
- I do not remember how I did it, have never done anything of the kind again, and know not how to repeat the experience; yet I remember having done it, somehow, and conclude that it is therefore possible, and potentially within my, and presumably anyone’s, human capabilities;
- There is (to my knowledge) no physics, or theoretical discipline, that clearly “explains” these, and comparable “out of body” experiences, as recorded by myself and others;
- I conclude therefore that “reality” is less than perfectly understood at this time by any and all Earth-borne humans.

These perceptions lead to further questions about who, and what, “I” am, the entity who retains these and other memories of a three-year-old child; and is capable of compiling a coherent autobiography, approximately to the present moment, drawn from memories I still retain. Such an autobiography would have numerous gaps, for I can no longer recall upon demand exactly how I spent a particular day ten years ago, or maybe even a month ago. Yet I can reconstruct with reasonable accuracy and detail the main features of my life, drawing upon nothing beyond my own currently retained memories of my personal experiences.

This is something I could not even attempt, for any period of time prior to the date of my (most recent) “birth:” because I retain no memory at all of any such experiences. I have no idea what I might have been doing, or where I might have been, at any time prior to that date; yet I have a memory demonstrating to my own satisfaction that I can exist, at least for a moment, spatially removed from my physical body. And of course, there are also a great many credible reports by people who have experienced “disembodiment,” “bilocation,” or existence for various lengths of time without physical attachment to their physical bodies, which corroborate and enlarge upon mine.

All this implies rather persuasively that a physical body is not an absolute necessity for existence, and that one may function apart from one’s body, or maybe without any body at all. It implies further that the birth of the physical body is not necessarily more significant in the life of the entity that animates it, than is, say, the purchase of a new pair of shoes, suit of clothes, or a new automobile. Such events may have local importance to the entity experiencing them; yet a man can wear out and replace many pairs of shoes, new suits, and

⁶If it may truthfully be said (which is doubtful) that the three-year-old body I occupied then was the same body I now occupy several decades later.

automobiles, in the course of a lifetime, and not consider any of these of more than passing interest.

Similarly, if an animating entity can occupy a number of successive physical bodies, and experience many "births," one may reasonably wonder, How many? And wonder further when, where, and under what circumstances one's "first birth" (if there ever was a "first birth") may have occurred?

6 Will the *Real* Reality Please Stand Up?

Such speculations lead to questions about the *real* nature of "reality," and may suggest that anyone's concept of "reality" may be so far removed from "how things really are" that the two have very little in common.

For example, a fundamental belief, common to virtually every existing human culture, holds that one's parental, cultural, and genetic heritage, such as the color of one's eyes, hair, and skin, are of central importance to who and what one is. It seems only natural, and I'm not denying it's so.

However, if it is also true that each of us is a spiritual being who may animate a succession of human bodies in the course of as many generations, and/or may continue existing without animating any physical body at all: then the link between what one really is, and his momentary body type, begins to appear significantly less important than is almost universally assumed at present.

Might an individual born in one "lifetime," for example, within an Anglo-Saxon family in London, be born into a Kikuyu household in Nairobi, in a prior or succeeding "lifetime?" If not, why not? What, if any, are the "rules" governing the succession of bodily incarnations for an immortal entity?

Further, if the entity is not required in the nature of things to animate only bodies of a particular racial type, is there any requirement in the nature of things that he be limited, from one "life" to the next, only to a particular gender? Or for that matter, only to a particular species? Might an entity elect, for example, to be hatched as a baby eaglet, nurtured in some mountain aerie by a golden eagle, and grow up soaring among the crags of mountain canyons? Or born alive at sea to a mother dolphin, or a whale, or as the spawn of a shark, or a sea turtle?

These are only the beginning of imaginable speculations that step beyond the fences most people assume define the natural borders of "reality." Do such fences really define anything at all, beyond a widespread, imaginary, and possibly erroneous consensus about "how things are?"

Such questions may be the source of discomfort for many: because it is natural to assume that one has at all times a basic understanding of “how things are;” and drawing such understanding into question is often not very welcome. On the other hand, those who are willing to entertain the possibility that everything they have believed about “how things are” could be mistaken, and who wish if possible to amend such errors if they exist, and can be identified, can do so only by engaging in speculations “outside the box,” or beyond the fences that define what “everybody knows.”

7 An Adult Experience

I had an interesting experience while in the midst of drafting this essay; specifically, while the questions in the prior four Sections were circulating in my mind. While working at the employment I maintain to cover my modest operating expenses, I took some refuse out for disposal in the dumpster; upon (not in) which I found carefully placed at eye-level a new copy of a small volume titled *Coming Back: The Science of Reincarnation*.⁷ I smiled as I glanced over the little book, and put this “gift from the gods” into my pocket, thanking the universe at large for such a timely and appropriate “answer” to the very questions I was mulling over at the moment. “The universe really is a different kind of place,” I mused, “than I habitually think it is. Otherwise, I would not be so surprised by this timely synchronicity.”

After I got the book home, and began reading it, I found it quite fascinating: for it addressed, from the perspective of the ancient Vedic heritage of India, the very questions I had already written down; as well as others I had not expressed. It immediately affirmed the speculation that we are indeed immortal beings who pass through countless physical lifetimes in as many different physical bodies: sometimes human, sometimes animal, and sometimes other.

The book even pointed out that part of this phenomenon is something with which everybody is already intimately familiar: for each of us is born in the body of an infant; yet our bodies grow, mature, and pass through many changes, including the repeated exchange of all our bodily cells for other cells, over the course of only a few years. Yet that which inhabits and animates the mutable body remains immutably the same identity, from beginning to end. So it may be said that an entity inhabits many successive physical bodies, even within the span of a single lifetime.

⁷Based on the Teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, The Mhaktivedanta Book Trust, Los Angeles, Stockholm, Mumbai, Sydney, 1984, ISBN 0-89213-114-4.

A number of prominent personalities through history were quoted, affirming various aspects of reincarnation—including a remark by Voltaire (1694-1778) to the effect that “It is not more surprising to be born twice than once,”⁸ which I thought a succinct and apt summing up.

According to the Vedic traditions represented in the book, the human spirit, or soul, is a timeless entity without beginning or end, whose original habitation is in celestial realms far removed from the world of illusion, or *māyā*, experienced through incarnation in physical bodies on Earth, and other planets.

The “rules” governing the succession of bodily incarnations for an immortal entity, according to the Vedic tradition (as I understand it), is primarily the law of *karma*, whereby a being inhabiting the celestial realm who wishes to experience the sensations of physical life, is at first awarded a human body to inhabit during a human lifetime; and is at liberty to conduct that life in whatever way he chooses. How he conducts his life has the effect of creating the conditions for his next life; and how he conducts that life creates the conditions for the next . . . and so on.

Life in physical form is not without hazards, however. If lived righteously, the conditions of the following life will be favorable, and one’s trajectory through the succession of lives will be in the direction of gradual improvement, and increasing satisfaction. However, if the life is not lived righteously, the being becomes entangled in karma, and the trajectory of successive lives is toward increasing degradation and misery—to the extent that if the trend is not reversed, such a being may enter bodies that are not human, but of lower animals. Such outcomes are determined by the choices one makes during each successive lifetime; and according to tradition, one’s final thought in life determines the conditions, including the body, of the following incarnation.

Further, the body one is awarded, and its physical situation, such as race, country, family, economic status, gender, species, etc., is specially selected to be most appropriate to the conditions and desires established during the prior lifetime.

The tiger wanted to enjoy the blood of another animal; therefore, by the grace of the Lord, the material energy supplied him the body of the tiger, with facilities for enjoying blood from another animal.⁹

However, the purpose of all life, according to this tradition, is *not* to incarnate in physical form; but once incarnated, to escape from the futile cycle of birth, pleasure, pain, death, and rebirth, in an endless succession of physical bodies, and to return instead to the celestial

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 5, quoted in *Widerholt Endenleben* by Emil Block, Stuttgart, 1952, p. 31.

⁹Prabhupāda, 1984, p. 86.

realms of one's origin. I have gathered the impression too that all beings that inhabit human and animal (and plant and even mineral) bodies are essentially of the same kind, but animate bodies and circumstances of widely different forms as a result of the karma accumulated from the conduct of present and past incarnations.

According to the doctrine expounded in the book, the only way to break out of this otherwise endless cycle—while occupying a human body, not the body of an animal, or other non-human, because only humans have the necessary comprehension for this—is by chanting the holy name of God, particularly the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, composed of the three names of God in Sanskrit: *Hare, Kṛṣṇa, and Rāma*:

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare
Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma
Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare¹⁰

If one does not take the opportunity to break the cycle while in the rare form of a human, then he must make another successive round through the lives of many other species, who have not the necessary comprehension of karmic law, until he once again attains human form, and has another opportunity to break out of the cycle of birth, death, and reincarnation. It is not easily done, and it takes long.

In order to be effective, however, the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra must be received from a bona fide spiritual master in the disciplic succession descending from Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. It is only by the mercy of such a qualified guru that one can become free from the cycle of birth and death. In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* Lord Caitanya, who is God Himself, declares, "According to their karma, all living entities are wandering throughout the entire universe. Some of them are being elevated to the upper planetary systems, and some are going down into the lower planetary systems. Out of many millions of wandering living entities, one who is very fortunate gets an opportunity to associate with a bona fide spiritual master by the grace of Kṛṣṇa."¹¹

So it appears that the spiritual masters in the disciplic succession descending from Lord Kṛṣṇa are the exclusive gatekeepers for release from the bondage of reincarnation through otherwise endless successions of lives, lived rarely in human form, and mostly in nonhuman form; and that only while in rare human form may one find one's way to the feet of the

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹¹*Loc. cit.*, pp. 119-120.

properly credentialed master, become his disciple, and so eventually return to one's proper habitation in the celestial realms.

If so, and if I have not misrepresented the teaching (which I easily could have done, because I am not a disciple) how—returning to our original question—do we *know* that it is so?

Well . . . because it is the teaching of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. And he got it directly from his master, exactly as it was taught to him; and his master got it directly from *his* master, who got it from . . . all the way back through an unbroken line of succession, eventually to Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, as related five thousand years ago in the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

Significant pause. . . .

Others are welcome to believe whatever they are persuaded to accept as "truth." I, however, am no longer able to accept the argument of "authority" as a basis for believing anything. I have done it in the past, but I will never do it again; of this I am as certain as I am certain of anything.

The concept of reincarnation, and that we are timeless, massless spiritual beings without beginning or end, who temporarily animate a succession of bodies made of physical matter, is plausible to me: because it does not contradict anything I have myself experienced to be "true," and it seems to be confirmed (provisionally), or at least is not contradicted, by my own experience, meditations, and analysis. This is the only basis upon which I am able to "believe" anything, and always includes an automatic caveat acknowledging that my "beliefs" are likely to be mistaken in large or small particulars. Most concepts within my personal awareness I neither believe nor disbelieve: I simply have insufficient information available to reach a decisive conclusion about them. I am also aware that a "disbelief" can be as decisively mistaken as a "belief;" and so deciding what, and what not to "believe" is an iffy matter, whichever way I look at it.

I am particularly skeptical, however, of privileged priesthoods whose members claim arcane knowledge which they impart only to disciples who serve and obey them; which knowledge can allegedly be had by no other means.

I have said that *existence* appears to me as an impenetrable mystery, with no satisfactory "explanation" whatsoever; and so it may remain, as far as I "know," forever. Yet we possibly timeless, massless spiritual beings, without beginning or end, shrouded in amnesia, with no memory even of what we were doing only a century ago, are able, somehow, to blunder "somewhere" in the darkness of our groping, fragmented lives, usually without bumping into walls or lamp posts along the way. Existence is shrouded in mysteries I doubt anyone will ever penetrate to the bottom; yet I cannot believe otherwise than that we all have an equal opportunity to learn about things we didn't understand earlier, if we pursue such

learning with intelligence, intuition, and persistence—and that *no one* is privileged with exclusive understanding not potentially available to *anyone*.

Meanwhile, if we are indeed spiritual beings who pass through successions of lives like wind through clover, then *why can we not remember what we have learned?* This question persists, and is vital; and Prabhupāda has said *nothing* to illuminate it. However, he did say this:

[T]aking birth in the material world is no picnic either. For months the human fetus lies cramped within the darkness of the womb, suffering severely, scorched by the mother's gastric fire, continually jolted by sudden movements, and feeling constant pressure from being contained in the small amnion, or sack, which surrounds the body in the womb. This tight, constricting pocket forces the child's back to arch constantly like a bow. Further, the unborn child is tormented by hunger and thirst and is bitten again and again all over the body by hungry worms in the abdominal cavity. Birth is so excruciating, the *Vedas* say, that the process eradicates any memories of one's past life.¹²

If that is what the *Vedas* say, and their masters maintain, after five thousand years of disciplic succession, then I'd say they stand somewhat in need of an update. The quoted exposition on prenatal development certainly fails to illuminate with any plausibility at all my perplexity over why I can remember nothing of any past lives I may have lived.

There seems to be a chronic "problem" with "absolute truths" hung upon the pegs of ancient sacred scriptures: they have a tendency to stifle intelligence, and the process of learning among their believers. When the "absolute truth" has been set down in a book, then for those who believe it, the quest for deeper understanding is often obstructed. It has happened many times, in many places, sometimes by brutal coercion, and as often has been marked by a "dark age," until such time as the people under its shadow have been able to throw off the stifling tyranny of orthodoxy, "right thinking," "political correctness," obligatory patriotism, and the terror of "heresy."

Prabhupāda's followers have fortunately not been coerced; do not, by themselves, constitute a "dark age; and for my part, are welcome—as are everyone—to believe whatever they are persuaded to believe. Of his book, discussed above, I would say that it, like many books, and perhaps like all books, or doctrines, or theories, sheds some light, and some shadow, upon the matters it addresses; and I continue my quest for deeper understanding.

¹²Ibid., pp. 113-4.

8 Another View of Transcendental Memory

The questions raised above in §§ 3, 4, 5, and 6, are addressed in another mystical work¹³ which in my opinion is at least as worthy of examination as the work discussed in the prior Section.

The Gaelic Manuscripts, Chapters IV, V, and VI in particular deal with human evolution within the context of timeless immortality; and the concluding § 12. SUMMING UP, of Chapter V, ends on an encouraging note concerning the progress of human development: to the effect that it is, ultimately, a "one-way street:" always onward and upward, and although sometimes delayed, never backward. From Chapter V § 12. SUMMING UP:

"Only one thing to add: whatever you have gained, you hold. You may be deterred, or stopped; but what solid acquisition you have made is yours eternally. The strings of your lute may be tuned higher, but they can never be slacked."

"What then of deterioration through neglect or misuse of capacity?" asked someone, "might not that slack the string?"

"You deter. You stop." Gaelic assured him. "You proceed on the next step with infinitely increased difficulty. You do not lose. You can deteriorate your immediate potentiality, and the instruments by which that potentiality might be assured. The gain you make, you hold."¹⁴

This, at least, is a far more reassuring vision of these esoteric matters than is the Vedic vision discussed in the prior Section: in which one is at least as likely to spiral into a descending maelstrom of successively more beastly and primitive animal incarnations, as to rise into the celestial spheres of our alleged origin.

Whether *Gaelic* renders a "truer" vision is a different matter. He is represented in the manuscripts bearing his name as a discarnate entity who during the 1930s was able to "speak" to a group of interested individuals, including the author, Stewart Edward White, because of the presence among them of White's wife, the clairaudient medium, Betty White, who "heard" what Gaelic "said," and repeated it to the group; and these utterances were transcribed and published.

Chapter IV IMMORTALITY: ITS EVOLUTION, *et seq.*, approaches the question first mentioned above at the end of § 3, and again at the end of § 5: "if an animating entity can occupy a number of successive physical bodies, and experience many 'births,' one may

¹³*The Gaelic Manuscripts* channeled by Betty White, written by Stewart Edward White, edited by J. Harmon Grahn. [wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic.html]

¹⁴[wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic05.html#s05.12.]

reasonably wonder, How many? And wonder further, When, where, and under what circumstances one's 'first birth' (if there ever was a 'first birth') may have occurred?" And Chapters V and VI illuminate the questions about "remembering the events and lessons of prior lives."

Gaelic approaches such questions with considerably greater circumspection than exhibited by Prabhupāda. He takes pains to make as clear as possible the virtually indescribable differences between the "reality" experienced on Earth by humans, and that native to the domain in which he dwells. Before addressing our explicit questions directly, it may be well to attempt to illustrate some aspects of this difference of perspectives. From CHAPTER 1 § 4. BEAUTY AND UGLINESS:

"Now we will take as an illustration a beautiful thing which seems most remote from the possibility of actual personal designing. Call from your recollection some particularly gorgeous and symmetrically balanced sunset painted across the sky. If you had been in a poetic mood, you might have said to yourself, 'What a master designer has limned the picture!,' but you would have said it with no thought of its being a literal truth. Nevertheless, no balance of structure in the design, no contrast or blending or harmony of color, no gradation of tone, but has actually been created by a designing intelligence. Nor could it there be present if an intelligence had not operated. That statement is literally true. And yet, if you therefore figure to yourself an artist planning out and fixing in the pigments of the skies the picture you see before you, you will be wrong. No intelligence, as far as we know, has the power to assemble those celestial phenomena to produce that exact thing. Nor does it necessarily mean that somewhere some artist has conceived or arranged the exact pattern and design you so much admire. But it does mean that somewhere, working in his own medium, some intelligence has creatively conceived a certain just and balanced arrangement of harmony which, expressed in sunset, produces this particular spectacle. I have used this as an illustration because it is so remote from the conception of a gigantic artist with a gigantic palette and brush."¹⁵

The world and cosmos of *Gaelic*, unlike the world and cosmos of formal contemporary human cosmological science, is in its totality, and in all of its parts, a product of purposeful, creative *design*; and creative design is something that transcends any form a particular design might take, in one or another of the many cosmic dimensions. Another illustration may give some glimpse of what Gaelic means by "many cosmic dimensions." From Chapter VII § 3. A PICTURE:

¹⁵[wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic01.html#s01.04.]

“You have, stretching out in all directions from the place you stand, an immense universe of tremendous spaces of something almost near emptiness. Here and there hundreds of thousands, millions, billions upon billions of miles apart, is a single small pin prick in immensity—something registering on your sense organism. Those minute points of registration you name the constituents of your physical universe. All between them is empty space, space so wholly empty that you must make a grasp for understanding by postulating an ether—which has no registration on your physical mechanisms! This registration is comprised within narrow limits of vibrations, vibrations so attuned to the organs with which your body is provided that they become, through that attuning, the real objects in your cosmos.

“But now—suppose yourself, by some magic of readjustment, to be attuned in your sense organs to a different scale of vibrations. Instantly the worlds and suns and stars and cloudy star-dust skies would be blotted into a black void of nothingness. From them would be conveyed to you no faint tremor of impingement to make you aware of their existence. But there now would flash before your reattunement galaxy upon galaxy of new worlds, new suns, new stars and cloudy star-dust skies, occupying in the firmament pinpricks of space at those points where before had been only the empty void of ether.

“And still moving on, in still another attunement, this second universe in its turn would vanish and be no more; and in the vast and empty void more points of light would spell to your renewed senses more worlds.

“And so on, and on, and on, through the almost infinite reaches, until, in the nearest approach to omniscience possible in a finite cosmos, you would appreciate that in all the vastness of space is no empty point; that it is all One Thing, One primordial Thing. And its manifestation in the complex is only as a man moves, and so sees new lights that were before obscured, and loses in obscurity lights that before have shone.”¹⁶

Can you believe *that*? It’s your call. In any case, it is a conception of “reality” significantly removed from the general contemporary consensus, and so illustrates examples of some ways in which “things” could be “almost, but not quite, entirely unlike”¹⁷ how most of us imagine them to be. And they demonstrate some of the ways in which “Gaelic’s mind works.”

¹⁶[wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic07.html#s07.03.]

¹⁷Douglas Addams, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Chapter 2; cited at wellspringpublishinggroup.com.

Now; back to the question we first asked at the end of § 3 above, which in essence wonders about the origin and longevity of the being, "I," who animate and "drive" my current physical body, in much the same way a driver, or a pilot, drives or pilots an automobile, or an airplane. We know in some detail the mechanics of how bodies, automobiles, and airplanes come into existence, and eventually cease to function, and dissolve physically into the material world from whence they came. But what about *me*—the being who "sits in the left-hand seat," so to speak? How and when, if ever, did *I* originate? And how and when, if ever, shall I end?

Gaelic's approach to these questions, as I have mentioned, is at once circumspect and eloquent; and I highly recommend his discourse to the interested reader, beginning with Chapter IV IMMORTALITY: ITS EVOLUTION.¹⁸ Meanwhile, I shall attempt a paraphrase, interspersed with some extensive quotations.

In Gaelic's view (as I understand it), everything that is, is *alive*—in the sense that it moves and has its being within a field of *intention*. In the case of rocks and minerals, its movement is slight, and that which motivates its movement is not high on the scale of intention. Nevertheless, even in the most primitive and rudimentary form, intention is present, and is attached to every "thing" that exists; and without such intention, nothing could exist.

In this sense, the intention attached to any "thing" is what gives that thing its *quality*; and so Gaelic uses the terms, *intention* and *quality* interchangeably, and often together; and so, as deemed appropriate, shall I. Further, a thing's quality is what gives it its identity: so that a thing which is identifiable as a tree is endowed with the quality, or intention, of "treeness;" and the thing which is identifiable as a human is endowed with the quality, or intention, of "humanness," or humanity.

Additionally, the "One primordial Thing" mentioned in the selection from Chapter VII § 3 quoted above, which Gaelic here calls the *All-Conscious*, provides and shares the intention for "all things"—which is *the expansion of self-consciousness by means of increasing awareness*.¹⁹

Just as we fulfill this intention through our sensations derived from our relationships with other beings and things, so the All-Conscious fulfills this intention through relationship with "all beings and things." Or one could say that *we* (beings and things) are the "sense organs" through which the All-Conscious expands its self-consciousness by means of increasing awareness.

¹⁸[wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic04.html] In fact, I recommend the entire work, beginning anywhere you please. However, Chapters IV, V, and VI are particularly relevant to the present discussion.

¹⁹Chapter V § 5 [wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic05.html#s05.05.]

The intention of expanding one's self-consciousness by expanding one's awareness might thus be said to be at once the intention of the All-Conscious, and the intention of every being, and every thing, in existence. It is the intention that motivates, or propels all evolutionary development—which is why evolutionary development is, ultimately, a “one-way street:” always onward and upward, and although sometimes delayed, never backward: because that is the *intent* of Cosmos, and of every particular being or thing within Cosmos.

Like humans, at our level of intentional evolution, and like the lower forms of animal life who “touch individual existence as dust motes touch individual existence, eddying in and out of a sun ray, [flashing] for a greater or lesser period, and are obscured,” Gaelic observed that “the billions of ants and bees and humming life that swarms everywhere slips into and out of individual embodiment, adding . . . not only to its own quality, enlarging its own intention, so to speak, but the tiny bit of experience it gains as an individual; but contributing to the experience and memory of those things and beings with which its little circumscribed, individual life may bring it in contact.”

“Now at a certain point [Gaelic continued] in the expression of this ant-intention, as one might say, there happen small, individual instances in which perhaps some one ant, in the tiniest, feeblest—one might almost say negligible—fashion, steps out, as it were, of the ant routine. He does this because his quality is exuberant with the gifts that all his kind for perhaps ages past have brought to it from their brief incursions into personality.

“Now that exuberance, that superfluity of quality,” he went on, “reaching on tiptoes to its highest point, just touches the thing above that ant-quality; and from that touch, like electricity, a spark springs into existence, and another quality is born. And from that quality in turn come those brief flashes into material personality—each bringing his little gift of function fulfilled—until it, too, fills to the overflowing point. And so on up.

“Does that give you a little glimpse into Evolution?”

“Very well. At a point in the upward progress there comes a time when the individual, leaving the sun ray, carries with him a little self-contained glow of his own. The glow is very faint and very simple. It does not represent a constituted individual, such as existed when the thing was what you call ‘alive’; it may represent only one or two or three characteristics out of perhaps a hundred that made up the complete carnate thing—but those three, glowing in the darkness, call to themselves magnetically all the complimentary things they need. And when, in the quality of that particular thing, this little persistent glow has thus made itself a completed whole, it is born again into the world of

personality—not as the same individual, exactly, but carrying within itself its own germ of immortality.

“So in that sense we may say individual immortality begins pretty far down in the scale.”²⁰

What Gaelic seems to be saying is that this dance among beings and the physical bodies we animate is much more a cumulative, “composite,” and subtle process than is the notion of someone today being simply “the reincarnation of Cæsar, or Napoleon;” and it has its beginnings much earlier in the evolutionary process, and much further down the scale, as Gaelic has it, than the exclusively human station in the overall scheme of things. In this way, an individual may be the inheritor of numerous qualities gleaned from the lives and experiences of many prior lives, in many different times, places, and physical bodies, by as many different individual beings.

This is the process, one might say, of an evolving fragmentary immortality, “—or perhaps continuity is better,” Gaelic amended. “That is, continuity of a separate thing. It is not necessarily personal. Certain incomplete but individual characteristics of that separate thing or being pass over into its Idea or Intention or Quality of the universal consciousness that makes it what it is. The particular separate things do not entirely dissolve back. They persist; and they attract to themselves all the other bits necessary to produce another complete being. These characteristics, then, have persisted in continuity.”²¹

At some point in the progression, it may be said that “a soul is born.” This happens when a being *voluntarily* projects love beyond and above itself. This threshold contains the elements of free will, affection, and worship; and although it usually occurs in humans, it can sometimes occur in animals.

“A wild animal’s relationships,” explained our Invisible, “in ties of affection or affectional interest, are primarily with his own species, and remotely—secondarily—with a few individuals of other species—sometimes. The wild dog’s relationships are of that type. But in the case of the domesticated dog, he has interchange, not merely of physical needs and the subtle dependencies attendant on physical needs, but little by little, from his juxtaposition with man, he enters into such realities as loyalty, unselfish love, and at times even into the highest sacrifice.

“There is a point, in degree, when the development of the spiritual realities so strengthen the dog’s entity that he has that included spiritual cohesion that will endure. I shall not attempt even to indicate the precise point. Not all, nor

²⁰Chapter IV § 2 [wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic04.html#s04.02.]

²¹Chapter IV § 3 [wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic04.html#s04.03.]

indeed many, domestic dogs acquire from their human contacts more than an accelerated opportunity for the development of gifts for their quality. Only in the case of a few does the process go so far as to fix the possibility of an enduring thing. At times you almost recognize this fact—when you say that a certain dog is ‘almost human.’

“Now it is a fact, or a law, that while an individual dog, and a fairly complete individual dog, can be born again materially as a dog, with the addition of his lacking characteristics drawn from his quality, a ‘personal dog’ will not be born again *as a dog*.

“A new soul must be born from the quality above its own.”²²

If I am understanding Gaelic right, I take the implication that an animal, such as a dog, can in rare instances evolve toward the quality of humanity, and become an immortal soul, by close association with, and emulation of, the qualities of humans. If so, this seems to create an “evolutionary axis” quite unlike that postulated by contemporary academic theory. But of course, this is neither here nor there, for academic theory stoutly rejects *intent* as having a part in any phase of cosmic or biological evolution; so Gaelic has long since left all forms of “scientific orthodoxy” behind, without so much as a backward glance.²³

Gaelic concluded Chapter IV as follows:

“Now you have thought that when a soul was born, free will was born; that they were contemporaneous, so to speak. That is not quite so. You cannot doubt that when an ant comes head on to a pebble he has the choice and the privilege of turning to right or left. That is certainly free will. But the more simple, the lower down the scale the organism is, the more circumscribed is the uncrossable circumference within which his free will works. *Growth is the expansion of that circle*. That is all. And the moment of the soul’s birth so expands that circle that includes a knowledge and a choice of right and wrong, good and evil; together with a perception—at first very faint, and at best dim and wavering—of the difference between going in harmony and the dour despairful struggle against the rush of life. That is the real free will. And that is the gift that at the birth

²²*Loc. cit.*

²³I believe that so long as the community of scientists continue resolutely and unequivocally to shut out of all consideration any scientific proposal that suggests or acknowledges that “things” of other than human origin may be products of *design*, or *intent*, they will thereby continue to exclude themselves from access to a “mother lode” of potential discovery. *Intent* is either a factor in the architecture of the universe, or it is not. If it is, and “scientific orthodoxy” persists in refusing even to investigate the possibility that this is so, then what relevance has “scientific orthodoxy” to the human inquiry into “how things are?”

of the soul the Fairy Godmother bestows—as a weapon by which its progress may be won, or a black curse by which its very existence may be destroyed.

“Heretofore the ordering of the climb has been in the hands of nature. Hence forward it must be man’s own.

“The soul is a feeble thing at first; it must be fostered and cherished—or it might expire. The abundance of its own quality swaddles it about, guarding and warding it until it has gained its strength to grasp. Then, justly, it demands that the soul, in turn, by its efforts, gain its own abundance, that it may return to its quality manifold what it has received; in order that those souls yet unborn, or feebly struggling in the first stirrings of life, may in their turn have abundance from which to draw. And if he fail, he might be destroyed utterly. And he would be destroyed utterly were it not for others, both in his own quality and in ours, to make up his deficiencies.”²⁴

Upon these loomings, we may now weave the fabric of how the *memory* of prior lives and carnate experiences—seldom within conscious awareness—affect our current lives; and enable us perhaps to better understand why such memories as we are able to bring forward into conscious awareness are so fragmentary and without clear coherency.

Gaelic began (in Chapter V) by distinguishing two different types of memory: *a*) in beings possessed of free will; and *b*) in beings without free will. Both types are genuine memories, and are derived from *experience*: “Without something to remember,” Gaelic observed, “naturally there can be no memory.”

In the latter case, the fruits of experience are gathered to the *intent*, or *quality* that propels the being’s evolution, rather than to the individual being itself. In the former case, the fruits of experience accrue to the free-will being having the experience—but not necessarily as conscious memories available for recall on demand.

A newborn infant, for instance, very quickly remembers how to breathe, although its lungs have until that moment been deflated and inactive during its entire fetal life. This is not a conscious memory of the individual, but the cumulative memory of all air-breathing animals, including humans, who share the intent, or quality of air-breathers. It is a memory that does not fall within the circle of free will; of which we have innumerable others, which fortunately do not require our conscious attention either.

The operation of free will, then, decides the difference between “race memories,” or instincts, such as the impulse to draw breath the moment, but not before, one is born; and the personal memories of the individual. Every experience, Gaelic said, “which is a

²⁴Chapter IV § 3 [wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic04.html#s04.03.]

matter of action by free will, however slight . . . is in the realest sense possible a portion of the individual entity, *and will forever remain so.*"

"The course of development from that point of view [Gaelic continued] is a constant transferal from that which is outside in experience permanently to that which is—not inside, but ourselves. Once it is a part of ourselves, it is naturally a part of our personal possessions. For one reason or another we may not be able at will to place our hands on either any particular one of these possessions, or, perhaps, a desired group of them. Nevertheless they are there. No act, no experience, which has involved free will, but exists intact in the memory, and can by a proper assembly of conditions be brought intact to the conscious mind."²⁵

In sum:

- Every experience wholly or partly the result of free will, results in an individual memory.
- That memory is part of our permanent possession. It cannot be destroyed or lost. It is a part of us, *whether we know it or not.*²⁶

Again, the progress of human development, and of evolution in general, is ultimately a "one-way street:" always onward and upward, toward the expansion of self-consciousness by means of increasing awareness; and although sometimes delayed, is never backward—because that is the *intent* of Cosmos, and of all of its parts.

Gaelic next gave consideration to the relationship between one's personal memories, formed by the exercise of one's personal free will; and the memories of the race at large, formed by the actions of pure instinct, or responses to pure sensations. These instinctual or racial memories too come potentially within the province of individual memory—simply to the extent to which the individual has expanded and widened his sense of sympathy with his fellows.

His relation to the racial consciousness, Gaelic said, "depends entirely and very, very simply, on the degree to which his contact possibilities are developed, as far as they can be developed in an individual, toward race consciousness rather than personal consciousness. In other words, the expression that 'the wider are one's human sympathies, the more power one attains,' is here taken from the figurative and placed solidly in the practical."²⁷

²⁵Chapter V § 3 [wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic05.html#s05.03.]

²⁶*Loc. cit.*

²⁷Chapter V § 4 [wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic05.html#s05.04.]

Early in one's evolution, his experience, and his memories, are his own, and have little or nothing in common with his peers—whose experiences and memories are also exclusive. As evolutionary development unfolds, however, and experience broadens, individuals begin to have common experiences, and hence common memories, which to some extent may be said to overlap. As this process continues, increasing numbers of individuals begin to have increasingly common experiences and memories with their fellows, and increasing empathy, or rapport, within widening circles of relationship.

The consequence is that this widening scope of common memories becomes as much the property of those individuals who in this way expand their empathy with their fellows, as are their individual memories of their own willful acts: they come into possession of racial memories which, as this evolutionary trend proceeds, may become the common property of every member of the race, thereby furthering the intent toward the expansion of self-consciousness by means of increasing awareness. For an individual, there is no theoretical limit to this process, and depending upon how far one expands his rapport, the entire memory of the race may come into the personal possession of an individual: as much his as any memory acquired by his own willful action.

However, *possession* is not the same as *command*. One may possess a racial or a personal memory, yet not be able to recall it to conscious awareness, or put it to deliberate use; yet it is there; it is his, forever. Under the right and favorable circumstances, it can be recalled, clear and complete, into conscious memory.

Why is it that even the memory of our own personal experiences—every moment of which, first to last, we have witnessed directly—are in hindsight such a hodge-podge of half-remembered fragments, interspersed with total blanks, and vivid memories rich in minute detail? Are we losing our minds as we age, sinking gradually into senility?

Gaelic said, no, that isn't it. He pointed out that the faculty of recollection is a function of the mind, and with the passage of time, and the acquisition of experience, it is used in different ways, and for shifting purposes. The mind itself has several, not only the single faculty of intellect. It also possesses the faculties of sensation, aspiration, instinct, and intuition; and these do not require the intellectual faculty for all of their functions. Yet they too make energetic use of memory, which Gaelic called the storehouse of experience.

“We should then consider memory in essence as the store-house of experience. That definition will hold, down to the lowest embodiment of consciousness. Before personality, as such, begins, that experience is gathered by the individual as a gift to the quality or intention embodied in him. That experience is recollected, in the sense in which we used the word, almost automatically in responses to needs or exigencies in the life experience of the individual. The recollection-mechanism then works through what you call instinct.

As the complexity of the creature increases, and the crises or circumstances of its existence become therefore more complex, it is necessary to recollect—to recollect—more and more varied bits of experience, or memory. This experience or memory in the case of the more complex creature has been accumulated by a long evolutionary process from many lives, not, in this case, of the identical individual, but of the *quality* from which myriads of similar individuals have sprung; and also a long series of contributing qualities, and of antecedent qualities. Therefore a given juncture in this one individual life may actually recollect bits of the lives of many thousands.

“In that sense, through sensation and through instinct, a creature may be said to have a perfect recollection of many incarnations, inasfar as those recollections immediately serve the present purpose in that creature’s existence.”²⁸

My lament, therefore, in § 4 above, that “little or nothing is remembered, from one life to the next, and we traverse ‘lifetime’ after ‘lifetime,’ making the same mistakes, and relearning the same lessons, over and over again. . .” may have been less than perfectly informed—based as it was upon the popular assumption that reincarnation involves the intact transfer from “lifetime” to “lifetime” of a single identifiable entity. In Gaelic’s view, this is such a profound oversimplification of what is “really” going on, that it cannot do otherwise than lead its believers into impossible contradictions; as we have, in part, already observed.

Gaelic had more—much more—to say on the subjects of immortality and reincarnation, particularly in Chapter VI; whereas we have not even plumbed to its depth Chapter V, but have only touched upon some of its highlights. I think at this point I shall leave further exploration along these lines as an exercise for the interested reader, and pass on to a consideration of any “conclusions” that might be drawn from what we have discussed so far.

9 So, What Does It All Mean?

As to “conclusions” in particular about what Gaelic had to say, the first question we must deal with is, “How do you *know* that his discourse is ‘true’?” And the unvarnished answer to that is, I don’t. Do you? But then, that answer (so it seems to me) applies generically to most things some people believe, and others do not—and almost certainly even to many things “everybody” believes. Such seems to be one of the lessons of long human experience; and it may be that the things “everybody” believes should for that reason alone head the list of matters reserved for further skeptical inquiry.

²⁸Chapter V § 8 [wellspringpublishinggroup.com/wl/gaelic/gaelic05.html#s05.08.]

Accordingly, it is not for me to declare what any of what we have discussed means for anyone other than myself: that is the sovereign prerogative of each individual. I can say, perhaps, what some of it means to me, right now, subject to change without notice; and that may be of interest to others.

As to Gaelic's discourse, although it falls among the many items I neither believe nor disbelieve, because I have not at my disposal sufficient information either to verify or falsify a large portion of what he has communicated, I do find myself in intuitive resonance with my understanding of the thrust of his argument. I value it highly, because, "true," or "false," it serves me as a potent stimulus to my own explorations of the "unknown."

I am particularly intrigued by the implications of what Gaelic had to say about the birth of the immortal soul with the emergence of free will: for freedom of will means freedom of choice; and freedom of choice is inseparable from *responsibility*.

Gaelic observed (quoted above, p. 24) that an ant encountering a pebble is possessed of the freedom of will to go around it, to the right, or to the left. However, the freedom of will of an ant is circumscribed by a very narrow circle within which to operate. "And the moment of the soul's birth so expands that circle," Gaelic said, "that includes a knowledge and a choice of right and wrong, good and evil; together with a perception—at first very faint, and at best dim and wavering—of the difference between going in harmony and the dour despairful struggle against the rush of life. That is the real free will. And that is the gift that at the birth of the soul the Fairy Godmother bestows—as a weapon by which its progress may be won, or a black curse by which its very existence may be destroyed."

Now, prior to giving close attention to Gaelic, I had reached the "conclusion," for myself, that there are no "good" or "bad" reasons to want to expand one's understanding and capabilities; and I was prepared to admit (if only to myself) that I could as well set out to explore the possibilities of becoming an arch-villain, or a master criminal, as to pursue any other project I may set myself.

Although these are not directions that happen to appeal to me, they imaginably could be, as they may be for others. It just so happens that there are other directions that have always been of far greater interest to me than such objectives, which appear to me as trivialities, motivated by fear, and a limited self-appraisal of one's potential.

Nevertheless, Gaelic set all this in a new light for me, and prompted me to revise my former "conclusion," and replace it (provisionally) with a new one.

My appraisal of "morality," and of all things having to do with "good" and "evil," or "right" and "wrong," had formerly been colored by the perception that these were invariably decided, and often coercively enforced, by some "authority," usually in the form of a privileged priesthood, of one kind or another. As I wrote above in § 7, I am "no longer able to accept the argument of 'authority' as a basis for believing anything." Therefore, I

reasoned, if "morality" is the exclusive province of "the authorities," then I can see no connection between it and "what is:" for in relation to "what is," which I am still convinced is an impenetrable mystery, there are no "authorities."

My observation during the small segment of experience I am able to draw into conscious memory—the span of my current "lifetime" in the biological envelope named "Harmon"—has disclosed to me the appearance of two opposing trends that seem to balance each other, at least approximately. One has been named *entropy*, the tendency toward mounting chaos; the other I have named *syntropy*, the complementary tendency toward emergent organization.²⁹ Both of these tendencies appear to be necessary complementary components of existence; neither of which may be said to be in any decisive way "better" than the other. What seems to be essential is that they balance each other in a dynamic way; and this being essential, I am presuming that they do so.

I observe further that both of these tendencies, toward syntropy and entropy, are endowed with many agents; and indeed that everything at every moment acts as the agent for one or the other of these two overarching tendencies. Anything, or anybody, at any and every moment and place, is contributing somehow to the advance either of syntropy or entropy in the universe—and in the more local systems of which they are parts. This is a constant and dynamic process, which does produce temporary local imbalances. The overall effect, however, at a universal scale, is (presumably) perfect balance between syntropy and entropy.

My intuition tells me that this is so, because anything other than perpetual overall balance, notwithstanding the presence of temporary local imbalances, probably leads to dissolution; and the dissolution of *existence* is its replacement by "non-existence," which is manifestly not so—because *I am*.

Therefore, because it is my prerogative, I am at all times faced with the choice of being an agent for syntropy, or an agent for entropy; and although I am at different moments the agent of both, the exercise of my prerogative gives preference to being an agent for syntropy.

Formerly, I had considered this preference to be an arbitrary choice, neither "better" nor "worse" than its opposite choice would be: because overall, regardless of what my, or anybody else's choices may be, in any particular moment, *syntropy and entropy always balance*. (Maybe.) If so, then anything I do to advance the trend of syntropy is inevitably balanced by some other action, sometime, somewhere, to advance the trend of entropy—and vice versa.

However, symmetrical systems in Nature are often—maybe always—marked by various asymmetries, and there quite plausibly *may be* a bias in the universe favoring syntropy

²⁹The physicists have named this tendency "negentropy," which I think is a "bass ackward" approach to something intrinsically positive and creative. I like my word better, and I'm sticking to it.

over entropy. This may offer an alternative “explanation” of why the universe expands, and systems evolve from the small and simple, to the large and complex. And according to Gaelic, the *intent* of Cosmos is exactly this: *the expansion of self-consciousness by means of increasing awareness*; which may also be expressed as *the growth of syntropy*.

If so, then here may be a solid basis for a conception of *morality* that has nothing to do with “authorities,” sacred scriptures, exclusive priesthoods, or coercion. Even if syntropy and entropy do exactly balance out on the Cosmic scale, every entity in Cosmos—or at least every entity within human view—lives and acts locally; and locally, it may be said in general that “syntropy is better than entropy;” or that “it is better—in a *moral* sense—to increase order, and diminish chaos, than the other way about.”

In this view, there are plausible reasons why a “moral life” in this sense yields a strategy for living that might significantly reward the individual implementing it; or legitimate reasons why it may be “good to be good:”

1. Although at the Cosmic scale, it may be so that “everything balances out in the long run,” the perpetual dance between syntropy and entropy can and does produce local imbalances, which have local consequences for, among others, the individual making choices favoring one of them, or the other.
2. The local rise and fall of syntropy and entropy share *complementary reciprocity*: an increase of one means a decrease of the other: the rise of chaos means the fall of order, and vice versa.
3. All entities occupying an identifiable locus in space-time, “here,” and “now,” thrive under conditions of abundant syntropy, within them, and around them, and languish under conditions of abundant entropy, within them, and around them.
4. Therefore, the conclusion is plausible that choices biased in favor of syntropy over entropy, within and around one, produce greater advantages for the entity than the reverse bias; and that such bias may be considered as a functional, non-contradictory *moral principle*.

One may reach such a conclusion without knowing very much at all about “how things *really* are” throughout Cosmos at large, simply by observing the advantages of local syntropy over local entropy; and as facilitated by opportunity, making choices accordingly. Such observations and consequent choices are within the scope of all living organisms; and for humans endowed with virtually unbridled *freedom of choice*, and corresponding *moral responsibility*, obviate many of the moral ambiguities and contradictions that fuel the self-destructive conflicts pandemic among humans throughout recorded history.

The spectrum of perceptions of “how things are” among the enormous panoply of living organisms is as vast as the panoply of living organisms itself, and it is a plausible speculation that in virtually all cases, including yours and mine, the *perception* of “how things are” has very little in common with “how things *really* are.” Yet all these living beings somehow manage to accomplish most or many of their intentions, get to where they are going without bumping into walls, or lamp posts, and are usually able to survive from one day to the next, regardless of whatever they actually *believe* about the world in which all this is happening.

I surmise from this observation that virtually nobody, and no living organism, experiences life in the world of “things as they *really* are.” All our experiences take place exclusively in the world of “things as we *imagine* them to be;” and our various imaginations are by no means congruent. Yet by itself, that does not seem to be a significant hindrance to anything, or anybody.

That, in part, is what it means to me.

If the preceding has fulfilled its intent, it has been a source of nourishment for thought, speculation, exploration, and possibly even favorable evolution, for you. If so, and if you wish to participate with others in furthering such thought, speculation, exploration, and evolution, then I would like to invite you to make contact with The Wellspring Publishing Group, and explore the possibility of initiating, or participating in one or more WPG Projects: TheWellspringPublishingGroup.com

Thank you for your time, and your interest.