

Immortality Defended

John Leslie



CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
1 Pantheism: A Rapid Introduction	1
2 Platonic Creation	16
3 Divine and Human Minds	35
4 Immortality	56
5 Existence, Causation, and Life	71
<i>Appendix: Brief Summary of the Book</i>	87
<i>Bibliography</i>	89
<i>Index of Names</i>	93
<i>Index of Subjects</i>	95

PREFACE

A book about immortality? A book about *God*, therefore? Of the three varieties of immortality discussed here, only one has a firm link to any idea of God, and it alone has a clear right to be named *immortality*. It is the immortality of an afterlife, of thoughts after bodies had died.

Of the other two, the “Einsteinian” variety – the immortality of your existing “back there along the fourth dimension” when people called you dead – is accepted by most of today’s physicists, yet the majority of them (and maybe Einstein as well, although he talked of it when comforting the relatives of a dead friend) would hesitate about using the word “immortal.” And the remaining variety – being part of a unified cosmic reality that, living the lives of all conscious beings, will live new ones after yours has ended – would be classified by many folk as “not immortality at all.”

Does the book truly bring in God, or does it just talk of a Creative Principle in which Plato believed, plus an infinitely rich reality which it created? Did Spinoza acknowledge God’s reality when he embraced Plato’s Principle and pictured our universe as produced by it? Was he indeed *a pantheist* who thought everything divine? Or was he instead the atheist that many philosophers have described, a trickster who wrote “*God-also-known-as-Nature*” when he actually accepted only Nature? The “Platonistic,” “Spinozistic” cosmos pictured in the following pages is infinite in its riches, yet whether to call it “pantheistic” could be entirely a matter of taste. *Atheistic* and *a denial of God* are the words that many would use of it. But nothing much hangs on mere words.

Chapter 4

IMMORTALITY

Change in a Pantheistic Scheme of Things

Aristotle's *Metaphysics* remarks that any change in a divine being would be change for the worse. Spinoza sees things similarly. God, he writes in his *Short Treatise*, "cannot change into anything better" and must therefore be "immutable." But then, how can he or any other pantheist accept the obvious truth that ours is a world constantly varying? Chapter 1 sketched how the difficulty might be overcome. Any absolute alterations to a divine mind – meaning that first it was *in its entirety* something with one set of qualities, while subsequently it had another set – could only be for the worse, but in fact no alterations are ever absolute. Our world has a four-dimensional existence, as Einstein thought. The changes we experience are simply differences between successive cross-sections of the four-dimensional whole. This whole never itself alters.

On such a theory, although yesterday and tomorrow aren't parts of what we of today call "the world of today," this fails to make them non-existent. Suppose some man insists that they at least aren't in existence *now*. He ought to mean only that they aren't included in what's *now* relative to his utterance of the word "now," which merely says they don't inhabit the same cross-section of reality as the utterance in question.

In nontechnical language it can be hard to make this point. It can seem that Einstein, trying to comfort the relatives of his dead friend Michele Besso by explaining that common ways of thought were wrong about the status of past events, might just as well have talked of spherical cubes and wifeless husbands. Besso's life had not been annihilated absolutely, Einstein considered. It was *in existence back there* along the fourth dimension. But, the protest comes, doesn't saying a life "hasn't been annihilated" mean it is still being lived today? And mustn't this mean, *not* that it's today true that it's being lived "back there inside other cross-sections," but rather that it's lived in the situation of today, which isn't a cross-section of anything? Everything *at present* in existence is everything in existence, isn't it?

Well, ordinary thought does treat the dead as annihilated absolutely rather than only relatively. Folk typically pity or envy dead people in ways in which they wouldn't if convinced of their existence "back there." No matter how long and happy their lives were, the dead are pitied "because for them it's all finished," or no matter how miserable they used to be, they are envied because their sufferings "are now over." This is mirrored by ordinary language, tending to make it utter nonsense to talk of the dead as *in existence*. The important point, however, is that the situation as pictured by Einstein plainly isn't self-contradictory.

Suppose for argument's sake that ours is a universe where time "flows" as pictured by most people. The present constantly preys upon the past for the "stuff" of existence, taking this stuff and molding it into new shapes. Real existence is thus never anything but *existence now*. It has three dimensions and not four, we are supposing. The future isn't real yet, the past isn't real still. But what if a demon creates *another* universe in which the successive patterns of our universe are reproduced as patterns succeeding one another along a dimension of a four-dimensional reality, its parts all existing together? The demon-created universe is our universe as Einstein sees it, a universe in which Michele Besso's non-existence is never more than non-existence inside particular cross-sections. And how could we possibly know that our universe differed from Einstein's?

No Experiences Can Disprove Four-Dimensional Existence

Situations certainly develop in time. According to Einstein, though, they develop in a manner interestingly like that in which a pattern of interwoven threads develops along the length of a carpet. The dead and the as-yet-unborn are not alive today. However, the difference between living today and living in a distant century may be not too dissimilar from the difference between living on Earth and living in some remote galaxy. Now-ness can be as relative as here-ness. (What's "here" to me can be "over there" to you.) The world, Einstein wrote, has a four-dimensional structure, and experiments never find in this structure "any sections which represent 'now' objectively" – in any fashion, in other words, to which the experiments point. This, he continued, need not make us dismiss "happening and becoming" as useless concepts. Still, it renders it "natural to think of physical reality as a four-dimensional existence instead of, as hitherto, the evolution of a three-dimensional existence" (*Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*, 15th edition, Appendix 5).

What Einstein recognized is that observers moving relative to one another will find it simplifies their calculations if they differ in how they draw their "now-lines": lines connecting events all counted as "happening simultaneously," lines that divide spacetime into successive segments. No experiments could demonstrate that one way of drawing the lines was right and all the others wrong. As James Jeans remarked in *The Mysterious Universe*, things moving relative to one another treat any absolute distinction between space and time with as little respect as cricket balls give to the distinction between a cricket field's length and its breadth.

This doesn't mean that such an absolute distinction must be fictitious. After all, a second, "anti-Einsteinian" demon could take a four-dimensional model of the world's history and cut it into three-dimensional slices. These, the second demon could claim, corresponded to situations each in turn created while the preceding situation was annihilated. Now, suppose physicists tried to refute this. Whatever evidence they brought forward would be evidence of what the world's patterns were; yet couldn't those patterns appear in our second demon's slices just as easily as side by side in a four-dimensional whole? Consider Richard Feynman's point

that calculations are simplified if the positrons entering into various reactions are treated as electrons moving backwards in time for brief periods, prior to again moving forwards. To anyone familiar with the Einsteinian approach, such *temporal zigzagging* could look far neater than the alternative, which is that each electron helps conjure into existence a further electron plus a positron, next fusing suicidally with the positron while the newly born electron continues onwards through time. But can this firmly prove that the zigzagging is real? The second demon would laugh at so quaint a suggestion.

Equally, however, our first, "Einsteinian" demon would laugh at the idea that anything in successive three-dimensional situations could prove they *weren't* mere cross-sections of a greater whole. This point applies to patterns of personal experience quite as much as to laboratory evidence. The exhilaration of fast running, fear of the unknown future, relief at inability to remember even which toe had been aching, could all of them exist inside a four-dimensional reality.

But why, if the world exists four-dimensionally, do we experience it as developing *from* the past *towards* the future? A standard reply runs as follows. Near the Big-Bang extremity of its four-dimensional existence, our universe possesses great thermodynamic orderliness. Events successively more removed from the Bang almost always possess less and less of it. Living systems, however, are like backward-moving eddies in a stream. They exploit the general flow towards thermodynamic disorder so as to increase their own order. In brains, this permits controlled transfer of information from points closer to the Bang to points farther away from it, which is why we "remember the past instead of the future."

For our purposes it hardly matters whether this standard reply is correct. What's crucial is only that, like the rest of the world, the realm of conscious experience runs not by magic but by physical laws: laws that specify correlations between the pattern of events at any one moment and the patterns at other moments. Now, exactly the same correlations can be present whether or not the world exists in a four-dimensional way.

Let us hope, though, that it does exist in such a way. For one thing, this would allow our thoughts to be real in more than the piecemeal fashion in which a train's progress across a continent is real. Any thought that is at all complex does not merely take time to generate. Instead, the thought is itself something spread out over time. But now, what if past and future situations do not actually exist? What if they have nothing

more than *was-existence* and *will-be-existence*? In this case the elements of a complex thought are real only one after another. The thought as a whole is never actually there, much as a train is never actually at two railway stations.

On the Einsteinian picture, in contrast, such thoughts truly can be there in their entirety. They can even have wholeness of the kind considered in the previous chapter, a unity of existence where parts are abstractions only. And while there may be no firm proofs in this area, Michael Lockwood seems right in saying that the reality of our thoughts and experiences is not simply piecemeal, a case of “first this bit exists, and then it doesn’t but the next one does, etcetera.” When musical notes arrive in swift succession we seem to experience several of them together. As Lockwood points out, this supports both Einstein’s world-view and the idea that quantum computing occurs in our brains. In the realm of the quantum, the parts of various wholes are not fully separate in their existence.

Immortality of a First, Einsteinian Type

Einstein may never have used the term “immortality” in this connection, yet in his world we could all be considered immortal in an interesting sense. Time no longer has to be regarded as “the flood on which the oldster wakes in the night to shudder at its swollen black torrent cascading him into the abyss” (D. C. Williams). Einstein and Besso will never have undergone absolute annihilation.

One way of viewing the matter could be this. Extending along a time dimension of a reality that exists four-dimensionally, humans may not be immortal in the sense that their earthly careers stretch indefinitely far beyond their births; however the four-dimensional reality, humans included, exists forever in time of another sort. The passage of this other kind of time, time in a somewhat different sense of the word “time,” is not an affair of passing seconds, days, centuries. Instead it consists in the fact that alterations *could in principle be occurring* although they never in fact occur.

They could in principle be occurring because there would be no contradiction in the entire four-dimensional situation changing. It could in principle be replaced by a series of other four-dimensional situations,

each noticeably different from its predecessor. It could even be replaced by total emptiness. Lack of all actual changes of this type would not mean that they were ruled out logically – that they couldn't conceivably be occurring. Well, the time in which they could conceivably be occurring is a time in which you and I can exist eternally, if our world is a four-dimensional whole that never in fact alters.

There is a tie between this way of thinking and very ordinary ways of thought. Imagine a world divided into two regions, each experiencing a freeze at intervals. When frozen, a region does not change at all. The first region undergoes alterations for 3 years, then remains frozen for a year, then starts altering again for another 3 years, and so forth. The second region goes through a similar cycle, but here each set of alterations takes 5 years instead of 3. Every so often, therefore, both regions must be frozen together for a period. During that period, time passes in the two-regioned world although nothing changes in it. There is no logical absurdity here, and nothing which clashes with common ways of thinking. What is more, no clash seems caused even by saying that outside the two regions there exists nothing whatever. Yet if nothing existed apart from them, reality as a whole would sometimes progress through time without the least change.

Immortality of a Second Type: An Afterlife

Spinoza denies life after death. He does sometimes call us immortal, but probably the only good sense to be found in his words is as follows. The pantheistic cosmos which he calls "God or Nature" exists eternally in the sense just now examined – it is, as we'd say today, a four-dimensional reality that is never replaced by anything different – and therefore human minds (like all other things) are never wiped from existence in the absolute fashion that Einstein rejected. Nevertheless we shall have no experiences at dates beyond our burials, Spinoza tells us firmly.

Why ever not? May we not have a right to life after death? Even if our experiences are simply elements in a divine mind's thinking, why shouldn't we have new ones after our bodies had died? Suppose some scientist has created a fully conscious computer which enjoys its thought processes. The scientist has no right to smash it, simply because of having created it. And the position may strike us as no different when

an immensely intelligent extraterrestrial has simulated that computer and its workings inside his, her or its own head through thinking about them in immense detail. Although a simulation, the new, in-the-head computer would truly perform computations. Its thoughts would truly be had by it, despite being mere subpatterns of the extraterrestrial's thinking. So, wouldn't it be morally ugly for the extraterrestrial to annihilate it through ceasing to think about it? If a computer outside a head can be happy, so can a computer inside the head.

Consider now the divine mind inside which we supposedly exist. Picture it as having thought all the way through some person's life up to the moment of bodily death. Why should not the life continue onwards, our world's physical laws ceasing to govern it? Those laws, after all, are supposedly a mere matter of how the divine mind thinks inside the tiny region of its thinking that is the universe familiar to us. Well, why would it not think *as well* about lives that continued outside the region? Wouldn't this be less ugly than thinking about lives that ended completely?

Human thoughts continuing after the deaths of human bodies would be miracles in a sense, but in a pantheistic picture the miracles, radically new ways in which events took place, would simply be cases where the divine thoughts took on a radically new character – and why not, if it were something good? No breaks in the normal course of things would disturb the region of the divine thinking which included the human bodies. This region, the world at present known to us, would be a realm whose laws of physics were never superseded. It would be completely miracle-free. Yet while John Brown's body decayed in the region in question, the thoughts of John Brown could continue elsewhere with much the same structures as before. Outside a pantheistic scheme of things this might be a ridiculous fantasy. Inside one, it ought quite to be expected.

Could we picture the structures of entire human bodies as continuing onwards in dimensions beyond those of the physical world, whereas in that world the bodies burned or rotted? Think of a strip running across a floor, then splitting into one branch that struggles on for a while before fading away, plus another that rises up above the floor. Peter van Inwagen has imagined something rather similar. "Perhaps," he has written, "at the moment of each man's death, God removes his corpse and replaces it with a simulacrum which is what burns or rots" (in Edwards, ed., *Immortality*). The corpse itself is then revived for an afterlife. But Robert Nozick may do rather better when he toys with the idea that at

death “a person’s organized energy” is what “bubbles out orthogonally” into new dimensions. What he’d consider essential, Nozick specifies, would be organization of the sort found in a computer program that captured the person’s “intellectual mode” and “personality pattern.”

In an afterlife I’d not expect to find my thoughts linked to anything like a human body. Nonetheless I might recognize the thoughts as *mine* because, for one thing, they continued (at least at first) along the lines I had grown used to. I’d hope, as well, to recognize dead friends by becoming aware of their thoughts, finding that they shared various of my memories. My personal identity, I suspect, depends as little on my ever *really having had* a body as it does on my toenails. What if my life up to date had been lived by an immaterial soul deceived by Descartes’s very powerful demon into thinking it had a body? The life would have been mine all the same.

Afterlives, if we have them, might be much as pictured by many religious folk, both pantheists and nonpantheists. People surviving bodily death could come to share the wonders of divine thought, losing much of their individuality. Keith Ward expects us all to “pass, as most theists think, into the wider reality of God,” perhaps even becoming “one reality with God” and “knowing God wholly”; we might share God’s knowledge of “the whole history of the universe.” Yet it could be hoped that such changes would take place only gradually – for mightn’t suddenly knowing the whole history of the universe erode one’s individuality quite as drastically as suddenly changing into a tadpole with its extremely limited thoughts?

Could we gain limitlessly wide-ranging knowledge even in the very long term, if matters are as pantheists believe? Wouldn’t many items of knowledge exist only inside severely circumscribed regions of the divine thinking, for instance knowledge of exactly how it felt to be some particular human with all of that human’s ignorance? Even if coming to know “the whole history of the universe,” or “knowing God wholly,” would we not remain unaware of quite how it had felt to be Mozart? Spinoza’s idea of a *divine overview* could be helpful here. Only limited beings can know just how it feels to be limited. (How could you know precisely how it felt to be as ignorant as humans are, were your mind flooded with knowledge of everything worth knowing? How could you experience all of the typical human fear of death, viewed as absolute annihilation, if fully aware that nobody undergoes such annihilation?)

Still, the divine reality could have a center at which everything was appreciated in a single glance. Here the hopes and fears of individual humans could be known “as if telepathically.” This would involve something fairly close to knowledge of just how being a human feels.

Suppose, that’s to say, that telepathy did in fact work. You might then get a very good idea of what it is like to be Mr. Smith, thoroughly frightened, without yourself thinking your name “Smith” or being alarmed for your safety. You could even get a very painful appreciation of Mr. Smith’s rheumatism. Now, recall that in his *Ethics* Spinoza distinguishes between God “insofar as he is considered as constituting the essence of the human mind” – which could best be taken as meaning those regions of the divine mind that *are* human minds in all their limitations – and God “insofar as he possesses the ideas of all things.” The divine reality includes an overview of all its parts, a seeing of them all together, and one of its ingredients is what I call “as if telepathic” knowledge of how it feels to be limited, for instance through being human. In the later sections of his *Ethics* Spinoza seems to say that this element of the divine reality not only knows humans well but loves them, or at least their better aspects.

People thinking along pantheistic lines might prefer to use the word “God” not (as Spinoza does) to name the divine reality as a whole, but rather as a label for such a central, “overviewing” element. Again, they might want to call this element *a divine person*. Experiencing and interacting with the central element or person would be awesome.

“Knowing God wholly” would always remain infinitely beyond us, I suspect. Even so, we could gain a constantly increasing share of all that is worth knowing. This might often be very different from memorizing more and more volumes of some infinitely large encyclopedia. What it is like to sing, chat, watch sunsets, create works of art, ski, is part of what’s worth knowing. Why think an afterlife would contain no new knowledge of things rather like these? It could be lived with friends from earthly times and with excitements on a par with those of skiing, even if no human bodies were involved.

What about friends who had long been dead, or people of much earlier centuries? Wouldn’t it be impossible to interact with them in any ordinary way because, by the time you had died, wouldn’t they have outclassed you (in their share of the divine knowledge or in their degree of fusion with a divine person) by as much as humans outclass frogs

or insects? Not necessarily, granted that an Einsteinian view of time is right. All the dead could enter the time dimension of an afterlife as a single group, without the sad consequence that those dying in earlier centuries had *wasted their time* by lying unconscious in their graves while waiting for the others to join them.

Would truly awful people survive, or would their lives be simply not worth preserving? Would there be afterlives for dogs or dolphins? In an afterlife I'd hope to meet many a previous dog, though feeling surprised if coming across a former mass murderer.

Immortality, Type Three: The Continued Existence of Something that had Carried Our Life-Patterns

The cells of our bodies are like candle flames, their atoms constantly replaced by new ones. Only their structures live on. But how then can we be the same people from year to year? Some philosophers speak of Pure Egos that experience our changing mental states while themselves never in the least altering, yet this can look a flat contradiction. Others describe mental states as carried by immaterial souls which do alter, but not with constant renewal of material as in human bodies, flames, or rivers. The nowadays standard story, however, is that structural continuity – like that of a path winding through a wood – is what keeps us always the same individuals.

There may be difficulties with this standard story, though. For a start, would completely unbroken continuity be crucial? If you dropped out of existence, would it make sense to talk of *you* as coming back after a millisecond?

Next, imagine a *splitting into branches* of what had been you until then. The “transporters” of science fiction (such as *Star Trek*) sometimes malfunction with results of this type. Would each branch still be you?

Might repeated duplication, perhaps by some device that destroyed your body while recording its details so as to be able to recreate its structure, mean that a million people could all of them be you? (Assume that all the brain traces that allow you to remember things could be duplicated successfully.) And if so would you – before being duplicated – live in terror when told that the million would be tortured? Would you view this as equivalent to being tortured a million times?

IMMORTALITY

My personal identity isn't, I trust, a matter only of structural continuity, whether or not completely unbroken. For if structural continuity were all that unified my successive mental states, wouldn't my mental life be too split up to have much intrinsic value? Would my thoughts have any reality that wasn't merely piecemeal like the reality of a train's progress from country to country? Could I ever experience an entire complicated idea or a sequence of musical notes *as a single whole*? People would answer these questions in very different ways. It would be pointless to repeat everything leading to my own answers. The thing to notice is instead this. Suppose there are no afterlives. Suppose also that Einstein was wrong about our world's four-dimensional existence, so that complex thoughts and experiences of musical sequences exist only in piecemeal fashion. Even so, I could draw comfort from the notion that all the things of our universe are mere aspects of a single existent somewhat as a lake's color and length are aspects of the lake. This could give me a personal identity which amounted to more than mere structural continuity. Might it not even give me immortality of a sort?

As the previous chapter noted, there are general grounds for thinking our universe more than a mere collection of entities each with no spread in space or in time. (How could any physical entity be real if without any size or if lasting for no time at all? And why fancy that any one entity stretching though space or time must have just the same characteristics at every single point over which its existence extends?) Furthermore, quantum physicists describe fairly clear signs of existential unity: when two photons in a box are in the same quantum state, for instance, or when the properties of various particles are markedly entangled. Also, examination of one's own consciousness can indicate that some regions, at least, of our universe carry highly complex patterns yet are unified in their existence. Now, all this can suggest that existential unification characterizes the universe in its entirety. In consequence, might not you and I have something worth treating as immortality of a third kind? It would lie in the continued presence of a single existent which, carrying our life-patterns until we died, would carry also those of all who lived after us. This single existent would be our universe or a divine mind in which this universe is contained.

The idea of personal identity is only fuzzily defined in ordinary thought and language. It thus makes little sense to insist that all who had wanted

an indefinitely prolonged future *for themselves*, but who now disbelieved in an afterlife, would still have something to hope for: namely, that an existentially unified reality, something whose parts were mere aspects or abstractions, carried their life-patterns and would carry the patterns of other lives in future centuries. Many would deny that anything on these lines would be relevant *to them personally*. On their preferred definition of it, personal identity could never survive without sameness of personality: sameness of character. It might follow that you ought not to fear some painful injury to be inflicted on the body that now counted as *yours*, just so long as you knew your personality would beforehand be destroyed through brainwashing; for wouldn't the body that was injured then be that of *another person*?

Those favoring this approach could not be at fault linguistically, any more than if they demanded slightly more food than various other people in anything they would describe as "a breakfast" or allowed slightly less white into anything they'd call "dark gray."

When, that is to say, words are vague, individuals have a right to use them somewhat as they please. But note, now, that the persistence of *something existentially unified that had carried one's mental life* is what many have chosen to mean by "surviving bodily death." The immaterial soul was traditionally pictured as just such a unified entity, and doubt was often thrown on any need for it to be free of abrupt personality changes. (Entry into heaven, it was said, produced instant and radical improvements in character in all but the most saintly souls. Even on Earth, sudden repentances could involve great transformations.) Clearly, the continued presence of intelligent life for many further centuries wouldn't be sufficient, not even in an existentially unified cosmos, for survival *of one's personality* through all those centuries; but nonetheless, mightn't it provide for something worth the name of "personal survival"? Personal identity strikes me as a concept nebulous enough to allow us to answer Yes just as much as No.

Hindus in the tradition of the *Chandogya Upanishad* look forward to a "dissolving into Brahman" in which (they must surely think) their personal identities would not be wholly destroyed, else how could they look forward to it as they do? It isn't as a man in torment looks forward to annihilation. Their idea is that they will lose their individual personalities when fading into the heart of a pantheistic universe, yet that this will bring good to themselves.

Here is one way of approaching the affair. Suppose you became convinced that you and all other living creatures were simply elements in an existentially unified cosmic whole. You might then see aiding others, humans and animals alike, as producing *self-benefits* of an odd type. Whenever trying to benefit yourself, you could well conclude, what you had really wanted was benefit to something existentially unified that carried your ever-varying states of mind. You would now see this sort of benefit as produced whenever you helped another human or even a whale – for if our world’s complexities are always mere aspects of a single existent, then all the world’s conscious beings “are, at some level, one,” as Derek Parfit expresses it; one and the same all-encompassing thing is living the lives of all. Well, benefits of that type could continue onwards indefinitely through the persistence of the stuff of which the cosmos was made, and through its continuing to carry the patterns of living intelligence.

Does the Third Kind of Immortality Remove All Need for an Afterlife?

If we could look forward to the kind of immortality just now examined, would our chances of an afterlife be ruined? Would we have to look forward to immortality of that sort instead?

Suppose, that is, that after our bodies had died we really would be immortal in a sense, drawing benefits of a sort, through the continuance of something existentially unified (a divine mind, or at least an existentially unified cosmos) which carries our life-patterns at the present instant. Why hope for anything more than this? Would it not be enough by itself?

The right reaction, presumably, is that an afterlife and the continuance of the existentially unified something would be fully compatible, and that there would be reason enough to wish for both of them together. What if the life of your child, your spouse or your friend is merely an aspect of a divine mind, and the mind in question will exist forever? For bodily death to terminate the life could still be something ugly.

The three possible forms of immortality are entirely distinct, so that any one of them might be had while the other two were not. However, it looks as if we could well have all three conjointly.

The Chances of Immortality of One Kind or Another

Picture a world of severely limited, separately existing things that spring into being, then undergo absolute annihilation. Surely this would be far from what one would expect if ethical requirements had creative power. Once, therefore, we had accepted a Platonic creation story, we could seem forced to believe in immortality of the first and third kinds.

Those kinds, though, can be argued for even without Plato's assistance. (A) Philosophers such as J. M. E. McTaggart, J. J. C. Smart, and Adolf Grünbaum maintain that an "absolute" flow of time, a series of changes to reality in its entirety, cannot be described without contradiction. If they are right, there are logical grounds for the belief that lives are never wiped out absolutely. Other grounds for this belief come from the triumphs of Einsteinian relativity theory. (B) Similarly – see the previous chapter – fairly abstract reasoning on the one hand, various scientific discoveries on the other, can suggest that reality forms an existentially unified whole. If it does, then that whole is living your life in some parts of it, and mine in others. It will live other lives when ours have ended.

The case of immortality of the second kind, the afterlife, is altogether different. Here is an immortality that certainly cannot be expected just on abstract or logical grounds, and there can seem to be no evidence for it. Think of what scientists now know about how minds are related to brains. It could easily seem fantastic for mental life to continue onwards beyond bodily death, let alone outside the spacetime in which we find ourselves. An afterlife can look preposterous unless we accept something like the divine reality of conventional religious systems, or a Platonic creation story, or both. I think it has to be *both*. A divine reality – perhaps pantheism's infinitely complex realm that the dead could explore, or perhaps a divine person who could share with them the wonders that he contemplates – strikes me as too hard to swallow when existing for no reason whatever. In contrast, a divine reality that exists *because this is ethically required* can be accepted readily enough when once you have grown used to the idea. Against the background of such a reality, an afterlife can be plausible.

What items of evidence, then, could give plausibility to the Platonic creation story and therefore to the idea of an afterlife?

Let us begin by remembering that the world portrayed by modern science is apparently *not* a series of severely limited, separately existing things, each suffering absolute annihilation soon after it has sprung into being. It is a world which can plausibly be viewed as an infinitely complex, fully unified and eternally existing whole. It could well contain infinitely many gigantic domains each worth calling "a universe." It could be just the sort of thing that a Platonic creation story would lead us to expect.

There are three further main items of evidence, to be discussed in the next chapter. First, there is the sheer truth that a world exists. Second, the world's events are orderly in a fashion leading us to speak of *causal laws*. And third, those laws permit the existence of intelligent living beings. A Platonic creation story can make sense of all this.

Further Reading

The theory that the world exists four-dimensionally is argued for by Adolf Grünbaum, J. J. C. Smart, Timothy Sprigge, and D. C. Williams. In his superb "The Myth of Passage" Williams holds that death is less fearsome on this theory. Sprigge writes that our experiences "are all just eternally there." For the works of these writers and of others this chapter has mentioned, see the Bibliography.

Sidney Shoemaker's "Time without Change" discusses a world divided into regions each frozen at intervals, and sometimes frozen simultaneously for lengthy periods.

Peter van Inwagen's idea that God removes corpses so as to revive them, replacing them by simulacra, is one of many curious things in Edwards, ed., *Immortality*. Robert Nozick's "orthogonal bubbling out of organized energy" appears in the second chapter, "Dying", of *The Examined Life*.

Keith Ward's *Religion and Creation* contrasts the immortality theories of the Chandogya and Taittiriya *Upanishads*. In the first we lose our individualities so quickly that we never really know we are dissolving into Brahman, whereas in the second we retain them while roaming the divine reality.

In *Self-Knowledge and Social Relations* John King-Farlow develops a language where the subject of everything is "It," an existentially unified cosmic whole. A cry for mother becomes "Let It be Mama'd here!" He gets close to saying that people who deliberately harm others show their ignorance of how they and these others are merely aspects of the same one existent.

My own struggles with such topics include "The Value of Time" in the *American Philosophical Quarterly* of April 1976.