



The third hypothesis

The enigma of the io

"Whoever you are, you are a friend"
(Don Sirio Politi)

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<http://www.iacopovettori.it/laterzaipotesi/eng/Default.aspx>
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This web site aims to set up a point of discussion in connection with a specific metaphysical hypothesis, that could be called "neomonopsychism". I feel that I have bumped into an important idea, destined to be considered with growing interest as time passes. In implicit form it already appears in many well known texts, but this site is an attempt to make its innovative ideas more definite, describing it in a way that will be accessible to everyone.

It corresponds to the least invasive method possible, allowing the mysteries of the "io" to integrate with a "scientific" vision of life without expecting in return any condition of adjustment to any kind of dogma, or the recognition of any transcendental "authority" or "moral principle", offering instead metaphysical support for what is called "layman's ethics". The rational methods that I have tried to follow permit the formulation of those "synthetic a priori" judgements that Kant saw as the only admissible ones for metaphysics.

If you find this idea interesting, you can help to spread it around by informing your friends of this web site.

The three hypotheses

*"After eliminating the impossible, whatever remains,
no matter how improbable, is the truth."
(Sherlock Holmes)*

My philosophical considerations start off with the basic question: what should we expect to find at the end of our lives. Having touched wood first of all, if we then have an objective look at the question, it becomes clear that all of the existing replies are variations on two or three main strands of thought. I say "two or three" because these classifications are made more arduous by the fact that some of the models presuppose the existence of God, while others do not. In my categorization however, I consider the option of the existence of God a variable element in the main classification, which is based on the number of life opportunities that each of us can hope to undergo.

The "first hypothesis" gives only "one single opportunity", according to which each of us will undergo only one life. If we do not admit the existence of God, we have the "atheistic variant" of the first hypothesis, which supposes that no one has ever existed before being born in the unique life experience to be undergone, and that he or she is destined to return into nothingness – into eternal "non-existence" – as soon as the days of life have come to their end. In the "religious variant" we are considered to have been created by God with the purpose of living this life, at the end of which we will be judged on the merits of our behaviour, and then destined towards a perpetual holiday or perpetual imprisonment.

The "second hypothesis" is reincarnation as it is traditionally understood in many oriental religions. Generally speaking, it is supposed that, once our soul has ended one life, it can incarnate again in another body and start life over, in a cycle that is potentially infinite, but which can be interrupted after a life of an exemplary nature conducted according to those canons specific to each single doctrine. There is the presence of one or more doctrines in some of these religions, but this model could work even without necessarily

imagining a divinity with the traditional characteristics of western religions, which makes it quite easy to envisage an "atheistic variant" and a "religious variant" for this second model as well.

The differences between these first two hypotheses are of a formal rather than a substantial nature. In fact, if we agree to call only the first life "birth", and use the term "rebirth" for each subsequent delivery, we have then an initial moment in correspondence with the first birth, after which, following on a number of more or less adventurous mishaps, the human being will reach a final result of "perpetual holidaymaking" in an afterlife that is secure from all the problems that afflict our humble earthly world.

Is that all? Do we have to resign ourselves to choosing one of these models, hoping only that it is the right one? After reflecting on the problem for my entire life, I have realized that there is another possibility, which has not until today ever been treated with due consideration, despite the fact that it echoes through many passages in the writings of great thinkers, and that many ideas have been doing the rounds this long time which, if you think about it for a moment, should by rights imply that it is true. At first sight it might look a bit unrealistic in that it seems to go against our instinctive common sense. Still, during the last century our common sense has been forced to submit to great and significant defeats stemming from the physical sciences and mathematics – which are exactly those areas of study necessary to us if we are to consider this new proposal acceptable.

We arrive at the "third hypothesis" if we imagine that all existing lives, even though they might be taking place in partial competition in time, are in fact things experienced by the same, unique shared mind. Using the hypothesis of reincarnation, we could say that we are all subsequent reincarnations of the same soul, even if our lives are taking place on the identical physical plane of time. Using the hypothesis of the world created by a monotheistic God, we could imagine that we are all God's "successive dreams", and the limitations of our knowledge and our abilities only exist temporarily in this contingent existence of ours. The interpretation that I personally prefer, and which I would like to ask you to adopt, is that

there is no "universal soul", but only a "consciousness property" potentially inherent in the world itself, which can express itself only in the presence of a certain number of conditions which we will not attempt to make a better definition of at this point, but which can certainly lead to smaller or greater degrees of self consciousness. However, the concept that we need to consider fundamental is that this "consciousness property" is necessarily unique, and that, therefore, any living being you meet on your road must be considered as a life experience of your own, exactly as if you were meeting yourself as you were yesterday or as you will be tomorrow.

Although this idea might appear bizarre, I would ask you not to underestimate it, and to try and imagine how we would all behave if we were convinced that it were true. In the following pages, I will begin to set out an overview of the reasons which should convince us to judge this hypothesis as the most reasonable of all alternatives. In fact, face to face with a problem that is not necessarily detrimental to it – the partial concurrence of our lives – it frees us of a much more serious existential predicament, which we do not even notice any longer due to thousands of years of habit. As this idea also envisages an automatic sense of Solomon's justice, in that, because we are the only possible people who can "experience" life, we are destined to receive all the good and all the evil that we commit in equal measure, we could conclude that, all things considered, even if it did not really represent "true reality", we might be forgiven for hoping that it did.

What is the problem

*"Veder volea come si convenne
l'imgo al cerchio, e come vi si indova;
ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne."
(Dante Alighieri, Paradiso XXXIII, vv.137-139)*

There is a fundamental contradiction inherent in our existence, about which we are by now so much in the habit of accepting as an incontrovertible matter of fact that we have all but removed it and live without thinking about it, in a sort of indolent agnosticism which shakes us up only in occasion of those events which, good or bad, upset our lives completely. This contradiction consists in our awareness of the fact that, on the one hand our individual existence is nothing more than an ephemeral contingent event coming into effect in a physical world that changes continually and would continue to exist without our presence in it; on the other hand, from his or her particular point of view, each of us has the right to consider our existence as necessary a thing as the existence of the whole external world. If we think that our life is the result of a series of casual events over which we could not have had any type of control, then we are forced to conclude that it represents one single possibility out of a number of alternatives that are practically infinite. We would finish up by thinking that we have won a sort of cosmic lottery in order to gain this, however ephemeral, victory over what would otherwise have been an eternal condition of non-existence; and still, an intimate part of us all is convinced that "the world could not really exist if I were not here to experience it". Traditionally, this problem is resolved (or, rather, "eluded") in different ways, on the basis of the distinctions that I have introduced between the three hypotheses. Nevertheless, it is only the third hypothesis which manages to give it a definitive solution.

The first hypothesis takes the life that we are living in the present as our unique life, or, at least, our only "earthly" life. In this case, we have to distinguish between the atheistic and the religious versions: in other words, if we believe in God we can hold that we represent an expression of God's will; otherwise we can only consider that we

have been "born by chance". Even if we judge the indetermination that seems to reign in the material world as an illusion (despite the fact that the opposite has now been accepted by almost all theoretical physicists) from our own subjective point of view, the fact that we really represent one of the possible existences "foreseen" by this hypothetical predetermination, would still point towards an inexplicable stroke of luck. In one way or another, we have to admit that we have been lucky (that is, of course, if we hold that living is a positive thing). The only provisional explanation that can make sense of this "stroke of luck" is that seeing as we are the result of one single "lucky combination", in the eternal evolution of the world "sooner or later" our own combination had to turn up trumps. This hypothesis is sustainable only if you admit the existence of many universes that can, taken together, exhaust all those possible "birth combinations" that are theoretically admissible. The only thing is, thinking it over on these grounds, we would have to admit that all those conditions that can "sooner or later" come about once, can happen "a little less sooner", and "a little more later" two, three or an infinite number of times. In this case, we have to decide whether we prefer to claim – every time that the same conditions come about – that it is the same mind that manifests itself or not. If we decide that is so, it is the same thing as thinking that each of us will be reborn an infinite number of times, under the same starting out conditions; if we decide not, we are still left with the problem of what could have made it possible for me to be born on this occasion in the place of my infinite number of potential clones. Each of these two cases are difficult to maintain.

If we analyze the "one single life" hypothesis in its religious variant, in which the motivation for our existence is as an expression of God's will, we cannot but notice that it can finally be brought back to a variation of the preceding case: the fact that we are souls "predestined to life" by God's will finds its solution in the discovery that we have been very lucky to have been chosen for this privilege. The only way out of considering this merely a case of "good luck" consists once again in supposing that God in his infinite foresight has disposed things in such a way that sooner or later "everyone will have his or her opportunity of life". This forces us to conclude that there must be an infinite number of opportunities and that the

dimension and the time span of our world must also be infinite or that, on the other hand, an infinite number of worlds must have been created, all of which have finite dimensions or duration. Otherwise we would have to suppose that we are part of a restricted number of "created souls" which, even if they were countless, would nevertheless have to be finite in number, which means that I personally must consider myself the holder of an absolutely exclusive privilege. Once again it would be difficult to explain why I should be so "lucky" because before being created I could not already have particular merits that would distinguish me from the other potentially "creatable beings".

The second hypothesis foresees that each of us can live out more than one experience of life, and that our individuality is able to migrate from one body to another. Here we are not interested in discussing whether we can experience a different state of existence between one life and the next, or even of the possibility of moving out of the potentially infinite cycle of subsequent reincarnations; the characteristic aspect of this second hypothesis is to release the probabilities of our individual existence from the probabilities of the contingent conditions in which it has occurred: if my soul was not born in its present circumstances, it would, anyway, have had other opportunities to be born. Even in this case, we suppose that our souls are already included among an infinite number of souls, and that, after their first birth and then a series of experiences perhaps subdivided into many subsequent lives, they can have access to a state of existence that will free them from the unwanted labours of this earthly world.

In all of these models, even before I can establish my participation among the those forms of life that have had the privilege effectively to live, I must always presume that I was part of a previous category of "potential experiencers" of life on earth. In the atheist version of the first hypothesis, in the place of souls, I have to presume the existence of "minds that may emerge and manifest themselves in a physical brain", and even if I persist in considering mental phenomena as an illusion produced by the function of a physical brain, I am still forced to recognize the existence of a subject that experiences this illusion: that self that everyone feels as his or her

own and which cannot be denied because of that same existential certainty acknowledged by Descartes: if I doubt, I am thinking, and if I think therefore I am. If we do not wish to accept the third possibility, we have to admit the possibility of a potentially infinite set of "possible experiencers" of life on earth, or whatever you wish to call them: souls, minds or "subjects of an illusion", whose elements are forced to accept their destiny to be or not to be born on the basis of events over which they have no control at all.

Why do I feel ill at ease when I think about this group of which I must evidently be a part? Even when I consider that the elements composing the set are infinite, I must look upon it as a transcendental privilege that I am one of them; as well as that, it is clear to me that their number would not be exhaustive without my presence in it. It is not enough to conclude that, seeing as the group is infinite in itself, I must necessarily be part of it. If we follow a similar line of thought, I would have to be a part of any set of infinite elements, which is absurd. The simple idea that this number might ever be considered in any way exhaustive provokes in me a profound sense of perplexity, and I doubt whether the effective birth events will ever be enough to give an opportunity of life to all the potential elements of the group.

The fact is that it would not be possible to distinguish in any way between these hypothetical "individualities" without singling out physical differences or discrepancies of character: in any case, seeing as nothing could stop two "individualities" from having identical characteristics, not even an infinite list of characteristics to compare would be enough to distinguish between them. As well as that, if you think that each of them would be able to express an individual will, not even their behaviour could be predictable. These characteristics imply that the total number of "possible experiencers" is of a cardinality infinitely greater than that of integers as you could demonstrate using Georg Cantor's "diagonal argument" for real numbers. This means that we can not be sure, however long we wait, that sooner or later everyone will have his or her occasion of birth. Lastly, this set of multitudes of individualities implies that for every new life conceived there exists a precise moment in which one particular "possible experiencer" is chosen,

which presupposes a dualism that cannot be eliminated between the mind and the body. Any alternative to the third hypothesis must come to terms with these problems. At a first superficial glance they might not seem so serious. To me they are untenable prejudices from which we must free ourselves.

What is the solution

*"Se non che la mia mente fu percossa
da un fulgore, in che sua voglia venne."
(Dante Alighieri, Paradiso XXXIII, vv.140-141)*

At the beginning of the 20th Century, physicist were facing the problem of how to conciliate Galileo's principle of relativity, according to which there is no one system of reference more privileged than another, with the equations of Maxwell regarding electromagnetism, according to which the speed of light in a vacuum is always constant. At this point, there was the hypothesis of the existence of a type of "ether", which gave support to the transmission of light and so also an absolute point of reference for the measurement of its speed. However, this ether was never actually located and no absolute point of reference was ever found for the measurement of its speed. That seemed to indicate that the Earth was stationary with respect to this hypothetical ether, or that we had to give up on Galileo's principle of relativity or on the precision of Maxwell's laws. None of these alternatives seemed satisfactory for the physicists of the time (or even of our own days). Einstein was a genius in that he put forward a drastic solution that actually worked: he eliminated ether as something completely useless, and, with his Theory of Restricted Relativity, reformulated the laws of movement so as to save Galileo's principle of relativity and at the same time the constancy of the speed of light, as predicted by Maxwell's equations. In order to do that he had to re-open the whole discussion about our concepts of space and time, which seemed to be a very reckless thing to do in those days, but which turned out to be the right choice in the end.

The revolution proposed by the third hypothesis is based on a similar procedure. To resolve the contradictions created by our awareness of the precariousness of everything that exists in our world and the sense of ineluctability that we all feel thinking about our personal existence, the third hypothesis does away with the concept of our soul or any other substitute that we might adopt to distinguish our individuality, and it reformulates the concept of

"experience of existence" taking into consideration two principles: both the necessity of the existence of the world in all its infinite forms and the necessity of the subject able to experience these infinite forms. In order to do that, we must first sacrifice our pre-concept of the multiplicity of our particular individualities, because only the singleness of the subject that experiences existence can justify its necessity. Each of us perceives the illusion of our own soul, or our own mind, or, in any case, of an interior subject that undergoes the experience of living: but this subject must necessarily be unique in that the multiplicity of all the possible "subjects that experience life" excludes without any appeal that a specific "subject that experiences" might ever be considered necessary: in the sense that another "myself" might easily have been born in my place, from my own parents with my own date of birth and all my own physical characteristics without making any difference at all to the rest of the world.

If we want to use a metaphor that is immediately comprehensible, I consider myself like a person who has a lottery ticket and who discovers that he has won. The only plausible explanation that does not involve some kind of unjustifiable privilege is to imagine that there have been an infinite number of extractions and that sooner or later even my own ticket would have come out, which would be possible only if the number of available tickets were as great as the set of integers, which, as we have already shown, would be a problem to demonstrate. Truth to tell, however, the fundamental question is another: why on earth am I the holder of a lottery ticket? There is no point in going off on a tangent and saying that God gave the ticket to me in person. In such a case, the question would become: why am I one of the possible holders of one of the tickets necessary for participating in the draw? We cannot start off by saying that, seeing as I have been born, this necessarily means that I am without doubt one of those that could be born: that would only be to fob off the question without answering it, as if we were saying that the fact that we were once children is justifiable on the grounds of the statement that in the meantime we have become adults.

The problem is that beyond the probability calculations connected with the possibility of my existence, as soon as my rationality forces

me to recognize my contingency and so my non-necessity, the evidence forces me to conclude that I represent in any case a result that has come to be despite its extreme improbability – the great unlikelihood of my ticket ever having been drawn. Yet, this extreme improbability is the irrefutable proof of the necessity of my "a priori" presence among the set of all the possible "holders of a ticket", including among their number both those who have been born and those who have missed by a hair's breadth their one single opportunity of life. Even if this set is infinite, it could not, evidently, have been complete without my humble presence, which means that I must necessarily have been one of the "holders of a ticket".

This is the dead end from which our reason will not allow us to escape: if there are so many of us who are possible candidates for "experiencing life", the others could have existed, if only as potential candidates, without my subsistence. If I am here, that means that it was necessary for me to have been one of those candidates, who, for an extraordinary sense of luck, actually had the chance to experience a real sense of life. It sounds like the paradox of the liar who admits "I am lying": if there are so many of us, then I was not necessary, and all the others could easily have existed without me: but the fact that I am here is the demonstration that my presence in the middle of that great number was, in fact, necessary if only for the fact that otherwise we would not be complete. Even if it was not necessary for me to win the lottery, it was absolutely vital for me to participate in the draw: clearly, the extraction could not begin without my "potential" presence, and then, just look, I went and won!

Only the third hypothesis resolves this problem in a consistent way. The evidence for the existence of my own "experiencing subject" is inescapable, and the only plausible explanation for its necessity is that it is always the same for everyone. The other hypotheses are forced to come up with more complicated alternatives, which all imply an inexplicable condition of privilege. Only if we think that there are – not many – but one only "experiencing subject", then there is no improbability or particular privilege which we have to try and find a reason for. Nevertheless, we have to force ourselves to go beyond the idea of an "experiencing subject" that migrates like a

ghost from one life to another. The only thing that exists is "the feeling of being myself", a single "myself-ness" that each of us feels in first person, and which is always the same for everyone, even if each of us has the sensation that our "myself-ness" is intrinsically connected with our personal characteristics, and that we all have a soul which contains our true individuality. Still, this "myself-ness" is one and it experiences every possible condition of life without any exclusion. It is not, however, in possession of any kind of information or characteristic that it can carry in its wake between two different experiences of life: such communication of information only takes place through the physical reality which is the stage setting of our life. All the individual characteristics that we think are in our possession are entirely dependant on conditions or physical events that take place in our bodies and in our brains: some of these stem from environmental causes, others from inherent factors, but they all lead back to something physical, to our DNA or, in any case, to the conditions of our birth. However, despite all the physical influences to which we are subject, I think the key element is our own awareness, which allows us to express our own choices, or our "free will" if we want to use the term, and it is this which makes us responsible for our actions and able to influence "the way of the world" even if within the limits of our contingency.

I have stated explicitly that I consider the existence of the outside world, and that of all the other living beings, as one of the foundations of my metaphysical structure: nevertheless, I feel it might be useful to set out a line of thought showing how, even if our "io" is the only "io" that exists, we cannot feel authorized in thinking that the other living beings that we meet might not really be "alive" in the same way that we all feel we are, but may be instead only illusions in a world of illusions. Technically speaking, this kind of position could be called a "solipsism", and I feel it is a dangerous lack of common sense. It is foolish because it reveals a kind of unmotivated sense of presumption with which we all have to come to terms considering the inevitable transience of the human condition; and it is dangerous because it leads us to asocial behaviour that can damage ourselves and those around us. Even Descartes, once he had arrived at the solid certainty of his existence as a thinking being, then found himself trying to face the

problem of how he could possibly demonstrate the existence of the outside world in a way that would be equally certain. Here he got into deep water because, having recognized that our senses can trick us, we could then feel that we might have been systematically deceived by an illusion of reality organized by a malign spirit only so as to keep us prisoners of an error with no way out of it: something similar to what was created in a very spectacular way in the film "Matrix". In order to escape from these quicksands, Descartes affirmed the idea that God is the summit of all perfections, so superior to all our other experiences that He can only be an innate idea in us, an idea which came directly from us. In addition, seeing that goodness is one of his perfections and He certainly does not wish to deceive us, external reality must not only exist but also be comprehensible to our reason.

I prefer a different solution, which has no need of a real true "deus ex machina". As I see it, the solipsist's mistake is that he does not consider that, seeing as the others behave "as if they were alive" and express their own will which is sometimes in contrast with his own expectations, they at least demonstrate that at least one other will exists antagonistic with their own even though it might only be the will of Descartes' "trickster". Accepting the existence of an external will like that of the trickster, or accepting the effective existence of all the living beings that we meet, or even interpreting this as a different form of my own will (as the third hypothesis really suggests) does not change the main problem: in each case, I have to accept that there really exists a reality that I am experiencing and that this evolves in a way that is almost completely independent of my conscious will. It is almost inevitably impossible for me to understand the ultimate reality of things, if only because of the limits of consciousness implied by my state of being a mortal human being, but I can at least try to interpret what I experience of the outside world with the most suitable model that I can come up with, evaluating its fitness in terms of the efficiency to be seen in my initiatives when I am behaving in line with it. In this way, if I thought that the others do not really exist, I would end up by showing a lack of respect which would attract their ill feeling. As a consequence, I might discover that I am isolated from others and as such I would

be in a more difficult situation as concerns resolving my own problems.

Therefore, things "work better" if I behave on the basis of the assumption that other people are really as alive and sensitive (not to say susceptible) as I am myself. Seeing that the truth always lies behind a veil that hides it, we might be inclined to think that it does not really exist, but that there are only the veils. Every so often, when we have managed to tear one of these away, we find a new way of interpreting our experiences, which "works better" than the preceding one. Once I have acquired the awareness that the living beings I meet have true existence, and that, in terms of the principle of the unity of the "experiencing subject", they are another experience of my own "io", then I should be very much encouraged to treat everyone with the same sense of respect and solidarity that I would like to receive in my turn, as well as promoting the conditions which will guarantee that everyone treats all others with the same respect and solidarity. From my point of view, believing in the "real" existence of the external world is the same thing as being convinced that all direct or indirect sense of interaction in which I engage with every other living being is an experience that I live through twice: once in the way that my "present persona" experiences it; and the second just as the other is experiencing it.

More details

*"Entities must not be multiplied any more than necessary."
(William of Ockham)*

If we can manage to accept that our deepest "io" is a unique entity shared by all those beings that manifest living behaviour, we can then realize just how decisively our vision of the world is simplified. All that we assume is existing is only one experiencing "io", and a potentially infinite set of conditions of experience, represented by the infinite number of lives that could be lived and the infinite external conditions that could influence that. This contrast between an "io" and the "set of infinite experiences" could be interpreted as a dualism that might annoy the purists. In order to reach a monistic vision we would have to pass over the contradiction between us and the external physical reality, which plays its role as a common basis of support that allows us to interact. In order to do this, we need to be willing to conceive of even that reality as a particular state of our own shared "io", although it can by no means be taken for granted that this particular state can be associated with a type of "awareness" similar to that of our own lives. In this way, however, we can conclude that the dualism is only apparent, in the sense that it is inevitably reduced to an interaction between different aspects of the only existing "io".

Nevertheless, the distinction between these two interpretations has no consequences on practical grounds. If two alternative solutions to one single problem both "work" in the very same way, in the sense that they both have the same "practical efficiency", this might be a sign that we are trying to apply to a problem a characterization that it simply does not have. Sometimes it might be possible to make a distinction between them, and then one solution will prevail. But if a problem gives us no chance, in the terms in which it is put, of distinguishing between two different solutions, then there is no sense in discussing which interpretation is the more correct: rather we should recognize that the problem is not open to discussion in that specific aspect, and we would save both time and energy if we simply decided to consider it an "unproposable problem". This

consideration is also useful when we are facing the "sequence" of our lives. If we think that, expressing our question in terms usually used in speaking about reincarnation, our "common soul" is reincarnated in each of our lives, then the question inevitably comes up: which life will be chosen for me to live after this one? My son's? My brother's? A stranger's life from another epoch or even another world, whose being represents the "ideal prize" for my behaviour during my present life? On a purely speculative plane, I have imagined that a possible sequence could be generated following these two rules: the consecutive life of every mother is her first son or daughter; the consecutive life of every man or woman without children is the brother or sister who comes immediately after him or her, or, in cases where they have none, the first existing younger brother going back up the mother's family tree.

In fact, the problem of "sequence" foresees all those solutions that we can imagine, but there is no hope of resolving it in a reasonable way, which is a good thing, because otherwise the foolish might start discriminating against lives that have already been lived, in favour of those which "still have to be lived". Yet, one of the basic points of the third hypothesis is that the "io" that experiences life is not associated with any kind of intrinsic information: it is only the subject of the experience of life, and all other characteristics pertaining to it derive from the contingent conditions which it experiences: any given information is to be found only in the physical world. Even if we interpret the physical world itself as a particular state of the existence of our unique "io" we can reformulate these same conditions in this way: the flow of information is to be found exclusively in the state of the "io", which corresponds to the physical world, and this flux is subject to the particular conditions that characterize it: the impassable limit of the speed of light, quantistic indetermination, the second principle of thermodynamics, to mention just a few of those that certainly influence this type of "information". In any case, whatever hypothetical pathway might be followed by the "io" between one life and another, this could not modify the flux of information which flows in the physical world: in other words, information about that pathway cannot be registered in any way at all and so the problem is not open to a solution. This should lead us to the conclusion that

the problem of the sequence of our lives has no meaning, despite all our curiosity: it is another example of a an "unproposable problem".

Speaking in terms of "the sequence of lives", it might seem that, living a life that interacts with the one that precedes it, I should be forced to behave in the second life in a way that conforms with what I have already experienced in my first life. However, even if the choices I make during my second life can influence what I experienced in my first life and the choices I make after undergoing that influence, it would still be impossible to communicate to my second life any information originating in the "future" of the first life. It is our concept of "successive lives" that deceives us. If we imagine a novelist who writes a "complete story of all the relations between living beings, from the birth of the first to the death of the last", we have no difficulty in conceiving that he could express his "free will" in every given dialogue between two or more characters. The fact that this creativity is expressed in divided terms of "the experiences of successive lives" just goes to hide the fact that in all cases he is responsible for every single choice made by the characters of his story. For each of these choices there is one single deciding event. And the consequences of every decision are propelled only "ahead" in the time that is common to all.

As an alternative to "sequence" we could adopt a conception of "atemporal simultaneity", which might appear a little less problematic on condition that we do not believe that in some way I could "avoid" experiencing lives that I consider in competition with my own. I consider the choice of this definition a question of personal taste, but the core of the matter does not change: in any case, in the model that I propose, each life is completely isolated from the so-called "preceding lives" just as from the "subsequent lives": all the information that we have is what comes to us from the external world in the state in which we experience it, which cannot be influenced during the "passage" from one life to another and which cannot "follow" us in any way. To be even clearer, we could take a cosmological example: some models of the universe foresee that many different universes might exist at the same time closed up in "inflated bubbles" that cannot exchange information with each

other. Other models hypothesize that our universe will finish in a "big crunch" that is symmetrical to the "big bang" with which it all began, and that it might then regenerate itself in infinite successive cycles by way of infinite bounces back, called "big bounces", in which the universe of every cycle could not conserve any trace of the preceding cycle. Some people have gone so far as to imagine that we could be part of a world that is being simulated in computers that exist on a level that is superior to our own. Seeing that each of these models foresee an isolation of information, we will never be able to find any difference between a universe that might have existed "before" our own and one that could exist "after" it, "beside" it, "far away" from it or even "above" it. They are all equally "unreachable"; and in this case "unreachable" does not depend on technical obstacles but rather on absolute limits, and so we cannot even conceive of a distinction between universes that might be "less unreachable" and others that are "more unreachable".

In this way, we do not have to try and force ourselves to imagine the set of all possible life experiences that we can have as a set that can be put into any kind of order following whatever criteria. The only limitation that we should adopt is in our refusal of any kind of solipsism: this means that the consistency of reality is defined as the correspondence of the experiences undergone during each life that has interaction with others. In other words, from the chaotic set of "all possible lives", in which no experience is precluded, it is possible to extract from time to time, and for every universe that permits life, a subset of lives being carried out there, which are interactive, and which must be experienced as an "undivided group". This guarantees that every good or bad action that I commit corresponds exactly to a good or bad action that will be done to me.

The fact that we have to experience each single life that we meet implies that the destiny of our present life cannot depend exclusively on our behaviour during our "last life", and that, therefore, there is no such thing as an individual karma that each of us has to bear like a weight. It seems to me that many people find it difficult to give up this idea because we would like our merits to be recognized, even if that means that we will have to redress our

faults. However, looking at it more closely, we realize that our present conditions of life depend on all the work carried out by those who have lived before us, just as our own work will influence the lives of all those who will be born after us: and so, even if there is no such thing as an individual karma, we can still understand how the physical world in itself – which connects all the actions of our lives – ideally represents our common "shared karma", which our own shared "io" continues to change for the better or for the worse while it experiences each of our single lives.

Technical compatibility

*"Everybody knows that something is impossible to realize till someone inexperienced comes and invents it."
(Albert Einstein)*

I have no intention of playing the part of the fanatic who thinks that his ideas can be demonstrated by quantum theory, basing myself only on all the strangeness this involves. My knowledge of modern physics is that of an fervent amateur who is happy to read popular publications but is aware of his limitations. The list of books that I like, which is present in [a page dedicated to this in my personal web site](#) gives some idea of the type of reading which has prepared me. That said, I would now like to put forward some reflections on how exactly that which seems to be the only conceptual difficulty standing in the way of accepting as admissible the model of the third hypothesis does not – from the point of view of modern physics – represent a real obstacle at all: the "technical" question of how it could be possible that my "io" can experience a plurality of lives that are all taking place "at the same time".

First of all, we need to be aware that relativity and quantum theory have forced scientists to abandon those concepts of time and space that we so calmly use in everyday life. Relativity has revealed that time can pass at different speeds for two observers that are in movement in relation to each other, and that two events can turn out to be contemporaneous for one of these observers and not for the other. At the same time, this theory denies that any information can be transmitted faster than the speed of light because otherwise, exactly on the basis of the relativity of time, it would be possible to send information into the past, which would give rise to impossible paradoxes. Quantum physics has revealed phenomena that are even more surprising: the state of reality is not something uniformly determined, and the measurements we choose to carry out "force" the physical world to take on a state that was not already predisposed before: this state is "decided on the moment" even if this decision implies "behaviour" that photons and other elementary particles can only have manifested in a place and a time that is very

remote. Nevertheless, this phenomenon does not consent the "sending" of information to the past. As well as this, this "past influence" can be neutralized by the destruction of information even when it has already been acquired, on condition that it has not been used. Put in this way, these phenomena sound absurd, and so I would ask you to look them up on Wikipedia under "Special relativity" for the loss of simultaneity, and under "Bell's theorem" for the indefinite state of unmeasured particles. Regarding the behaviour of past particles, you should search "Wheeler's delayed choice experiment". As concerns the destruction of information read "Delayed choice quantum eraser" article at Wikipedia site.

Let me say it again: this does not give me the right to claim that the third hypothesis has been demonstrated. All I want to do is insinuate doubts into those who think that the "technical difficulty" of going back into the past to live another life is impossible to get over. Put in this ingenuous way, this concept tends only to give the idea of what I mean when I say that, during all our lives, it is always the same "io" that manifests itself, despite the fact that everyone considers that his own "io" is only "his" or "her". In fact, it is very important to keep in mind that that all our physical and mental characteristics are connected only to our particular contingent experience, and the only thing we share is that "shining light" that everyone feels inside himself. Anyhow, absolutely no information can ever "come back in time" along with our "io" that is in continual metempsychosis. This is an indispensable condition to avoid giving rise to paradoxes in which an event can become the cause (or the prevention) of its own existence: and this is exactly the condition that is respected even in the disconcerting phenomena observed in the experiments proposed by Bell and Wheeler. In this way, at least as a matter of principle, the third hypothesis might be recognized as "not impossible" in that it does not involve the transmission of information back into time.

If we accept that the third hypothesis is admissible, we can then at least appreciate how well it integrates with a number of cosmological models that are under discussion at the moment: for example the same John Wheeler of the "delayed choice" experiment that we have already cited proposes a "anthropic

participative principle", according to which of the possible universes that could evolve in a stable way, only those able to generate living observers can really exist due to an action of "backward causality" that consciousness itself operates on the universe, which is a generalization of what happens when a living being takes a measurement on a quantum particle which would otherwise remain in an "undefined state". More drastically others, like Max Tegmark hold that a universe exists for every possible mathematical structure, although, evidently, only those which are able to sustain life can ever be experienced. It seems to me in any case, that the question of whether to consider as existent even those universes which can not be experienced is just another example of a problem that cannot be posed, as indicated in the preceding pages. Seth Lloyd suggests that we should consider the universe as an immense quantum calculator which represents at the same time the programme that it is carrying out. In this kind of interpretation, the variety of possible universes is as vast as in that proposed by Tegmark, but we still need an "experiencer" in order for the existence itself of the universe to unveil itself. This is what Stephen Hawking has called "what breathes fire into the equations".

If we consider the "io" as an absolute subject, and not a phenomenon which has appeared in an accidental way and which might never have been a given thing, then we can discuss the world, life and ourselves in a different prospect. Our vision of the world is simplified because it is no longer necessary to "keep the administration" of an infinite set of "aspiring experiencers", or to find any impossible explanation for the fact that "by blind chance" our single "io" is a humble member of this group. The fact that we consider this "io" as something unique is the key to having a complete vision of the world in its multiple forms, even if we limit these or extend them to the infinite number of forms configured by Tegmark. These different organizations have no way of expressing themselves without a subject that can experience them or to differentiate themselves from the infinite sum of all the different possibilities or to give themselves concrete form coming down from the platonic world of ideas. Whenever the "io" can manifest itself, it must not be "extracted by chance": it is always the same "io" even if, each time it experiences existence, (and this is the same thing for

each configuration of a universe) it is subject to intrinsic limitations represented by the limits of our physical or intellectual abilities and by the physical laws that keep our external world together.

We could ask ourselves why the unique "experiencing subject" is manifested through a multitude of beings all of which are living parallel lives instead of as a unique monolithic existence which has no need to divide itself up. My reply is that, first of all, we should not think of a pre-existent "io" that chooses the forms of life in which to manifest itself, but of an "io" that is the subject of every possible form of existence that can be manifested. Secondly, even if we admit that "monolithic" types of existence are possible, it is nevertheless much more probable that a complex form of life develops itself starting from simple types of life that are, however, able to reproduce, differentiate and evolve themselves exploiting the mechanisms of natural selection discovered by Darwin. That implies the simultaneous existence of many living beings, but does not mean that there have to be many "experiencing subjects" if we admit the condition of isolation of information that I proposed above. The only thing that we need is that the world "in progress of experimentation" maintains its consistency while the "io" goes from one life experience to another, and this network is held together by the relay of living beings that run between them, in that they are continuous witnesses of a set of information which is forced in this way to maintain its coherence in time. Both the world that precedes its appearance and that which follows its decline is destined to disappear in a gigantic, ineluctable quantum cancellation. In this way, the "consistency of reality" turns out to be an "unproposable problem", beyond all the veils of appearance and approximation. All that we can hope to experience is a consistency limited to our life experience: we are called on to live again each single event that we witness for each of the living being that are involved. It is not necessary to suppose there is any "reality" above this.

Mystical metaphors

"You are That"
(Adi Shankara)

It seems impossible to me that down the whole history of philosophy and religion no one has seen it as an inevitable thing to reach the third hypothesis, especially if you take right to its extreme consequences the intuition of being "one with God", which is not only explicit in Hinduism and the Vedanta but also makes its appearance in western religious doctrines, if only in the form of an individual "mystical experience". Averroes was the first to formulate the thesis of "monopsychism", which distinguishes between an "individual soul", which is mortal in the same way as the body is, and "material intellect", which is immortal and unique, and which corresponds to the deity. However, he does not infer from that the fundamental identity of all men (and all living beings). If we start out from the third hypothesis, according to which the "io" is a unique, absolute being, you arrive directly to the conclusion that, if God exists, he must be another form of experience of that same "io" which is also our own "io". Fundamentally, I am a not-mystical atheist; but I would like to convince even the believers that the "Copernican revolution" that involves considering our "io" as something shared is such a far reaching idea that it is no longer necessary to experience among other lives "a superior God-like entity" so as to establish the ethical principles that should give us guidance.

One of the most commonly shared metaphors giving an idea of God is to consider him a sea, from which the clouds are formed by evaporation before condensing to rain and then returning in its way to the one single sea. Thinking in this way, our individuality is a single "drop" that can be dissolved in God's oceanic individuality, towards which we all converge and from which we detach ourselves as parts which have acquired a momentarily separated individuality. Some people think that this cycle could continue indefinitely, and that we can free ourselves of it only if we follow an impeccable or an ascetic lifestyle. The problem that no one investigates, even if it

is as simple as mathematics, is this: if I converge towards the soul of God and you converge towards the soul of God, we will not meet there like two excursionists that have come together at the top of a mountain: we will be more like people that have recovered from amnesia and suddenly remember that they have had experience not only of "their own" lives but also that of all the others. The third hypothesis is the necessary logical inference that should be immediately evinced from the idea of us all being "part of the one same God". If we take three people, A, B and C, who become part of God, D, then we will get $A = D$, $B = D$ and $C = D$. From that, however, we should easily be able to deduce that $A = B = C$. once we have reached this state of illumination, we then become aware that the term D is no longer necessary, and that we can simplify our formula by eliminating it entirely, as happens when you use complex numbers in the various parts of a calculation to find the real solution to an equation.

In this way, it is not possible to deceive ourselves into thinking that an ascetic life could save us from the necessity of future reincarnations, deluding ourselves in this way that we can liberate ourselves of the tiring fatigue of having to live and converging on God before other people: once we have become "part of God", we immediately realize that also all the others are "part of God", i.e., of the "cosmic io" that we have become, in exactly the same way as was that "individual io" that we had deceived ourselves we were. In other words: if I am a "dream of God", there is no point in hoping that, by waking up, I can find a bit of peace that will last longer than a moment. At that point, I would become aware – or I would remember – that I am the same God that is also dreaming the lives of all the others. Otherwise who is dreaming the others? This idea that there is "no way out" that guarantees us an "eternal holiday" leaving the world and its problems to all the others is something very strong and above all very useful. Asceticism will continue to be important as a way of learning how to live, as a way of understanding yourself and arriving at a balance: but this only becomes effective when it is capable of offering its practical results all other people – in the form of exemplary behaviour or as a contribution to peace or justice, more useful ways of acting, innovative ideas or advice that is simply more sensible.

The idea that we are all expressions of the one same shared "io" is of such effect that it will reduce all discussion about the existence of God to the possibility of experiencing a "divine state" if such a thing exists. Even if we do not wish to resign ourselves to considering the idea of God as "an unnecessary hypothesis", we still need to be able to come up with a new interpretation of it, in the same way as we have already done with the idea of the soul. It is clear that, just as our lives take place in times that are partially overlapping, so "God's life" could be contemporaneous with all the others. Yet, seeing as our "io" is always the same, we need moments of discontinuity in order to experience each single "normal" life. The difference between our "human" state and the one that is "divine" should resolve itself into a difference of quantity and awareness and power. A good example could be found in thinking what we were like as little children or even as new born babies with respect to what we have become as adults: the experience of a "divine state" might consist in a sort of awareness developed to its maximum extent. From this point of view, we can see that there is no longer any necessity for God's role as judge of our actions: there is no sinner if not our own "io", just as there is no one that has undergone injustice, if not, again, our own unique "io". From that superior point of view, we might feel sorry for not having always behaved ourselves in the right way, and for having inflicted unnecessary suffering on ourselves with our own hands – something we might have spared ourselves. But there is absolutely no one else to punish or to console.

Along with our awareness, we can imagine that our ability to influence the world might grow as well, even if it is not strictly necessary for the two to develop together. Nevertheless, this means that it is at least possible for us to influence human affairs in some way. Those who do not let themselves get carried away by the mysticism that involves finding a hidden key which can turn every negative even upside down and change it into something positive, can see clearly that God, even if He exists, does not manifest himself in daily life, where chance governs things with all its bizarre forms, and man with his imperfections as well as his unfortunate capacity for evil. The only logical conclusion is that God, even if he exists, just can't see to our affairs, or that, at least,

in the best possible hypothesis, he is not able to intervene every time our common sense of justice would make that seem irrevocable to us. If God is there, he just does not reply to all our calls, and the mountains of innocent human victims that human history continues to heap up testify to that with a force that the rare cases of "miracles" scattered here and there just make more evident.

Historically speaking, these are the arguments brought to bear by atheists against those who believe, but the third hypothesis allows us to add another consideration: if God exists, we should all consider ourselves as His incarnations, some more and some less illuminated, we can't think that we are here to pass a trial and that we will be judged on the basis of its result. If God – that is us, in our divine state – had the power to influence the world without having to incarnate himself in each one of us, he would have no reason to want to experience this state of limited awareness and limited ability. He would at least pay more attention to making sure that the least possible unnecessary pain would be created, which as it turns out, He has to undergo Himself. To sum up, it is my opinion that, if an experience of divine life really exists, it cannot be different from the physical laws that keep our universe together: and if it can influence things, it must do so within certain limits that do not allow for statistical verification. This means that its impact cannot be calculated and so our belief about whether it exists or not becomes a question of personal taste.

We can imagine a way out if we envisage that during our experience of "divine life" it is possible to influence the thoughts and wills of people that are willing to listen to their inner voice. This allows us to save the laws of physics because this influence would take place on the same level with which our conscious will becomes evident: for instance, if our will is not merely an illusion, it must make use of some uncertainty mechanism in order to express itself and effectively modify the course of reality, as suggested by many important studies of the mind. Yet, even if we can suppose that "God's mind" is able to interfere with ours in this way, and because, as far as the third hypothesis is concerned, we are always dealing with the same "io", in the end we are only affirming a different

version of a concept that is generally known and agreed on – that our mind has more resources than those of which we are aware. Once again it all comes down to a question of our stylistic preferences and the difficulty disappears in this way into what we have already defined as "unproposable problems".

We could give to this "divine type of existence" the role as "guarantor of the consistency of the world", which is part of the scenery common to all the single individual existences, in the same way set out by Descartes. As we have already said above, an interpretation of this type would allow us to get beyond the dualism between the "io" and the "outside world". However, that does not necessarily imply that such a type of existence admits of its own awareness and its own "will". From my point of view, the chance of experiencing a state of "divine awareness" is quite irrelevant, and it can only deceive us into thinking that if we have good reasons we might be favoured in some way "because we deserve it". I am willing to leave the hope of this kind of possibility to whoever needs it: it is something I entrust myself to whenever I am in a situation in which I can only hope and wait. Yet, my personal conviction is that, with or without the inspiration of God, the task of creating a better world here on this earth is something that has only to do with our abilities.

Conclusions

*"You and I are one single thing: I cannot hurt you without
injuring myself"
(Mahatma Gandhi)*

From the point of view of the third hypothesis, there is no such thing as a real "moral law" that has to be respected, and so there is no need to distinguish between "good and bad" intentions. Nevertheless, it is clear that every action contains its own reward within itself or its own punishment, and this goes beyond any kind of ethical judgement. For this reason, more than the ideology that we can inspire, it is the actions that we manage to carry out that are important. If they contain advantages for others, this means that we will be able to benefit from them ourselves in our future lives. If we apply this principle, we should be encouraged to behave in the best possible way for humanity and for the whole complex of living beings. However, seeing that, despite all our good intentions, disasters and painful events take place even without necessarily presuming the existence of an evil will, as Leopardi says, all our actions should be directed towards our common defence against nature, "che de' mortali / madre è di parto e di voler matrigna" ("which is mother to mortals by way of giving birth, but is by will a stepmother").

If it is our will to experience continuously every conceivable "possibility of life", our best strategy should be to try and avoid in as much as this is possible all those unpleasant circumstances which are nevertheless an integral part of the set of "all possible lives". Supposing we are effectively equipped with "margins of choice", we can at least try to pick those options that worsen our "collective karma" as rarely as is humanly possible to us, so as not to deteriorate our world and the life of all the creatures that inhabit it. In practical terms, this means trying to eliminate every superfluous pain that we stupidly inflict on each other and to make life an experience that is as pleasant and as gratifying as possible for all. We will have no other paradise than the one that we will be able to build for ourselves.

It would be wrong to think that the third hypothesis promotes behaviour that is in any way monastic or totalitarian. The will to improve the conditions of life is that which encourages individuals to try and make the best possible use of their abilities. Yet, we should be able to recognize merit in relation to the improvements that the work of the single human being create for the well being of the whole. A certain social pecking order is created in an almost automatic way between individuals who are all of a more or less similar social order. It is reasonable that these should exist as long as they reflect the real abilities of the single individuals and the usefulness of the work they perform, and with these limits they should not be judged as arbitrarily abuse. Needless to say this must be compatible with political policies of social defence which guarantee for all, the same opportunities in education, health care and participation in public life. The third hypothesis does not even exclude limited use of violence in cases where no dialogue is possible and when it considered the lesser evil for the community in general, even if I can see that these things might be very difficult to judge. Very often these differences of evaluation are based on a fundamental prejudice – that "we are ourselves" and that "they are different from us" and so probably "worth less than us", which means that "they can be bombed in a summary fashion" as long as "our security is safeguarded, because we are more important". What all this means is that "the fate of those that are inferior to us is of no interest to us" in that "at this point I have this life of privilege that I deserve" and so "all this has nothing to do with me". Quite the contrary, the third hypothesis warns us that everything has to do with you because your enemy of today is your reincarnation of tomorrow. This way of thinking should favour a more objective way of judging what is just and what is unjust.

The moral of the third hypothesis might even be of consolatory value for that who are hopelessly unfortunate, but who might still be able to think that, in any case, all those lives which he now considers with frustration, really belong to him. At the same time, even the others should be conscious of the fact that their life is a part of their own destiny. No one is ever definitively excluded from anything, and all destinies belong to us in equal measure. Once we have accepted this idea, it will be easier for us to get over our envy

of those who are better off than us, our indifference with respect to those who are worse off and even our intolerance against those who are merely different. Differences exist and they can be deep or even irreconcilable: they are the reflection of all the contradictions in our society and the different cultures of which it is made. Yet, the knowledge that we are all expressions of the same "io" could contribute to the foundation of a new culture in which we will go beyond the divisions based on the unjustifiable prejudices that lacerate the world today.

In that it is the only effective living entity, the common "io" of the third hypothesis can never be suppressed definitively, though this cannot ever be considered an instigation to pour scorn on life: on the contrary, the real value of life itself and all living beings becomes more evident the moment you reset to zero the presumed "sacred nature of the soul". All the importance of life is to be found in the physical beings that are living it, in the wealth of their experience, in the abilities that they have developed and in the network of relationships that they have woven with each other. However, a certain existential sense of comfort can be derived from the third hypothesis when we lose people who are dear to us or when our own end draws near. At the last, we will only be missing ourselves and the multitudinous lives that are all around us give us faith that we will be back again in the guise of all the people that we have met.

Hamlet's nightmarish conception of death as the bourne from which no traveller returns no longer exists and we can more profitably concentrate on our real problems, from which we now know it is not possible to escape at the end of our lives. They cannot be ignored by simply sweeping them out the door, and they will just continue to grow bigger until we finally face them. We can choose to believe that some transcendent type of inspiration might possibly come to our aid in difficult moments or that it will support our choices when they are moved to worthy ends. We might be able to feel reassured if we consider ourselves the instruments of some superior will with which we choose to conform. Yet we must always be aware that our lives are indispensable to give shape to all projects for the improvement of our society. The third hypothesis puts us face to

face with our responsibilities: the social conditions of our birth were not important, and nor is the present state of our wealth or lack of it: the task we have to carry out is our present life so as to find new solutions, to stand witness to the existence of confines or injustice that we need to resolve. This may frighten us, but at this point we must start to consider ourselves mature enough to take our own responsibilities instead of continuing to hope that someone else will fix things in our place. Our destiny depends only on our ability to cooperate and to share our common resources in mutual agreement.

If you consider the third hypothesis plausible, you should feel even more encouraged to face the problems of the world with a new sense of urgency and a greater concern. The destiny of the undernourished children in Sub-Saharan African is suddenly no longer a statistical number, but something very close and connected to us, a threat that hangs over our own heads. The possible ecological disaster on the earth is not only something that will concern our great grandchildren: it concerns each and everyone of us directly. It is no longer possible to imagine the hereafter as an eternal holiday that we have justly deserved only on the basis of our own wretched judgement, while this world continues to struggle for its survival and to cut down victims that have no defence. Personally, I would much prefer to come back here and to keep returning because there is still a whole lot of work to be done. The only thing I hope is to find myself in a state that will allow me to be useful. This is the "minimum" condition that should be guaranteed to all of us because, if we believe that the third hypothesis might really be correct, it is surely the only one that gives us a little faith and hope for all our future lives.

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