

11. Reincarnation

Up to this point, I have drawn on transphysical process metaphysics to build a case for the survival of personality after bodily death. Some form of “survival,” then, is virtually a given within the world view I have developed in this book. In this chapter, I will now turn attention to a related, but immensely more complex, issue—*reincarnation*. Can transpersonal process metaphysics provide a similarly coherent account for the continuity of “something” across multiple lives?

I will start with the assumption that reincarnation does, in fact, take place. In other words, I assume that the life I am now living is somehow intimately tied up with other lives that were lived in the past. But the “how” of my entanglement with past lives is far from clear. And that’s what I want to explore here: Just what do we mean by “reincarnation,” and what kind of world must we inhabit for it to occur?

From the perspective of transpersonal process metaphysics, we can articulate a cosmology in which survival of bodily death in transphysical worlds seems quite plausible and relatively straightforward. The idea of survival grows naturally out of the way in which transphysical cosmology accounts for life in terms of the process I have called “embodiment.” If, as I have argued, the hierarchical ordering of higher grade actual occasions accounts for the central subjects of living entities, and for the eager exploration of novel possibilities that makes life into a grand adventure, then it is plausible to assume that a society of higher grade occasions can, at death, simply cease to be embodied in the physical world while remaining an ongoing personality in the transphysical worlds to which they are native. In this way, too, it makes sense to call the surviving personality the “same” as the physically embodied personality because it retains continuity of memory and purpose with its physically embodied self. Reincarnation, however, is much more mysterious.

Many Types of Reincarnation

Dr. Ian Stevenson, a researcher and psychiatrist from the University of Virginia, has produced one of the most comprehensive databases documenting cases of reincarnation in his multi-volume work *Cases of the Reincarnation Type*.¹ His data are sufficient to convince anyone who finds reincarnation plausible to accept it as fact. But his data are not complete. Stevenson's research is based on memories of past lives that surface in young children, and that can be confirmed by finding people and situations the children report having known in their previous lives. However, children who remember past lives are somewhat rare, and the stories they tell are, in order to be verifiable, of recent lives lived nearby their current incarnation. Furthermore, the majority of these cases involve a young and violent ending to the previous life. Thus, as precious as Stevenson's data are, there is no reason to assume his cases are typical of "average" reincarnation. Given the assumption that all of us are reincarnations of previous personalities, given the fact that most people do not die violently during our youth, and given that most of us do not have childhood memories of previous lives, then it seems quite possible that there exist processes of reincarnation other than the types documented in Stevenson's work.

We do not have enough data available at this time to decide among the many possible processes that might be experienced as reincarnation. In this chapter, I hope to review many of them, to show how they are intelligible within the framework of transpersonal process metaphysics..

Distinction Between Personality Survival, and Reincarnation

First, let's clarify the logical distinction between survival and reincarnation. Survival entails the ongoing existence of the transphysical parts of the self after the dissolution of the physical body. It entails that the very same personality that was developed over the course of a lifetime, with its memories and its purposes intact, and continues to function in transphysical worlds.

¹ Ian Stevenson, M.D., *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* - Vols. I-IV, University Press Of Virginia (1975)

However, even if survival is a fact, it does not prove that reincarnation is also a fact. It might be and, as I will suggest below, it probably is the case that the personality which survives bodily death is itself mortal and, in the general case (not the special case explored by Stevenson), itself dies before any reincarnation takes place. Survival enriches and extends the human life cycle, but it does not logically entail individual reincarnation. Furthermore, it is possible that there can be reincarnation without any personality survival at all (as some Buddhist texts suggest).²

An Exploration of the Continuity of the Personality

In this book, I have defined a personality as “a society of actual occasions with personal order”—that is, a society of actual occasions that has only one member at a time, and is so arranged that the members of the society follow each other like beads on a string. From this definition, we can derive the five fundamental characteristics of personality that I stipulated in Chapter 00:

- Consciousness—which entails both feeling and free choice
- Causal power in its actual world
- Continuity of memory
- Continuity of purpose
- Identity (which we may or may not be able to establish).

In this chapter, then, I want to focus attention on the the exact process by which transpersonal process metaphysics accounts for the continuity of a personally ordered society. This will lead us to pay specific attention to the last three characteristics—continuity of memory, continuity of purpose, and continuity of identity. These three characteristics define personality continuity.

‘Personality’ vs. ‘Self’

In order to make the following investigation easier, we need to distinguish between the terms “personality” and “self.” Up to this point, I have not questioned the assumption that

² See, for example, Bhikku Nanamoli (trans.), *The Path of Purification* (Vishddhimagga), Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1975, p. 451.

the core of a human existence is a single personality—the highest grade personality in the human being. When we begin to explore reincarnation, however, we need to question more deeply exactly what we mean by “the core of the human person.”

Let’s begin with the term “self.” The self of an organism includes not just the presiding personality, but rather all of the personally ordered societies the make up the complex hierarchy of that organism at any one time.

Two Meanings of Continuity

We also need to distinguish between two different meanings of “continuity” that are sometimes conflated, but that must be kept quite distinct if we are to do full justice to the issue of reincarnation. One definition of continuity—dominant in conversations based on scientific common sense—is appropriate to macroscopic physical bodies. In this case, an object is defined as “the same” on two different occasions if (1) it is possible to trace *some* continuity of character between the two occasions, and (2) it is possible to trace an uninterrupted trajectory within the relevant time-space relation between those two occasions. From this point of view, the continued existence of some entity requires an uninterrupted trajectory in time and space.

Process metaphysics, however, permits a much broader understanding of personal continuity—where an uninterrupted trajectory in time and space is entirely optional. In this case, continuity is not dependent on a time-space trajectory. Instead, it requires continuity of memory, purpose, and (perhaps) identity. We will examine the contribution of these factors in more depth later; but for now consider the *Star Trek* process of “beaming.” In that fictional universe, people (and other entities) can get on a platform in one location (say a starship orbiting a planet) and, more or less instantaneously, find themselves in a very different location (say on the surface of that planet) without having lost continuity of memory, purpose, or identity. Here we have little difficulty grasping a (fictional) situation in which there is continuity of personality without a continuous time-space trajectory linking the various members of the of the personally ordered societies constituting the relevant self.

This type of continuity is also supported by ideas from quantum mechanics, where the completion of an event is said to leave behind a trace in the field of possibilities described by the Schrödinger wave equations. Because the Schrödinger wave equations are linear, the possibilities left by a particular event do not change over time, and may precipitate a new event at any time in the future when the right conditions arise. This enables us to imagine a situation in which a sequence of personally ordered occasions ends at one moment/position in time and space, and then begins again at some other position, removed in both time and space from the position at which the last member of the society expired.

Thus there are two ideas of continuity—one requires a continuous time-space trajectory for personal order. We will call this type “physical continuity.” The other requires some kind of continuity of memory, purpose, and identity. We will call this “process continuity.” The contrast between these two types of continuity will help clarify the following exploration.

What Binds Members of a Personally Ordered Society?

For personality survival after bodily death, I identified the three key criteria as continuity of purpose, of memory and, possibly, of identity. In the case of reincarnation, we will see that continuity of purpose is crucial (and may even constitute a criterion for identity), but that continuity of memory (or of conscious memory, at least) is not required. If we assume that reincarnation is a general phenomenon, and we know that most of us have no conscious memories of past lives, then we can safely assume that continuity of conscious memory is not a precondition for the continuation of personality from life to life. Let us consider these issues in more detail.

Continuity of Aim, Purpose, or ‘Character’

Let us imagine a personally ordered society, and freeze the action just as one of its members completes its condescence. Let’s also assume that this society is the dominant strand of personality in an embodied human being. The just-completed occasion (except in very exceptional circumstances) includes in its final satisfaction an expectation that the

society to which it belongs will continue on into the future. If I am, for example, walking down a path, I complete one step, and I fully expect to take another. But we know that my expectation might be foiled. The last step I took might, for a variety of reasons, have been the last step in my life. Between any two moments of human existence, there is a kind of decisive transition—not necessarily a noticeable gap—one occasion has expired into objective immortality, and the next occasion has not yet taken place.

It is in this transitional phase that both Creativity and God (the Ultimate Ordering Factor) are intimately involved. In the last occasion of the series, the many became one and were increased by one, thus bringing into being (along with all of the other occasions that are reaching final satisfaction at the same time) a new actual world. Creativity will now (in partnership with the Ultimate Ordering Factor) initiate a new process of concrescence for that actual world. Creativity and the Ultimate Ordering Factor must specify both a subjective aim and a position before the new concrescence can begin. In our example, the personality involved is the presiding personality of a human self. If the Ultimate Ordering Factor gives the new occasion a subjective aim appropriate to (let us say) a sub-atomic occasion, or if it were to concresce this new actual world at a position that is not in the body of the ongoing self, then the personality will have no new member in which to objectify its own ongoing experiences, and so it will certainly lose physical continuity, if it doesn't cease to exist altogether. What would happen to the human self at that point is hard to say. Perhaps the personality would reappear at some time in the future. Perhaps some of the other complexes in the self, or some other personality in the transphysical worlds would take over, or perhaps the embodied self would die.

In the vast majority of cases, personalities do endure (in an entire lifetime, we only die once). Why is that? First of all, personalities tend to endure when their environments endure with certain important features held relatively constant. For example, the dominant personality in a human self almost invariably continues as long as its body remains functional. The Ultimate Ordering Factor that provides each occasion with its subjective aim is assumed to operate, like all occasions of experience, with an aim at enhancing value in the creative advance. The stream of experience of an embodied personality is very rich and, presumably, the Ultimate Ordering Factor acts so as to

provide subjective aims for new occasions that will prolong and further enrich that value. However, when the relevant circumstances change too much and the body ceases to function, then the body is no longer a fit as an embodiment of a high-grade personality and the personality necessarily loses its physical continuity. The same drive at value that ensures the physical continuity of an embodied personality will, presumably, work to encourage the continuation of that personality even after the death of the waking body—hence survival.

In order for a personality to endure through the transition between its constituent occasions, the Ultimate Ordering Factor must provide a subjective aim that is at least very similar to the subjective aim of the just-expired member of the society. Thus continuity of purpose is intrinsic to continuity of personality. Also, as we saw in chapters 5 and 6, the more similar the initial subjective aims of two occasions are, the more fully the past occasion objectifies in the current one. This is why, for example, I am so intensely intimate with the person I was an instant ago. When Creativity and the Ultimate Ordering Factor provide an appropriate occasion with the appropriate aim and position, then the self with its dominant personality endures. One implication of this is that the continuation of our personalities through the moments of our lives requires the ongoing cooperation of both God and the universe.

Continuity of Memory

To discuss continuity of memory in this context, we must differentiate between memory as a general phenomenon, and conscious memory as it is experienced in the life of a personality.

Memory, as defined in transpersonal process metaphysics, is the same as efficient cause. What scientific thought calls “the transmission of energy through time and space” is, in process metaphysics, called “the transmission of experience through the creative advance”—that is, *memory*. In some sense, each actual occasion in the creative advance has some memory of all of the occasions in its causal past.

Personalities, however, remember in a specific sense. The members of personally ordered societies are each objectified with special completeness in the immediately following members. In effect, a personally ordered society is like a tube of easily accessible and highly relevant memories stretching off into the causal past. Note, that the memory operating in a personality is never complete. Each moment (except in exceptional circumstances) remembers the immediately preceding moments of its own personality, but as its memories trail off into the past they become, for the present moment, more episodic, more abstract, more fragmentary and less easily accessible. Finite personalities, such as ourselves, are conscious only of memories that are in some way relevant to our current moment. Thus, at any given moment, we necessarily have both conscious and unconscious memories.³

As I noted earlier, I do not need to remember my past lives to be convinced by the data supporting reincarnation. Thus conscious memory is not a criterion for continuity of consciousness. Unconscious memory, however, is always a criterion of continuity. This is the ongoing causal effect of my own personal past on my developing present moment. From another point of view, unconscious memory is manifested by the fact that *if* memories of past lives are accessed, they will retain some sense of having been being “mine.”

Now let us examine the conditions under which we might or might not expect continuity of conscious memory between successive members of a personally ordered society.

Similarity of subjective aim enables greater fullness of causal objectification and, since memory is a causal objectification, fullness of causal objectification is fullness of memory. But fullness of memory, is also conditioned by a two other factors.

- First, it depends on distance in the relevant time-space relation. The farther away in time and space the previous occasion was from a currently

³ Note that I am here using what philosopher Christian de Quincey calls the “psychological” meaning of consciousness in which its opposite is held to be the unconscious. This is contrasted with the “philosophical” meaning of the term, in which consciousness is opposed to *non*-consciousness, as in the idea that “dead” matter is non-conscious.

concreasing occasion, the less clearly it will be remembered.⁴ In other words, the further away an occasion is from the past occasion it is objectifying, the more abstract and the less causally effective will be its objectification. Note, however, that this factor of distance is only a moderating factor on the operation of the first factor (similarity of aim) and the next factor to be discussed—“resonance.”

- Second, the fullness with which a past memory can objectify itself is a function of resonance (see Chapter 6), which, in the context of memory, we know as “association.” Memories present themselves to us when they are relevant to our current situation. This accounts for the particular set of memories that we can access in any particular occasion of experience. For example, when I am depressed, many of my good memories simply disappear. Also, even if my basic subjective aim is quite similar to the subjective aim under which I functioned as a child, I can remember childhood memories only with difficulty because the person that I was as a child was so different from the person I am now that it is difficult for me to find associative pathways that can give me access to those memories.

I will discuss this in more detail in a later section when I look at the various modes of reincarnation.

Summary

I have been discussing what happens between two successive occasions of personally ordered society of actual occasions—between successive moments of a personality. I introduced two preliminary clarifications:

- The distinction between a single strand of personality, and the entire human self, which is comprised of a complex hierarchy of such strands.

⁴ Remember that the kind of memory enjoyed by high-grade occasions is essentially mediated by the metrical space of the physical world, but by the type of space appropriate emotion and thought.

- The relevance of two different types of continuity:
 - *Physical continuity*—which, like the existence of a physical object, requires a continuous trajectory in its time-space, and
 - *Process continuity*—which is direct continuity between two different members of the personality that are not in direct proximity, but are separated by macrocosmic distances in some relevant time-space.

I then considered the basic factors that must be present if we are to acknowledge continuity of personality, and we saw that continuity of aim is essential, but that continuity of conscious memory is not a prerequisite in cases of continuity of personality across lifetimes.

Thus, the continuity of a personality through the creative advance requires *neither* continuity of position (physical continuity) nor conscious memory, but it does require a new occasion with an aim that disposes it to identify that occasion in the past that was the end of its last existence, to receive into itself the expiring aim of its death, to take on its purposes as its own, and to be especially sensitive to its causal impacts, and to any previous embodiments of that personality. The necessary connection that transpersonal process metaphysics sees between successive members of a personality begins to look very much like the Vedic notion of *karma*.

A Deeper Examination of Continuity of Aim as ‘Character’⁵

We have seen that, in order to even begin interpreting its world, each actual occasion must have a subjective aim. Earlier, I defined aim as a set of values. From another point of view, we could also call the subjective aim the “value character” of an occasion.

“Character,” of course, is a vague way of describing personalities, but it is an important one, particularly in the analysis of reincarnation. I would suggest that we define the

⁵ The ideas in this section were developed in conjunction with Victor Goulet and Josephina Burgos.

character of a personality as a function of two factors. First, the character of a personality is a function of the *habits*⁶ that that personality has formed over time. Behind, that, however, is a deeper part of character, *value*, which consists of the pattern of values that inform the way in which the personality responds to its various moments of experience.

Each of us can identify, both in ourselves and in others, a characteristic set of values that is a crucial component of character. All of us have some relationship to all possible values, but each of us has a unique way of prioritizing them.⁷ Some characters are organized around a single overriding value—be it success, security, power, sensuality, truth, beauty, or goodness. Most characters involve a complex and often contradictory set of values with which we muddle through. But each of us does have a character in this sense, and this character is a fundamental factor in the uniqueness of our personalities.

When we look more deeply at this character in terms of transpersonal process metaphysics, we see we can abstract from it various layers, each of which has a different source.

First, as an intrinsic contribution from Creativity, each occasion receives an aim at the maximization of value for itself and for its relevant future. This is the character that all occasions share.

Then, from God, or the Ultimate Ordering Factor, each occasion receives an aim, or character, that specifies its character more narrowly. This aim is responsive to the actual world that this particular occasion will concreate. It includes:

⁶ The notion of habit can be adequately expressed in the language of transpersonal process metaphysics. A habit is built up in a personality where (1) one or more occasions makes a (usually complex) decision with a subjective form of intense determination; and (2) some adequate number of subsequent occasions in that personality accepts and reaffirms that decision. In this way, the causal power of that decision becomes stronger for subsequent members of the society.

⁷ I am here assuming here that the various values are differentially prioritized, which implies only one dimension of valuation, more or less. The actual relationships among the values constituting a value character is probably much more complex.

- The *social aim* which is contributed to the nascent occasion (through the mediation of the Ultimate Ordering Factor) by the various higher grade occasions for which the current occasion is to serve as a prehension. For example, the initial subjective aims of all of the occasions in my body are influenced by me as the presiding occasion of my body. In this way, we can account for the remarkable coordination of spontaneities among the various occasions of the body by virtue of which it is a single organism.
- Then, in the case of occasions belonging to personalities, there is the *personal aim*, which the occasion inherits from past members of the personality. This personal aim is the evolving set of values that governs the behavior of the personality in question. A spiritual conversion, for example, could be described as a very important decision on the part of some occasions of the personality that will, in some measure, modify the values for all subsequent members of that personality. In this context, it is important to distinguish between the “*initial* subjective aim—the aim as given by the Ultimate Ordering Factor —and the “*final* subjective aim,” which is modified in the course of concrescence, and is passed on to future members of the society. The initial subjective aim and the final subjective aim share the same value character (see next definition), but the decisions made by each member of a personality are free to modify the social and personal parts of that aim, and to pass the new values that it has affirmed on to subsequent members of that society. The developing personal aim is thus built up as each occasion receives a personal aim from its predecessor, makes its own judgements on those values, and passes those along to its successor. As the personal aim changes, this may lead to changes in the societies to which an occasion belongs—for instance, when a change in values motivates me to change jobs, or to move from one set of friends to another.

- Finally, there is the *basic value character*⁸ which is a core of values that does not change during the evolution of the personality, and that serves to distinguish this particular personality from all others.

We can take two positions in relation to this idea of basic value character. First, the “no-soul” position says there is no such character, and that the only requirement for personal order is that the aims of the successive occasions should be sufficiently similar to allow a sufficiently full objectification of the immediately past member of the occasion in the present one. This would be in the spirit of many Buddhist (*anatta*) teachings, since it would leave the personality entirely devoid of an individual soul. The second position claims that all occasions belonging to a personality do share an identical value character. This does not violate the letter of the Buddhist analyses, though it may violate the spirit of the *anatta* doctrine.. This position does not assert any substantial identity as the core of the personality. It does, however, allow a personality to have an identity that is more constant than any of its other features. This second position also allows a point of connection between a personality and some other entity we might call its “soul.” I will return to this idea below when I discuss soul theories of reincarnation.

For now, I am going to assume there is certain pattern of values—a certain character—that remains invariant through all of the members of a personally ordered society. Further, I am going to assume that this identity of character is a principal factor in the elusive “identity” of personality about which I have been speculating throughout this book.

Theories of Reincarnation and the Process they Involve

In this section, I will explore five theories of reincarnation. Then, at the end of this chapter, I will assemble these theories into an overall hypothesis about the “how” of reincarnation.

⁸ In what follows, I will sometimes refer to this as the “basic character” or the “value character.”

Theory 1: Every Personality is a Reincarnation of Every Other Past Personality⁹

This theory holds that each individual personality is causally connected to all other personalities in the past and that, when any event in any past life is particularly relevant to a series of events in a current life, the current life may access to those memories.

In the earlier chapters, I focused on the issue of personality survival, and so I have been speaking in terms of a full continuity that—whether or not it involves a direct identity—does involve a close continuity of process that includes significant continuity of conscious memory and purpose. While this theory might seem to qualify as an extreme version of “reincarnation lite,” nevertheless it is important to consider it because, in the context of transpersonal process metaphysics, it appears to be true (though not complete).

Remember, in all process metaphysics, actuality is a creative advance of occasions of experience, and that each actual occasion prehends all the actualities in its causal past. Prehension, as we have seen, is a relationship from which both efficient causation and memory can be abstracted. Thus, we can say that each actual occasion remembers *all* of the occasions in its causal past. From this point of view, we could say that each actual occasion is a reincarnation of all of the occasions in its causal past. But a single actual occasion is not a personality. Rather, a personality is a “personally ordered” society of many sequential actual occasions—a society in which one member follows another like beads on a string. Although each actual occasion can be understood as a reincarnation of all others, can this also be said of personally ordered societies?

The answer is both “yes” and “no.” Each occasion of a personality retains the radical openness of all actual occasions, and so it is, in some important sense, a reincarnation of all other occasions. The practical implication of this is that, in principle at least, all past memories are accessible to any actual occasion and, given the appropriate circumstances

⁹ My attention was drawn to this theory by Dr. Sean Kelly and Frank Poletti. Dr. Kelly developed a unique and interesting version of this theory in: “Integral Time and the Varieties of Post-Mortem Survival,” *Integral Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, June 2008, http://integral-review.org/back_issues/backissue6/index.htm

and an occasion of high enough grade, can become a fully conscious memory. On the other hand, a personality is characterized by the particular fullness with which its own predecessors objectify in it. This is because any two successive members must have very similar character (aim) and because, by hypothesis, some part of the character of all of the members of a personality is *identical* to that same part of all of the other occasions in the personality. Thus the causal effects and, by extension, the memories of past lives are particularly concrete and powerful within one strand of personal order, and so we can assume that a personality is much more intimate with its own previous members than it would be with the other occasions in its actual worlds.

There is no reason to think that continuity of memory requires physical continuity. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that a personality will have a special memory of the members of its own past. Those memories will always exercise a stronger casual power on future members of that society than the memories of most of their contemporaries. Also, when those memories from within a single strand of personality are “accessed,” they will have—by virtue of their shared value character—the familiarity that marks them as “mine.”

Given this analysis, the way in which all occasions of experience are incarnations of all the expired occasions in their past does not negate the importance of continuity of memory as characterizing continuity of personality—both within a single lifetime and among successive lifetimes.

Theory 2: Reincarnation as Continuity of Personality without Physical Continuity and with Variable Continuity of Memory. No survival.

This theory is advocated by some early schools of Buddhist thought. It suggests that the last member of a particular strand of personal order (the last moment, for example, in the life of the dominant personality of a human life) creates a configuration in the general field of probabilities that will manifest itself when the proper opportunity for re-birth occurs. In the example of the dominant personality of a human self, the proper circumstances will arise at the conception of a new human self. At that time, the personality will pick up its ongoing adventure. By virtue of sharing a common value

character with the occasion marking the last member of the previous strand of the personality, it will be uniquely sensitive to the causal impact of the occasions of previous strands, and thus it will be “karmically” connected to the past life. However, because the new life will generally be in very different circumstances from the old life and, in any case, the body of an infant will be very different from the previously inhabited body, it will be very difficult to establish continuity of conscious memory. In this case, there would be process continuity without physical continuity or continuity of conscious memory.

Some of Stevenson’s cases (those that do not involve the “intermission memories” discussed below) can be interpreted as instances of this reincarnation process. Further, given that in these “Cases of the Reincarnation Type” (CORT), the reincarnation is close to the previous death both in time and space, as the child grows emotionally and cognitively, the relatively similar environment will trigger associations that remind him or her about the previous life, and thus memories of that life can surface as the child matures.

Furthermore, the birth marks on the new body that correspond to death wounds on the old body also become intelligible as causal effects of the moment of death on the new moment of conception.

Theory 3: Personality Survival Leading Directly to Reincarnation

This mode of reincarnation is suggested by the stories of a conscious interval between death and a subsequent birth, reported in approximately ten percent of Stevenson’s cases of the reincarnation type.¹⁰

These experiences can be roughly analyzed into three stages:

¹⁰ Poonam Sharma, B.A. and Jim B. Tucker, Ph.D, “Cases of the Reincarnation Type with Memories from the Intermission between Lives,” *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 23(2), Winter 2004, p. 102.

- First, a “transition stage” that includes phenomena such as “preparation of the previous personality’s body for the funeral or trying to contact grieving relatives, only to find they are unable to communicate with the living.”¹¹
- After the transition, a more stable stage is reached in which the personality is recalled as living in some locale (e.g, in a tree, in a pagoda, near the scene of the death). Sometimes, the disincarnate personality also has “a schedule of duties to which they must attend.”¹² Reports of “seeing or interacting with other disincarnate personalities are common” in this stage.¹³
- The third stage involves “choosing parents for the next life.” Common themes in these stories include:
 - ▶ “following the parents home, apparently of their own initiative as the parents passed by while performing everyday tasks, such as bathing or returning home from work”
 - ▶ Being directed to the new parents, “often by elders or the ‘old man,’” [a common disincarnate personality referred to earlier in the paper]. Just under a fifth of the cases analyzed in Stevenson’s study “commented on how they gained entrance to the mother’s body. This was most often by transforming into a grain of rice or speck of dust in the water and being ingested by the mother. A few went to considerable lengths, having to try repeatedly when either they were rebuffed by guardian spirits or the water was thrown out as dirty.”¹⁴

In an analysis of 1,200 cases of the reincarnation type (CORT) of which 276 included intermission memories (CORT-I), the number of verified statements and the strength-of-

¹¹ Ibid., p. 107.

¹² Ibid. p. 107

¹³ Ibid, p. 107-108.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 198

case scores for the CORT-I were both nearly double that of the remainder.¹⁵ One implication of these findings is that those cases with intermission memories are also cases in which the continuity of conscious memory is particularly strong.

I have hypothesized that continuity of memory is facilitated by continuity of circumstances. Personality survival is accompanied by continuity of memory because the transphysical aspects of the body remain intact and, thus, provide a relatively similar environment for the presiding personality. In the type of reincarnation I am discussing here—where the same personality, with important parts of its transphysical body intact, remains lucid all the way through to entering the mother’s body—it is not surprising that continuity of memory is stronger than in other cases.

However, we need to consider another factor governing memory. Memory is also a function of what we could call “mindfulness.” The more mindful, alert, or lucid we are in a given moment, the more likely we are to have recall of that moment later in our existence. Some people are more mindful of their lives than others. It is possible that people who are generally more mindful live their intermission periods in a more memorable way, while people who are less mindful might pass their intermission periods in a more dream-like state of mind so that their intermission memories just fade away.

In any case, Stevenson’s data provide strong evidence for theories 2 and 3, and we might hypothesize that the reincarnation process in theory 2 is the same as in theory 3, but with intermission memories being unrecoverable.

Theory 4: Partial Reincarnation

Another type of reincarnation is explored in the work of Michael Whiteman.¹⁶

In this book, I have been developing the idea that the human self is a complex hierarchy of personalities—a presiding personality, various subpersonalities, a personality that is

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 103

¹⁶ John Poynton, *Making Sense of Psi and Mysticism: Whiteman’s Multi-Level Ontology*, unpublished.

the “control panel” for the waking body, personalities presiding over the major organs, and so forth, all the way down to the personalities of the individual atoms constituting the molecules that make up the cells. We have seen that some of these personalities may enter into, and become an integral part of, the self from the enviroing physical and transphysical worlds. When higher grade personalities enter into an ongoing self, they may bring with them memories of their earlier existence.

At death, we are assuming that most of the personalities belonging to the self remain intact as a unit (except, of course, the lowest grade members that are most closely involved with the physical parts of the body). Some of the higher grade personalities that have been involved in the self may, however, take death as an opportunity to go off on their own. These personality strands will carry with them the memories of their existence in the now-deceased human self to which they formerly belonged, and they may then join another personality taking those memories with them.

This idea is indirectly supported by the data suggesting that people who have heart transplants sometimes discover they have both memories and preferences from the person who originally had the heart—sometimes radically at odds with the personality of the patient before the transplant.

Here are some characteristic examples of what can happen when hearts are transplanted:¹⁷

- In one case, an eighteen-year-old boy who wrote poetry, played music and composed songs, was killed in an automobile accident. A year after he died, his parents came across an audiotape of a song he had written, entitled, *Danny, My Heart is Yours*, about how he “felt he was destined to die and give his heart to someone.” The donor recipient of his heart, “Danny,” was an eighteen-year-old girl, named Danielle. When she met the donor's parents,

¹⁷Paul Pearsall, Ph.D., Gary E. R. Schwartz, Ph.D., and Linda G. S. Russek, Ph. D., *Changes in Heart Transplant Recipients That Parallel the Personalities of their Donors*, in *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Vo.. 20, No. 3, Spring 2002.

they played some of his music and she, despite never having heard the song, was able to complete the phrases.¹⁸

- A forty-seven-year-old man received a heart from a fourteen-year-old girl gymnast who had problems with eating disorders. After the transplant, the recipient and his family reported his tendency to be nauseated after eating, along with a childlike exuberance and a little girl's giggle.¹⁹

In these cases, it appears that the presiding personality of the heart—with its memories of a previous life—stays with the heart as it is transplanted.

In terms of transpersonal process metaphysics, however, the presiding personality of the heart is a transphysical entity that can, like the dominant personality of a human self, survive the death of its body and can, under appropriate circumstances, involve itself in some capacity in the life of a new personality. We can even imagine a case in which the personality that presided over the heart of one self might enter in as the dominant self in a new human being.

Further investigations into the processes of reincarnation will have to take this possibility into account.

Theory 5: Soul Based Theories of Reincarnation

A large number of theories of reincarnation are based on some notion of a soul. The word “soul” has so many uses I need to define what I mean by the term in this discussion. Like the word “spirit,” “soul” is sometimes used more or less synonymously with “mind,” “consciousness,” “self,” or “personality.” However, I will distinguish soul from all of these other terms, and define it as some entity other than a personality that somehow both holds memories of past lives and is, rather than the personality itself, the entity that reincarnates.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 194-195.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 199.

Various Theosophical teachers²⁰ have offered theories in which the soul is called “the causal body,” and is held to be a special, personality that dwells in the higher reaches of the mental world. Sri Aurobindo speaks extensively about the soul (which he calls the “psychic being”) and he is clear that this “psychic being” is the reincarnating entity rather than any particular strand of personality.²¹

In this section, I want to introduce a hypothesis about the nature of soul that is natural to transpersonal process metaphysics, and that seems to fit well into the overall cosmological scheme I have developed in this book.

An essential aspect of personality, as defined here, is that any given personality is necessarily a separate individual among other separate individuals. We generally take our independence quite for granted. On the other hand, there are certain ways in which our unity with one another is also quite evident. We could not be what we are in this moment if it were not for all of the myriads of occasions that have made up the entire course of cosmic evolution. It has taken our universe billions of years of evolutionary effort to bring forth this one moment of human experience. And each moment of our experience literally *contains* within itself the entirety of its causal past (Chapter 9).

We are one in this sense: Each of us is an individualization of the universe that we collectively participate in co-creating. We are *separate* individuals to the extent that abstraction in objectification is imposed on the causal interactions between us. If you objectified with utter concrete fullness in me, if I felt everything that you feel, knew everything you thought, and anticipated everything that you anticipate, and so on—then we would be truly and pragmatically one unified being. Of course, in fact, I do *not* know you that intimately. I never know as much of you as you know of yourself, hence you are

²⁰See, for example, Arthur E. Powell, *The Causal Body*, The Theosophical Publishing House Ltd., 1978; and Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1977.

²¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Psychic Being - Soul: Its Nature, Mission and Evolution*, Wisconsin: Lotus Lights Publications, 1989.

outside me, and we are distinct beings. Distinct individuality is a function of abstraction in objectification among occasions.

But the degree of abstraction in objectification imposed on individuals varies with the grade of the occasions involved. Given two occasions of the same grade, the higher their shared grade the more concrete, rich, and full will be the communications (causal interactions) between them.²² Two low-grade, inorganic occasions know each other by virtue of disturbances in the various fields of force where they are located. Two living occasions know each other empathically in the richness of their emotions. Two mental grade occasions know each other telepathically in the richness of shared meaning. The “higher” the transphysical status of the occasions involved, the lower the degree of abstraction in objectification between them, and the more deeply they feel and know one other.

We approach an idea of the soul by imagining that the degree of abstraction in objectification among some occasions drops all the way to zero. In this situation, every occasion would know all other occasions at this grade as intimately as it knows itself, and so the oneness of each with all would be an entirely effective reality. Note that at this stage, there is no *separate* individuality. But this does not imply that there is no individuality at all.

Each individual occasion still retains its unique value character. Each occasion in this state of zero abstraction retains its own way of appreciating and ordering the possibilities for actualization. Each occasion, while being effectively one with the others, nonetheless has its own perspective on that unity. Also, as these individual perspectives are intrinsic to the functioning of the one universe, they will be in existence as long as the universe is in existence, and so will be personally ordered and effectively immortal.²³ Transpersonal

²² This is similar to what Teilhard de Chardin suggests: that more complex entities can experience greater “radial communication,” whereas simpler entities are confined to more “tangential communication.”

²³ One of Whitehead’s last published essays is entitled *Immortality* (Alfred North Whitehead, *Immortality*, in Paul Arthur Shilpp, *The Philosophy of Alfred North*

process metaphysics, then, defines a soul as an individual, immortal being that knows itself as one with all beings in the universe.

We could envision these entities as intrinsic to what Whitehead calls “the Consequent Nature of God.”²⁴ In a more Aurobindonian scheme, we might assign the soul a home on what he calls the “Overmind Level.”

In any case, these soul entities each objectifies the whole creative advance as it is happening, and does so from its own value perspective.²⁵ In addition, each of these soul entities will have a particularly intimate relationship with those occasions and personalities in the creative advance that share a value character with it. The soul will center its interpretation of the creative advance around those occasions, and will retain a memory of those occasions in a particularly rich way. When a finite occasion begins its concrescence, it will have the same value character as its soul, and will always feel the influence of that soul in some fashion and in some degree.²⁶

The literature on reincarnation, sometimes suggests that a single soul might have more than one incarnation at a time. The theory of soul that I am advancing here would make that possibility entirely intelligible. In terms of the theory of soul that we are exploring,

Whitehead, Illinois: Open Court Press, 1991, p. 682.) Whitehead speaks of “the immortal aspect of personality.” I offer this idea as a possible key to the interpretation of that fascinating, but notoriously obscure, essay.

²⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected ed. New York: The Free Press, 1985, pp. 342-351.

²⁵ Note that that for entities with no abstraction in objectification among them, spatial distance is undefined. Remember that in transpersonal process metaphysics, spatial distance is a function of abstraction in objectification. Without abstraction, there is no distance and, hence, no space. I am assuming that the soul also objectifies all finite occasions without abstraction, thus the distance between the soul and finite entity in any finite universe is also undefined. Souls define a unique perspective that cannot be grasped in any scheme of indication

²⁶ Sri Aurobindo, in many of his writings, suggests that the entire evolutionary process can be understood in terms of the soul’s efforts to construct entities grounded in the physical world *and* capable of expressing the soul’s fullness in that world. The higher the grade of the presiding personality of a being living in the waking world, the more open it is to the soul’s expression.

there is no reason that a single soul could not preside over many simultaneous strands of personality. Also, in a multi-world cosmology (for example) in which time lines branch off whenever a decision is made, we can also imagine a single soul that has embodiments distributed in time as well. In every timeline, there will be a unique causal ordering of the past, and the already settled past will not change with the creative advance. But a soul, completely beyond finite time-space, might join the advance at any time-space location at all, thus initiating a new time-line for its enjoyment.

Bottom line: It is possible to construct a doctrine of soul-based reincarnation compatible with all of the other mechanisms of reincarnation we have already considered.

The soul-based theories of reincarnation expounded by Theosophists²⁷ and in Sri Aurobindo,²⁸ suggest that cases in which survival leads directly to reincarnation are relatively rare. They suggest that in the majority of cases the death of the physical body is followed by a sojourn in the Vital World. During this sojourn, Hells and Heavens are experienced because the dominant emotions of the previous life, still operative in the personality, will place that personality in a vital environment appropriate to those emotions. This playing out of the emotions is held to be temporary, and it is suggested that there can be, in this period, interesting experiences that advance work accomplished during the just-past lifetime. Eventually, the vital body is said to also die, followed by a sojourn in the mental body, invariably a blissful experience. The mental body, too, eventually dies, and the experiences of that life are incorporated into the soul. Then, when it is ready, the soul will initiate a new incarnation.

If the soul has only one embodiment at a time, then the process of personality continuity that I have outlined above would allow us to trace the destiny of a single personality as it reincarnates again and again through the creative advance. The continuity of the soul will be of the same nature as the continuity of the personality. If, however, the ongoing identity of the personality is a function of the soul, of which it is an expression, and if:

²⁷ Powell, A. E. *The Astral Body*, Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1972.

²⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Problem of Rebirth*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1994.

- The soul can have many simultaneous embodiments.
- With a sufficiently complex understand of time, the soul can have embodiments at different times.
- The different embodiments of the soul can be of different grades
- Souls may embody themselves in subpersonalities of other personalities—that have a value character other than their own.

then it becomes less meaningful to speak about the reincarnation of an individual personality. Rather, it is the soul that reincarnates, and the personality is merely a temporary expression of an effectively immortal soul.

Conclusion

Reincarnation forces us to look very closely at the nature of the continuity of the personality. Transpersonal process metaphysics allows us to analyze the continuity of personality in a way that supports many different processes of reincarnation. We have here discussed:

- The important sense in which every personality is a reincarnation of all past personalities.
- A possible process, corresponding to the data of a majority of Stevenson's CORTs, in which there is a continuation of personality with loss of physical continuity, some variable continuity of conscious memory, but no intermediate survival of the personality.
- Another process, corresponding to the data of a significant minority of Stevenson's CORTs in which there is personality survival that transitions directly into reincarnation.
- There may also be various ways in which parts of personalities survive the death of a human self and may reincarnate themselves either in another living

self, or even incarnate themselves as the presiding personality of a new human birth.

- Finally, some soul theories of reincarnation usually involve an intermediate period of temporary survival for the transphysical aspects of the personality, and suggest that it is the soul, not the personality, that is the true reincarnating entity.

What emerges from this investigation is a sense that the creative advance involves a rich and complex texture of reincarnation processes that call into question our usual assumption of a simple strand of personality enduring through time.

Enough data on reincarnation exist to establish its reality, but not enough to allow us to evaluate the various alternatives explored in this chapter. And so, these theories remain necessarily speculative. Nonetheless, it is my hope that this way of laying out the various issues involved in reincarnation may stimulate further research.