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DISEMBODIED SOULS ARE PEOPLE, TOO

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I believe that you were once a disembodied soul, and you will be one again after your death. Later, you will be embodied again and will experience another lifetime. Then another life after that, and so on. No one ever comes into or goes out of existence; everyone who exists at any time exists at all times, going back infinitely into the past and going forward infinitely into the future. Persons merely become or cease to be embodied.

I can't convince you of all that in this short chapter. What I would like to do is to give a brief sketch of why one might believe these amazing things (Sections 10.1–10.3). Then I'll discuss some of the ethical and political implications if these things are true (Section 10.4).

10.1 People Have Souls

10.1.1 *Minds Are Non-Physical*

Most contemporary philosophers are physicalists: they think that reality is entirely physical. This entails that either there is no consciousness or consciousness is somehow really physical. This is the main source of opposition to the idea of a soul.

I know that consciousness exists because I am immediately aware of my own conscious states. I assume that doesn't need further explanation. So, the main question is this: why think that consciousness is a non-physical phenomenon, rather than merely a physical state or activity of the brain?

I see three important features of the mind that physicalists cannot explain.

i Mental states have ‘qualia’: there is a particular subjective feel to the emotion of anger, or a tickling sensation, or the smell of a rose. As Thomas Nagel (1974: 436) puts it, the fact that an organism is conscious means that there is something it is like to be that organism. By contrast, there is nothing it is like to be a table, or a rock, or a tree. The ‘quale’ of a mental state (plural: *qualia*) refers to *what it’s like* to have that mental state.

Qualia pose a problem for physicalism. How can *what it’s like* to be in some state be construed as a physical property? Imagine that you are colorblind and have never seen the color blue. Could you learn what it’s like to see blue, purely by learning the physical facts about the brain of a person who sees something blue? Suppose that you learn which wavelengths of light are blue, how the eye responds to these wavelengths and the exact pattern of neuron-firing in the brain when someone sees a blue object. It seems obvious that you still would not know what it’s like to see blue. Therefore, *what it’s like to see blue* is something over and above the purely physical facts (Jackson 1982).

ii Mental states have ‘intentionality’: that is, they (purportedly) *represent* or *are about* things. When I imagine a dragon, my mental image is *about* a dragon (even if there are no dragons in reality). When I think that the Eiffel tower is in Paris, that thought is *about* the Eiffel tower. When I see a cat in front of me, I have a visual experience *of* a cat. All of these are examples of mental states with ‘intentionality’. (*Note*: Please do not confuse this use of ‘intentionality’ with the ordinary English word ‘intention’. This is a technical term for philosophers, one that has nothing to do with intending to do things.) It is difficult to see how intentionality can be physical. How can any purely physical properties of an object constitute its being *about* another object?¹

iii At least some minds have free will. By this, I mean that, sometimes, you have more than one alternative open to you and it is up to you which alternative is realized. I think that we are introspectively aware of free will, and that the reality of free will is presupposed in all reasoning. This is because reasoning is a form of deliberation, and one cannot coherently deliberate without implicitly assuming that one has alternatives and the ability to control which alternative is realized. Hence, thinkers who reject free will are in a self-defeating position (Lucas 1970; Huemer 2005, 2009).

How could a purely physical system have free will? The behavior of any macroscopic physical object should be determined by the behavior of the particles of which the object is made, together with the conditions in its environment. None of these particles ever has multiple alternatives open

to it – or, if it does, the alternative that is realized is purely random (as per quantum mechanics), and random events are under no one’s control. So, physicalists cannot explain free will. To explain free will, we must posit minds with causal powers that go beyond those of the particles of which our bodies are made.²

10.2 Properties or Substances?

The above comments indicate why I favor dualism in the philosophy of mind, the view that the mental and the physical are separate classes of phenomena. There are two forms of dualism:

Property Dualism. This is the view that there is a single entity, ‘the person,’ which simply has two different kinds of *properties*, mental properties and physical properties (Strawson 1959: Ch. 3).

Substance Dualism. This is the view that there are two separate entities that have the two kinds of properties: there is *the mind*, which has mental but not physical properties, and there is *the body*, which has physical but not mental properties. Either of these objects logically could exist without the other (Descartes 1984).

The substance dualist’s mind is also called ‘the soul’. A soul is, by definition, a non-physical component of the person that has mental properties but not physical properties. It is supposed to be the thing that has thoughts, feelings, desires, and so on.

Property dualism is widely viewed as more plausible than substance dualism, probably because it is seen as the more moderate view. This, however, strikes me as a small advantage at most: once you’ve rejected physicalism, there is little cost to going the whole hog with substance dualism. More importantly, substance dualists have a decided advantage in dealing with at least one major philosophical issue – the problem of personal identity (Huemer 2021b: Ch. 12).

This problem concerns the conditions under which A and B are *the same person*. For instance, if all your memories were permanently erased, but your body and brain continued to function and had to learn all about the world anew, would the resulting person still be *you*, or would it be a different person?

Note: I am not asking how we would *know* if it was you; nor am I asking whether the person would be *qualitatively* the same (having the same characteristics) as the current you; nor do I mean the question *metaphorically* (as we sometimes use ‘he’s a new man’). I am asking whether the person occupying your erstwhile body would *literally be you*.

This turns out to be a mind-boggling question to try to sort out. When you study the literature, nearly every view seems open to decisive objections. What follows is a brief summary of some of the problems. There are at least three principles about personal identity that I consider self-evident.

- i Facts about personal identity are *objective*. For any person who might exist at any time, there must be an objective fact as to whether or not that person is *me*. It is never indeterminate or a merely semantic question whether I exist.
- ii Identity is a *one-to-one relation*. As a matter of logic, two distinct things cannot both be identical to the same thing.
- iii Personal identity is *intrinsic*. That is, whether A and B are stages of the same person is solely a matter of the nature of A and B and how they are related to each other. It cannot depend upon what is going on with some completely separate objects.

I think that all theories of personal identity that a physicalist might want to advance violate at least one of these principles. For example, suppose you say that A is the same person as B provided that A has the same body as B. This theory violates principle (i), the objectivity of personal identity. Imagine a gradual process in which individual atoms in your body are replaced, one at a time. Over the course of ten years, every atom in your body has been replaced at least once.³ When all the atoms have been replaced, is there still *the same body* there? (If you feel sure that the answer is ‘yes’, imagine replacing larger parts, such as individual *cells*, or macroscopic tissues until you feel unsure whether the process preserves ‘the same body’.)

That, I say, is a semantic question – a matter of what we want to *call* ‘the same body’. A similar point applies to all macroscopic physical objects: there is no objective metaphysical fact as to the exact conditions under which it continues to be ‘the same object’. If you replace enough parts quickly enough, we say there is a ‘different object’; if you replace only a few parts, or replace parts slowly, we say there is ‘the same object’. But this marks no qualitative metaphysical distinction; there are no ‘joints’ in nature here.

The same does not seem to be true of persons. There is an objective metaphysical distinction between *you* and another person. This is why it is not satisfactory to identify *you* with any purely physical object.

Here is another physicalist-friendly theory: ‘the same person’ is preserved as long as there is psychological and spatiotemporal continuity (no discontinuous changes in psychological state or spatial location). This one violates condition (ii) – that identity is a one-one relation. It is logically possible for there to be two entities at time t_2 that *both* have psychological and

spatiotemporal continuity with a given entity that existed at t_1 (imagine a person dividing like a cell undergoing mitosis). The present theory then implies that two distinct things would be identical with the same person.

We could avoid that result by modifying the theory to stipulate that a person persists over time when there is one *and only one* thing at a later time that has psychological and spatiotemporal continuity with the earlier person. But this theory violates condition (iii): it implies that the identity of persons is *extrinsic* (whether a given person is *you* could depend upon whether there is some *other* person who bears a certain relation to your past self).

That should give some indication of why I find physicalist views of the person unsatisfactory. I see only one theory that satisfies all of the intuitive principles about personal identity. This is the soul theory: A is the same person as B, provided that A and B have the same soul. The identity of a person is not determined by any purely physical conditions; it depends on the presence of a particular immaterial component, ‘the mind’, which is the subject of thoughts, feelings, and other mental states.

10.3 People Are Repeatable

10.3.1 A Probabilistic Proof of Reincarnation

Elsewhere (2021a), I have argued that persons are *repeatable*: you have had other lives before this one and will have other lives in the future. Here is a sketch of that argument.

I take as a premise that both the past and the future are infinite. I then argue that *if* persons could only live once, then the probability that *you* would be alive *now* would be zero. Given an infinite past, the conditions for *you to be born for the first time* should have happened long before now, which would have prevented you from being here *now* (unless those conditions are so specific as to have a probability of zero, in which case you also shouldn’t be here now). But you *are* here now. So, we can infer that persons *can* live more than once: that is, reincarnation is possible. Given unlimited future time, any event with a non-zero probability will occur again, infinitely many times. So, you will live again infinitely many times.

Here is the probability calculation. Let ‘E’ denote the proposition that you exist now and ‘R’ the hypothesis that persons are reincarnated. Bayes’ Theorem tells us this:

$$P(R|E) = \frac{P(R) \times P(E|R)}{P(R) \times P(E|R) + P(\sim R) \times P(E|\sim R)}$$

(Read: ‘the probability of R given E equals the initial probability of R times the probability of E given R, divided by the probability of R times the probability of E given R, plus the probability of not-R times the probability of E given not-R.’)⁴ Since, for the reasons stated above, $P(E|\sim R) = 0$, the equation reduces to the following.

$$\begin{aligned} P(R|E) &= \frac{P(R) \times P(E|R)}{P(R) \times P(E|R) + P(\sim R) \times 0} \\ &= \frac{P(R) \times P(E|R)}{P(R) \times P(E|R)} \\ &= 1 \end{aligned}$$

So, given that you exist now, it is 100% certain that persons are reincarnated.⁵

Note that this argument does not *presuppose* the existence of souls; that assumption did not appear anywhere in the premises. Rather, to the extent that reincarnation requires a soul, the argument provides *further support* for the idea of souls.

10.3.2 How Does Reincarnation Work?

I don’t know what determines where and when a person is incarnated. I don’t know whether we can be reincarnated as non-intelligent animals. I don’t know whether, after death, one is reincarnated immediately, or instead the process takes a googolplex years. The above argument does not answer these questions, nor am I content to just make things up.

Regarding how long it takes to be reincarnated: some cosmologists believe that our universe is only one of a large (perhaps infinite) collection of parallel universes (Susskind 2006). If this is true, then persons may be able to be reincarnated in other universes, in which case it is plausible that we are reincarnated shortly after we die (with many parallel universes, there should be a suitable body to house your soul in *some* universe shortly after you die).

On the other hand, if ours is the only universe, and if (as standard thermodynamics predicts) our universe is headed toward thermodynamic equilibrium, then it is plausible that it will take a ridiculously long time for you to be reincarnated, like maybe a googolplex years. (That’s $10^{10^{100}}$ years.)

To explain: according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the entropy of the universe is constantly increasing. Entropy is, roughly, a measure of how disordered things are. Entropy is expected to continue increasing until the universe reaches thermal equilibrium, the state with the maximum possible entropy. This will be a state in which there will be

no life, no planets, just radiation and subatomic particles moving through space. The universe will remain in that state for a ridiculously long time.

However, the Second Law of Thermodynamics is fundamentally *probabilistic*: it is not *impossible* for entropy to spontaneously decrease; it is merely *extremely improbable* on a human timescale. But, given unlimited time, the most ridiculously improbable things will *eventually* happen. So, if you wait for a googolplex years, maybe eventually entropy spontaneously decreases, by chance, enough to create another situation like the one that we are in right now. When that happens, perhaps there will be another incarnation of you.

You might wonder why you don't remember any previous lives.⁶ The reason is that your memories are stored in your brain, which decays after your death, and so the information about your life experiences is lost. Since you have no memories of any previous lives, you should expect not to remember this or any future life either.

10.3.3 *Parallel Arguments: Tables vs Persons*

Some people wonder whether my argument for reincarnation of persons can be extended to inanimate material objects. For example, can we argue that the table I am sitting at will exist again, infinitely many times? Some might consider this an implausible implication of my argument.

In response, there are two important differences between tables and people. First, the identity conditions for ordinary physical objects like tables are a matter of convention. There is no deep metaphysical fact as to what counts as the same table; there is only the semantic question of what we want to call 'the same table'. So, if we choose to adopt conventions according to which a table cannot survive spatiotemporal discontinuity, then the initial probability of the table being 'reincarnated' is zero by stipulation, and the probabilistic argument of Section 3.1 fails.

Second, we are immediately aware of *ourselves* in a way in which we are not immediately aware of tables. When I see the table, I am aware of a particular set of qualities (hardness, rectangularity, blackness, etc.). If the table were swapped for another table with the same *qualities*, my evidence would be exactly the same as it now is. By contrast, if *I* were swapped for another person with the same qualities, my evidence would not be the same as it now is; rather, I would have no evidence at all. Fundamentally, my evidence includes the existence and consciousness of a specific soul (mine), in a way in which it does not include the existence of a specific table. So, in the case of my perception of the table, the probability of my having the evidence that I currently have would be the same, regardless of whether tables are repeatable.

10.3.4 *Parallel Arguments: Space vs Time*

Whenever I discuss the argument for reincarnation, someone asks whether we can give a parallel argument for ‘spatial reincarnation’. Just as we can argue from the fact that you exist *now* to the conclusion that you exist at many *times*, can we argue from the fact that you exist *here* to the conclusion that you exist in many *places* at once?

In response, there are at least two important differences between space and time. First, it is plausible that you can know by direct observation that you are not in multiple places right now (unless these different places all look exactly the same). When you look around, you see a single physical scene. If you were right now on Earth *and* on a planet in the Andromeda galaxy, then you should be seeing some Andromedan scene now, in addition to whatever Earthly scene you are observing. But you are not. By contrast, you *cannot* know by direct observation that you are not going to exist at different *times*.

Second, you are directly aware of the current time in a way in which you are not directly aware of your spatial location. In a sense, one is not really aware of *places* at all; one is only aware of the qualities and relationships of the material objects around one. This is why you don’t notice anything changing as Earth hurtles through space. The correct account of our fundamental evidence at a given moment must include propositions about the mental states that *we ourselves* are experiencing *in the present moment*, but it would not include propositions directly referring to any particular spatial location.

10.4 Dead People Exist

It is commonly assumed that when you die, you cease to exist. I disagree. I think that, upon death, you merely become an unconscious, disembodied soul, as opposed to the conscious, embodied soul that you are right now. This is supported by the argument of the preceding section, which shows that persons can be reincarnated and therefore that the soul is not destroyed upon one’s death.

My view is also suggested by reflection on the following cases.

Case 1. You are asleep and not dreaming, so you have no experiences at the moment. Do you exist?

We would normally say that you continue to exist throughout your sleep. This suggests that a mind can exist while having no experiences. This is more natural than the view that you (that is, your soul) go out of existence

when you fall asleep, and then pop back into existence when you awake. Similarly, your soul may exist in a non-conscious state after your body dies.

You might agree with me about Case 1 but think that the soul ceases to exist at the moment that a person dies, perhaps because at this point the person's brain is no longer *capable* of producing experiences. But consider this case:

Case 2. You have a heart attack and, according to the standard criteria, you die: your heart stops beating, you stop breathing, your brain waves cease. However, it turns out that renegade scientists have just created an experimental technology for reviving a dead human body. After you've been clinically dead for an hour, doctors revive you: they get your heart to start beating again, your brain starts working again, etc. You then go back to your life. During the hour that you were dead, did you exist?

This seems to me relevantly like Case 1. In Case 1, you exist while unconscious, between episodes of being awake. In Case 2, you also exist while unconscious, between episodes of being alive. If you agree with that, it becomes plausible that, given the reality of reincarnation, souls in general continue to exist between episodes of being embodied.

You might agree with my assessment of Case 2, *provided* that after revival you still have your old memories, but you might think that the loss of your memories makes you cease to exist. After a normal death, with no amazing revival, a person's brain deteriorates until the information that constitutes their memories is unrecoverable. You might think that *that* is the point at which the person's soul ceases to exist. If you're tempted by that thought, consider this case:

Case 3. You have an accident and suffer amnesia. You completely forget your name, your past, and all details about your life. Over the next few weeks, your memories gradually return. During the period of amnesia, did you exist?

Cases like this actually occur. No one doubts that the person with amnesia is the same person who occupied that body before the amnesia. This is especially clear when the memories return. (Let A be the person before the accident, B the person with amnesia right after the accident, and C the person after the memories have returned. Since B = C and C = A, it must be that B = A.) Finally, consider this case:

Case 4. As in Case 3, except that the memories never come back.

If you continued to exist in Case 3, then you also continue to exist in Case 4, since your intrinsic state right after the accident is the same in both cases. Hence, people can persist after permanently losing their memories.

10.5 The Normative Puzzles of Non-Living People

10.5.1 *The Harm of Death*

Epicurus argued that it is irrational to fear death because ‘death [...] is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, we do not exist’ (1926: 85). Perhaps this is what he meant: after your death, you don’t exist. It is impossible to suffer harm at a time when you don’t exist. So death is not a harm. So it’s irrational to fear it.

This strikes many as sophisticated, but it is not easy to say what the error is. You might say, ‘Death isn’t a *harm* but rather the *absence of a benefit*, the benefit of life. But it can be rational to fear the loss of a benefit; hence, it makes sense to fear death.’

Epicurus could respond,

It can be rational to fear the loss of a benefit if indeed *you* will suffer that loss. But if you don’t even *exist* when the benefit is absent, then there is no one to undergo the loss. It is not true that you’ll be worse off while dead than you were while alive; a non-existent entity cannot be either better or worse off than anything.

If Epicurus succeeds in showing that we ought not to fear death, it would seem that we also have no reason to try to avoid death. But this, it seems, just cannot be right.

My account of persons provides a satisfying solution to the puzzle raised by Epicurus’ argument. You *do* exist after your death, in an unconscious state (at least until your next lifetime). It is better to be conscious (assuming that your experiences are overall positive) than to be unconscious. So, you are typically worse off while dead than you were when alive.

10.5.2 *Posthumous Harm*

There is a similar puzzle concerning posthumous harm. Many have the intuition that it is possible for events that occur after one’s death to be either good or bad for one in a nontrivial way.⁷ I recently heard a fellow philosopher say that we should punish nineteenth-century philosopher G.W.F. Hegel for being such a terrible writer, and that the way in which we should punish him is by refusing to read his work anymore. It is somewhat

intuitive to think this would be bad for Hegel, and that continuing to read his work would be good for him, particularly if Hegel himself, while alive, wanted his work to last.

The puzzle about this kind of harm concerns *when* the harm occurs. It seems that, in the case of posthumous harms, the victim cannot be said to be harmed *after* his death, since after death there is no one to suffer the harm, and there cannot be a harm without someone who suffers it (for example, we need never fear harming Santa Claus, since he doesn't exist). It also seems that the victim cannot be said to be harmed *during* his lifetime, since the harmful event does not exist at that time. Some claim that the person is in a harmed state during his lifetime in virtue of the fact that the harmful event is *going to occur*.⁸ However, we can imagine that, during the victim's lifetime, it is not yet determined whether the event will occur (perhaps it depends on choices that metaphysically free agents have yet to make), and this only becomes determined after the victim's death. It would be odd to claim that some harmful fact or state of affairs nevertheless exists during the agent's life.

This puzzle, again, is straightforwardly resolved by holding that the victim *does* exist after his death, albeit in an unconscious state. It is more plausible that one can harm an *unconscious* being than that one can harm a *non-existent* being.

10.5.3 The Repugnant Conclusion

The 'Repugnant Conclusion' is a controversial (and misnamed) thesis in population ethics that claims that, for any world full of happy people, one can imagine a *better* world consisting entirely of a much larger number of people whose lives would all be just barely worth living. For example, instead of having one billion very happy people, perhaps it would be better to have one *trillion* people, each of whom was just 1% as happy.

Many philosophers have worked very hard to explain why the Repugnant Conclusion isn't true. Every attempt leads to even more counterintuitive consequences. I can't list all these attempts and all their absurd consequences here, but here is just one example. Suppose you say that what matters is not the total quantity of welfare summed over all people, but the *average* welfare level of the population. This would avoid the Repugnant Conclusion. However, this theory also has the implication that, in some situations, it would be better to create some *miserable* people who would wish they were never born, rather than to create a larger number of *slightly happy* people. To see this, imagine that there are presently one billion people, each with a welfare level of 100 (which is great). You may either create another billion people with -10 welfare (who would wish that

they had never been born) *or* create another *four* billion people each with +10 welfare. The second option seems obviously better. But the average welfare level of the world would be higher under the first option than the second (45 versus 28).

There are problems of comparable seriousness facing *every* theory that seeks to avoid the Repugnant Conclusion. The most reasonable view, I argue elsewhere (2008), is that the Repugnant Conclusion is true. There are powerful arguments for the Repugnant Conclusion, besides the fact that all alternative views have crazy implications. But I won't go into all that now. Here I want to talk about a new defense of the Repugnant Conclusion.

Compare two possible worlds (see Figure 10.1). In world A, there are one billion people alive, each with a welfare level of 100 (which is great). In world Z, there are one trillion people alive, each with a welfare level of 1 (which is barely better than nothing). Traditionally, philosophers who work in this area invite us to intuit that A is better than Z: if you had a choice of creating either world, you should choose A. Some would go on to reassure us that the extra 999 billion people who would exist in Z but not in A would have no valid complaint about your choosing A because people who do not actually exist cannot have a valid complaint about anything.

All of this depends on the assumption that people who are not alive at a given time *do not exist*. Suppose instead that, as I claim, all people exist at all times: there simply are times when they are embodied and conscious, and other times when they are disembodied and unconscious. In that case, worlds A and Z cannot differ in the number of people who *exist* in each world; they differ only in the number who *are alive*. The correct description of the two worlds is therefore this: in A, there are (at least) one trillion

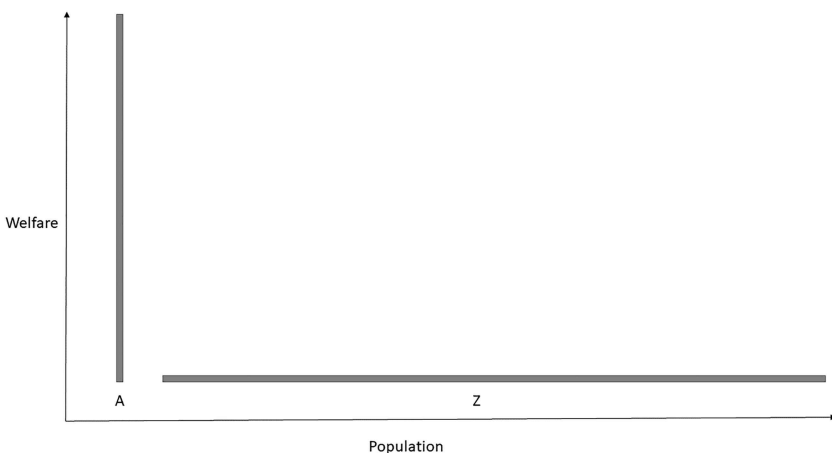


FIGURE 10.1 Two possible worlds.

people. Of these, one billion are alive at the very high welfare level of 100, while the other 999 billion are disembodied and hence have zero welfare.⁹ In Z, there are the same trillion people, but all of them are alive at welfare level 1.

Once we describe the two cases in this way, it becomes clear that Z is better than A. Z obviously has higher total utility than A (one trillion versus one hundred billion). In addition, Z has ten times greater *average* utility than A, properly understood. Those who write about this scenario commonly miscalculate the average utility of A as 100 because they overlook the disembodied people, who are supposed not to exist. Once we recognize that disembodied souls are people too, we see that the average utility of world A is 0.1 (=100 billion/1 trillion). Z's average utility, on the other hand, is 1. Finally, besides having both lower total utility and lower average utility, world A also suffers from extreme inequality (between the living and the non-living), whereas Z is a world of perfect equality (at least as regards the trillion souls mentioned in the scenario).¹⁰ It is thus difficult to see how one could rationally prefer A over Z.

10.5.4 Pro- and Anti-natalism

Some philosophers defend anti-natalism, the view that it is morally wrong to procreate. I can't address all arguments for this view, but one argument is especially relevant here. David Benatar's Asymmetry Argument claims that there is a normative asymmetry between pleasure and pain, in that the absence of pain is always good, but the absence of pleasure is not bad unless there is a specific being who is lacking pleasure. Benatar writes (2006: 58):

The fact that one enjoys one's life does not make one's existence better than non-existence, because if one had not come into existence there would have been nobody to have missed the joy of leading that life and thus the absence of joy would not be bad.

He concludes that the *pain* that your offspring would experience in their lives is a reason *not* to produce offspring, yet the *pleasure* that your offspring would experience is *not* a reason *to* produce offspring. Hence, you always have the most moral reason not to procreate.

Most find this conclusion crazy. Note that Benatar's argument trades heavily on the notion that non-living people do not exist at all, and so that the decision whether to procreate is a decision whether to cause a new individual to *exist*. The argument dissolves if we suppose that the decision is merely one of whether to cause an existing individual to go from a state of unconsciousness to one of consciousness. In this case, there already is a

person, your potential offspring, who is in a state of complete absence of both pleasure and pain. If one can cause this person to have experiences that will be more pleasurable than painful, then one has good reason to do so.

I do not claim that one is *morally obligated* to procreate. One need not do so, since one is not generally obligated to produce benefits for others at a very high cost to oneself. But one is *permitted* to do so, just as one is morally permitted to risk one's own life to save that of a stranger. Indeed, the moral reason one has to procreate is *the same* as the reason one has to save a stranger's life (when one can do so at a high cost to oneself): in both cases, one has the opportunity to save an existing person from a condition of unconsciousness and to enable them to live in this world. Whether the beneficiary is *presently* conscious is irrelevant (note that, in a medical emergency, doctors have the same reason to try to save a patient's life whether or not the patient is presently conscious). Procreating is equivalent to saving the life of a person who is presently unconscious and amnesic, which there is a very strong moral reason to do.

10.6 Conclusion

Time stretches forever into the past and forever into the future. In the infinite expanse of time, everyone has had infinitely many lifetimes and will have infinitely many more to come. Between lives, you exist as a disembodied, unconscious soul.

The main resistance to this view in contemporary philosophy comes from physicalists, who think that we are purely physical objects. The physicalists, however, are unable to explain the existence of qualia, intentionality, and free will. Physicalists and property dualists both face difficulty in accounting for personal identity. The soul theory is the only theory that deals satisfactorily with all these philosophical issues.

This view of persons has interesting normative implications. It explains how the dead can be harmed by their own deaths as well as by other events; it undermines a well-known anti-natalist argument; and it vindicates the misnamed 'repugnant conclusion'. Because it is better to be conscious than unconscious, we have strong reasons both to fear death and to bring more people into the world.

Notes

- 1 For physicalist accounts of intentionality, see Dretske (1981) and Millikan (1984). For critiques, see Loewer (1987) and Rupert (1999).
- 2 For a theory along these lines, see Lucas (1970) and Penrose (1994). On the conflict between free will and determinism, see van Inwagen (1983).

- 3 Murchie (1978: 321–2) says that every atom in the human body is replaced within five years.
- 4 For explanation of Bayes's Theorem and its significance, see Joyce (2003).
- 5 Assuming that P(R) and P(E|R) are both nonzero.
- 6 Some people report memories of past lives (Stevenson 1974). However, these cases are controversial and may be either false memories or hoaxes (Angel 1994, 2015).
- 7 For extended defense, see Boonin (2019).
- 8 See Pitcher (1984: 187); cf. Feinberg (1984: 79–95).
- 9 Unless perhaps some of them are being posthumously benefitted or harmed, as per Section 5.2. But let's assume that is not the case.
- 10 Some people consider inequality of welfare intrinsically bad. I view it as intrinsically neutral (Huemer 2003, 2012). The important point for present purposes is that inequality is not intrinsically *good*, and hence that A's extreme inequality cannot redeem its deficiency with respect to both average and total utility.

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