**Intimations of an afterlife: A speculative framework**

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In essay 11 we elucidated a framework for a non-local, intelligible ‘emergent field’ which, according to those who have received intimations from the afterlife, can be equated to a middle ground that souls occupy prior to reincarnation or further ascension into higher dimensions. We posited that souls are of the same rudimentary nature as thoughts, but are of greater complexity, somehow capable of volition and awareness. This emergent field is comparable to an ‘astral’, which Oxford (2020) defines as “a supposed nonphysical realm of existence to which various psychic and paranormal phenomena are ascribed, and in which the physical human body is said to have a counterpart”. We further suggested that the material plane may be one of many bands of reality that, according to Plotinus, leads to greater forms of perfection (Walsh et al., 2014, p. 75). Plato noted that the intelligible realm is composed of perfect forms, from which we derive our thinking to manifest and create on the material plane (Walsh et al., 2014, p. 59). As we will see in this essay, similar notions concerning perfection and ascending realms are a frequent theme related to the afterlife. In this essay we will seek to understand the nature of the afterlife at depth by exploring multiple sources. We will provide our insights and hypotheses throughout the essay and conclude with the practical importance of ‘acting as if’ an afterlife exists.

**Afterlife**

Rather than strictly material, substance dualism (Robinson, 2020) suggests that mind and body are of a separate type. In addition to this philosophical notion is panpsychism, that suggests consciousness infuses with matter from an unbounded source (Goff et al., 2020). It is suggested by Jane Sherwood (a medium who channeled a communicator named ‘E. K.’) that these two systems are interlocked, and the whole story of the organism is their gradual disentangling (Carter, 2012, p. 299). Indeed, as we have noted previously Bernardo Kastrup (2014) suggests that mind becomes increasingly unbounded as the brain degrades from aging, thus remerging with ostensibly higher bands of reality.

The physical body and spiritual body are said to be connected by a “silver cord” that attaches to the solar-plexus chakra in the ostensible energy body (Barušs, 2021). According to some variants of dualism, the consciousness that comes to inhabit the material body is said to be a “soul”, which presents as an etheric bodily double. Buddhist traditions suggest experiences on the material plane can result in subtle psychical imprints upon this double which we previous called samskaras, and that they persist beyond bodily death into these emergent planes (Tigunait, 2021). If they are of a negative type, then the soul requires ‘purification’, either through living out future incarnations on the material band, or through enduring karmic-related suffering on a lower immaterial (ethereal) band, in order to further the lessons associated with transcendence to the higher bands in the afterlife (Fontana, 2005, p. 446).

Our understanding of the nature of the afterlife comes from sources such as deathbed visions, deathbed coincidences, near-death experiences (NDEs), and mediumship. In both the readings it was commonly suggested that the afterlife is “what we are expecting it to be like” (Barušs, 2021; Carter, 2012, p. 311). According to Evelyn Myers, who potentially channeled her husband, the first band of the afterlife is a “plane of illusion” (Carter, 2012, p. 311). Otherwise known as ‘Hades’, it is a transitional state similar to earth life. Its similarity is the result of elements of our unconscious (i.e., samskaras) carrying over, such as the clothing we wear, the interests we have, and even the external environment. It is suggested that our proclivities persist until they lose meaning by virtue of realizing their illusory status. The ethereal version of our physical body is said to present as it did when we were in the prime of life. This corresponds to what people see when they see loved ones in their sleep during deathbed coincidences (Fenwick & Fenwick, 2008, p. 73). Communicators also report increased lucidity, which aligns with how NDErs report feelings of reality as enhanced during these experiences (Barušs & Mossbridge, 2017, p. 75). Our intellectual power is said to be greater on higher planes, and we are capable of manifesting things with our mind much faster (Carter, 2012, p. 311). Animals are said to be found in the afterlife, as well as beings that are not of human origin (Carter, 2012, p. 292; Barušs, 2021).

Another common theme found in philosophies about the afterlife is this notion of a judgement that determines the level to which we go, and that as a result of this judgement the soul experiences either positive or negative consequences (Fontana, 2005, p. 445). This corresponds well with the life review people report during NDEs. A “life review” is defined as “a review of the events that have occurred for a person in her life, usually accompanied by critical self-evaluation” (Ring & Valarino, 1998). Some people report reliving everything in their lives as if they lived for a second time. Perhaps this subjective preparatory stage occurs because the body thinks that it may indeed die, and the soul needs to be readied for crossing over via such a review or “judgement”.

A frequently cited number of levels to the afterlife is seven (Fontana, 2005, p. 465). Fontana suggests that the next level above earth is that of the “earthbound”, where those who still hunger for earthly existence reside. Such discarnates are often responsible for ostensible “hauntings”. Tibetan Buddhist traditions called them “hungry souls”. Above this band is said to be the “Lower Astral” whereby individuals who lived a violent or otherwise negative life go. The band above this is called the ‘Upper Astral’, which is an idealized version of how this world might be if we treated it and others with the appropriate level of love and respect (Fontana, 2005, p. 465-467). Transcendence through these levels, from earth up into the “astrals” and the “heavens” that exist above them, occurs through character development and “purification”. We learn to be of service to others, more loving and compassionate, and we purify through experiencing the suffering we have done unto others either in this life or in the afterlife. Through this process all souls are said to be able to transcend, rather than being confined to eternal damnation. As we transcend it is said that we increase in “frequency”, and therefore only up to the Upper Astral can discarnates be communicated with as a soul’s frequency is too high beyond this point (Fontana, 2005, p. 467).

From the perspective of the afterlife, this life can appear to be a dream (afterlife ‘more real than real’ as per NDE). We have validated this concept in previous essays by suggesting that indeed, the human nervous system does simulate only a portion of reality that itself is not necessarily accurate compared to the objective stimuli beyond the senses and is thus illusory. If idealist philosophies hold true, we are localized from these higher planes to this ‘meat suit’ that does the simulating. That we are said to come from a more idealized version of material existence, perhaps we are here to actualize our ‘dreams’ by channeling from this place, and perhaps our dreams were already a part of our soul prior to birth. After all, Plato suggested that learning is remembering (Samet, 2019); especially given imprints of karmic proclivities from previous lives. Perhaps then once we localize, we can also continually channel – either our higher selves or the soul of another – from this intelligible plane in order to actualize our life’s purpose or this idealized state. Barušs(2021) suggests we may be channeling all of the time, and it’s just a matter of who we are channeling. Our actualizing of our dreams and high character perhaps helps us raise our ‘frequency’ in order to enter into higher levels of the afterlife, in part because of successfully doing what we were expected to do. Society has gradually evolved from barbarism into civility through ceaseless innovation, all of this perhaps coming from these ostensibly higher planes from which our bodies channel. This frames material reality as existing in a sort of lag time, whereby “heaven on earth” is supposed to be actualized.

**Concluding thoughts**

In this essay we have constructed a speculative idealist metaphysics of an ostensible afterlife. It appears that an emergent field of non-local consciousness amongst the human macro-organism serves as a sort of middle ground or ‘hades’ in which thought and discarnates reside. Upon death, it is hypothesized that consciousness survives and enters this field, and that discarnates maintain earthly proclivities for a time as a result of psychic imprints formed on earth. Through reincarnation or ‘purification’ in this realm, a sort of dissipation occurs whereby all material traces are gradually shed as the soul transcends into greater realms of the afterlife, eventually merging into ‘pure consciousness’. I would opine that these greater realms are increasingly beyond the substrate of the material universe. Perhaps the substrate is where the material universe bubbled up and expansively burst out of.

Regardless of veridicality, religions and spiritual traditions such as Buddhism and Christianity with their notions of spiritual (character) development as a part of transcending earthly life, prescribe an ethic that is conducive to building individuals that are altruistic (‘Christ like’; bodhisattva) and help to keep the social fabric tightly interwoven through their deeds. Altruism helps create community: through giving to others we motivate reciprocation and the coming together of people. This contrasts to exploitation, which can motivate resentment and the desire to ‘get even’, further promoting division amongst people. Practices such as prayer or ‘laying on of hands’ can have healing properties (Bengston & Krinsley, 2000), and belonging to a spiritual or religious group can prolong life through providing a sense of community (systematically reducing allostatic load, a contributor to bodily breakdown), meaning, and purpose (Bruce et al., 2017). Therefore, spiritual and religious traditions, with their focus on idealist practices as a means of improving standing in the afterlife, have great utility for earthly life.

In spite of this, society has gradually come to abandon idealist institutions, and as a result has left a vacuum by which materialism commonly fills. In our focus on matter philosophically, thought leadership concerning intentionality (that only material events or things are real) has ostensibly transmitted to the common man, who now places value in excess on material things in a consumerist world, while placing little value on spirituality. We partake in an endless cycle of conspicuous consumption and corporate production, and in a recent Gallup survey (McGregor, 2013) it was found that only 13% of people are actively engaged in their work, suggesting few people even enjoy their jobs. In an attempt to reduce the felt suffering from an arguably purposeless and mundane life that most people experience during the week, escapism is a common practice (‘living for the weekend’ is a modern adage).

What we see then is the loss of thousand-year old ethics built upon arguably wise teachings (i.e., scientific research on the benefits of becoming a mindful human being) that people try to fill with their own make-shift version. The problem with this is that it appears to frequently devolve into nihilism and hedonism. This in part due to one’s character, which is found on the psychological interior, falling out of sight as immaterial notions lose emphasis (which historically psychology placed major emphasis on; Walsh et al., 2014, p. 77) Furthermore, we are ravaging the earth in excess through the once unpredictable byproducts of this original philosophy (from materialism, to the scientific and industrial revolution, to conspicuous production and consumption). After all, the hard work of character development in this life arguably means nothing if there is no survival upon death. Yet given the hard problem of consciousness, even this is taken on faith. Summarily, belief in an afterlife appears more adaptive than does not believing. It may even help us save our planet.

Not bad. I thought you were strongest through the middle of the essay when you talked about samskaras and the material existence appearing as a dream. The conclusion section is clear but seems detached from the material though the middle of the essay. In other words, you are making the point at the end about the ills of the world but without tying any of that to the previous material about the afterlife. For example, you said that this existence appears as a dream. If it appears as a dream, then does it matter if we screw up our material circumstances? Those are the kinds of questions that are raised for the reader, but you never address them at the end. In other words, your reasoning could have been more nuanced. 9/10

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