

ETERNAL QUESTIONS

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Soul Evolution

Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals, the one living the others' death and dying the others' life.

Heraclitus¹

I was in my thirties, drunk again, fighting in a tavern with another man over something of little consequence. Knives were drawn and flashed, and I went down. That's how I died in the 19th century, the last time I was here—or so I was told. I was a white man who tried to live like an American Indian and was rejected by both races and cultures. But, other than having a lifelong aversion to drinking in bars I don't remember any of it. I only know about it from a psychic speaking to me deeply in trance and holding my hands while she sat across from me at a table in an empty classroom in Cuernavaca, Mexico. It was 1979.

Do I believe it? Do I believe that's how I died in my last life? I don't know. Do I believe in reincarnation? Yes. Do I believe it is possible for a soul to evolve? Yes, definitely, because I have experienced the evolution of the soul in my life, and I have observed it happening to others. I will avoid turning this into a confessional to save you from the shock and me from the chagrin of listing all of the bad habits of body and mind that I have overcome by discipline of the will and internal dialogue. Knowing myself as well as I do, learning that I had died in a knife fight, drunk, is entirely possible. But, did it really happen?

¹ Burnet, John, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908)

This is neither the place nor the time to discuss what a scoundrel I have been in this life or other lives; this is the place and time to explore everyone's evolution of the soul. There appear to be two ways the soul can evolve: over one lifetime and over many lives. We already know the Hindus and Buddhist would agree that we are liberated after many lives of reincarnation required to perfect the soul, but the Abrahamic faiths would disagree and insist that the work on our soul must be confined to how we lived in one life, this one life.

A life of good deeds may save a Jew or Muslim from Gehinom or Jahannam, respectively, but the Christians have Jesus as their intercessor to make them fit to be with God regardless of the kind of life they lived. If you accept Jesus Christ as the son of God and ask him for forgiveness of your sins, then even if it's at the moment of your death after a lifetime of evil, you will be saved. If not; then you're lost. That requirement includes everyone, even those who never heard of him. Otherwise, it's hell fire forever.

But let's leave Jesus out of it for now. And, if it appears we are pursuing two topics at the same time that's because we kind of are. We all know the soul can evolve in one lifetime. Anyone who has quit smoking or drinking or beating their husband has changed their soul. It has evolved. But, a person who has quit smoking or drinking or tamed a vicious temper may have taken more than one life and repeated effort to do so—probably many lives, according to Old and New Age literature on the subject. No footnotes needed. Among those who believe in many lives, it's rather common knowledge.

But in order for a soul to evolve over many lives we first have to prove it can actually leave a body that is dying or dead and go somewhere beyond this life. Anywhere. Can the soul survive at all? Virtually all of the religions believe that it can and does. That's the greatest power of their message. They may disagree on the name and description of heaven or hell, but even the Hindus and Buddhists who believe the liberated soul merges with God or an ineffable Nirvana do not preach *extinction* of the soul.

Science does. The standard model of physics says it's impossible and wishful thinking, which is their contemptuous dismissal of all who suggest there is anything more to life and death than the standard model of physics. Scientists and others who confine their thinking to this single point of view are no different than a Pentecostal preacher who insists that without accepting Jesus as your savior you will be condemned to hell for all eternity. The standard-model scientist will call you a fool, and the Pentecostal preacher will tell you that even thinking outside their model is likely the whisperings of Satan.

We have already seen what the religions say about the soul after life. And we have already seen that none of them have any proof for their claims. Not only do

they lack proof, their only evidence is the occasional mystical experience. They just accept and perpetuate whatever their religion tells them, content to believe with self-righteous certainty what someone said someone said many centuries ago. And you had better not disagree with them. Today, it's the Muslims who are most likely to kill anyone who disagrees with them. Yesterday, it was the Christians. And the desire to stifle dissent with blood-lust is still alive in both.

When I was in my early twenties I was an atheist working in a laboratory in the aerospace industry, and I was smarter and more cock-sure of myself than I am now. One day, while visiting a friend, I met his new girlfriend, a young woman who said she was a Lutheran. A devout Lutheran. But she was easy prey, and within a few minutes she had run out of answers to my pointed questions. I could see she was getting madder by the minute, but I didn't care. Finally, she couldn't take it any more and bolted out of the room, slammed the door behind her and screamed, yes, screamed! for God to strike me dead.

One last stop before we get back on the path of soul evolution. We will make this a brief stop to look at what the standard model of physics says about what we are supposed to believe. This is from Dr. Sean Carroll, a scientist with a PhD from Harvard who has all the right credentials to explain what the standard model of physics says about the future of the soul after the body dies:

"Claims that some form of consciousness persists after our bodies die and decay into their constituent atoms face one huge, insuperable obstacle: the laws of physics underlying everyday life are completely understood, and there's no way within those laws to allow for the information stored in our brains to persist after we die. If you claim that some form of soul persists beyond death, what particles is that soul made of? What forces are holding it together? How does it interact with ordinary matter?"²

Dr. Carroll asks these questions about the particles of the soul because the real, "huge, insuperable obstacle" is his inability to imagine anything beyond the standard model of physics. He truly believes the laws of physics are complete and that he completely understands them. But the real limit to his understanding is that he can only measure and contemplate physical bodies, the corporeal. The same is true of many Stoics. You may remember the Chrysippus argument about the soul necessarily being a body because the incorporeal cannot attach itself to the corporeal.

Many Stoics and Standard Model Physicists will only work with material bodies. But on this matter the early Stoics had a much grander definition of these bodies. As every Stoic knows today, there are two very different views about what

² Sean M. Carroll, "Physics and the immortality of the Soul," Scientific American, May 23, 2011: <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/physics-and-the-immortality-of-the-soul/>

those bodies can do and be. Modern Stoics believe the Standard Model of Physicists are correct in their limitations and would have us all believe nature is *only* particles, atoms and their interactions within the forces of nature that we currently know. But the Traditional Stoic, of which the author counts himself, believes that God *is* Nature and the Whole is conscious and providential.

But let's go on. We don't need to drag everyone back to the God sections. We can believe the Standard Model Physicists, because they are right, but short-sighted. We can believe the Modern Stoics of today, because they are right, but short-sighted. We can believe the Stoics of antiquity, because they are right, but short-sighted. We can believe the Traditional Stoics of today, because they are right, but limited by the fact that most of them have not explored what goes beyond *our* standard model. But we can, and we should. We have the opportunity to know more about the eternal metaphysical questions, both in theory and practice, than at any time in human history.

Salvation, Liberation, Evolution

I have a older brother whom I've known all my life. I am a Second Son. We both had the same mother and father, and grew up in the same Seventh-Day Adventist fundamentalist Protestant home. We went to the same parochial schools while growing up, and we knew the same people. Today, for half of the year he lives with his wife in Paris when they are not at their home in Normandy; the other half of the year they live in their condo on the beach in Hawaii. By every objective material measure of our society he was a success; I was not.

Why? There are a number of reasons, of course, but the one that led me to writing a journal of metaphysics in my old age is the one I write about today. He was a teacher and accumulated money in his free time after work. I was many things, no one profession, and in my free time I studied and experimented with philosophy and mystical experiences. You already know this, but the reason I bring it up is to discuss soul evolution. We all have our life lessons to learn.

My brother is learning what he needed to learn for the evolution of his soul; and, I am learning what I need to learn. My brother is a Presbyterian, now, mostly because he enjoys singing in their choir. I'm a Stoic and have a Sacred Space in a room at home where I chant in Latin or Punjabi everyday. Our lives are very different, and what we believe about the afterlife is also very different. Christians believe in heaven and hell. I don't believe either of our souls will go to heaven or hell. Let's recapitulate what we have already seen, and this time we will briefly compare it to the afterlife of Eskimos.

Science. Our Standard Model Physicist, Dr. Carroll, says that nature is *only* particles, atoms and their interactions within the forces of nature that we

currently know. His understanding beyond the standard model shows he knows almost nothing else. He says, "...all we have are a few legends and sketchy claims from unreliable witnesses with near-death experiences, plus a bucketload of wishful thinking."³ What he calls "Sketchy claims from unreliable witnesses" shows he knows virtually nothing about the research that has been done on NDEs. But his response is typical of the closed mind.

Abrahamic Faiths. At the risk of showing my own closed mind I'm going to flatly state that IMO the Jewish and Muslim heavens and hells are undeserving of further comment. Purgatory is an invention of the Roman Catholic Church vaguely reminiscent of Greek Hades' Asphodel Meadows or perhaps the first 6 levels of the Jewish Gehinom (see issue #12). The Protestant Christian requirement that only those who believe in Jesus as the Christ will be saved, leaving the billions who knew nothing about him to be consigned to hell, describe a god too cruel and petty to be worthy of respect. I will not worship a god I cannot respect.

Rhymes with Orange by Hilary Price



But now we must go back to the early Christian church to see another side to this story—one that is seldom told today. His name was Origen. Although this boy was born in Alexandria to Christian parents (late 2nd century CE) he was given a pagan name, *Ôrigenês*, "child of Horus." He became renowned as a man of great daring and learning, but his most famous insight was that in the biblical Genesis it clearly appears there are two versions of the creation of the world: the one where God creates everything, including human beings, in six days. Then, there is the version of God creating Adam from the dust of the earth.⁴

For his brilliant and renowned scholarship Origen was doubly unfortunate. First, although he was tortured to death by pagan Rome for his Christian faith, he was later condemned as a heretic by a 6th century ecumenical council of Christians.

³ *ibid*

⁴ This section on Origen is from a fascinating article by Professor Charles Stang, Harvard Divinity School, "Flesh and Fire: Reincarnation and Universal Salvation in the Early Church," March 19, 2019, <https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2019/03/19/flesh-and-fire-reincarnation-and-universal-salvation-early-church>

Condemned by Rome for being a Christian and condemned by Christians who were afraid of him. Why were they afraid? Because a small monastic movement was following his teachings about the two creations he found in the biblical Genesis. Origen said the first creation was of the spirit; the second creation was of the body. We began as minds, consciousness; then, when God blew life into the earth-formed Adam we were created as flesh, the body.

And if this is so, Origen reasoned, then by a careful study of Genesis and a long process of reasoning he believed that the spirit in all of God's rational creatures—angels, humans, and demons—would be reincarnated until they could be reunited with the divine. He believed even Satan would eventually find reconciliation with God. The early Christian bishops decided that such ideas would weaken the people's fear of Judgment Day and the eternal fires of hell. And, if that were so, then the people's obedience to the Church would also weaken. And for this, Origen was branded a heretic and condemned to hell—long after he was dead. For this author, only the god of Origen is worthy of respect.

Hindu/Buddhist. Fear of the masses and the need for control prevented the early Christians from being more Christ-like in their kindness and healing love. It's often true even today. Rejecting Origen's brilliant innovation also prevented them from competing with the Asian religions for reincarnation ideas. They could have had the upper hand with a positive and uplifting message that promised we would *all* be forgiven and end our earthly lives in union with God.

Indigenous Americans. I can't leave this subject without comparing the afterlife of the “great” religions with the beliefs of the tribal and nomadic culture of the Arctic, the Eskimo. Actually, they were called Eskimos derogatorily by their neighbors, the Abnaki Indians. It means, “eaters of raw flesh.” So, that was the name western explorers heard from the Abnaki, and that's what almost everyone called them until the 21st century.

They call themselves Inuit, which means simply, “the people.”⁵ One more thing we should know before we consider their beliefs about the afterlife. The Inuit are a culture that predates history, and all we know of their origins is that some if not all of their ancestors crossed the Bering Sea land bridge at least 4,000 years ago from the Mongol region of East Asia. About 60,000 Inuit live scattered for 12,000 miles around the Arctic from Alaska to Siberia.⁶

“According to Inuit belief, the [soul] is eternal; a rich mythology supports this notion through stories of the afterlife and the events that succeed death. The underworld is named Adlivun, and it is located beneath the land and the sea.

⁵ J. Sydney Jones, “Inuit,” Countries and their Cultures <https://www.everyculture.com/multi/Ha-La/Inuit.html>

⁶ *ibid*

Souls are purified there in preparation for the journey to the Land of the Moon, Quidlivun, where they find eternal rest and peace. Only those who have lived a pure life or otherwise became purified in Adlivun, go to Quidlivun, the rest are reincarnated on earth.”⁷

Eternal life; a Purgatory that purifies the soul; Reincarnation; and, Heaven for the Righteous. Those are the big points. The shamans of millennia past created a complete metaphysics for their scattered and illiterate tribe of raw flesh eaters. It is, in my opinion, a metaphysics that equals and in some cases is more believable than most of the great religions. The Inuit stories of the soul after life is what Edelstein is talking about when he says that the only thing lacking in Stoic philosophy is “what Kant called the eternal metaphysical need of man.”⁸ We are working on that now.

Current Evidence

And now it's time to move onward and forward beyond the Standard Model of Physics. The same year (2011) Dr. Carroll published his article in Scientific American about sketchy claims, unreliable witnesses, and “bucketloads” of wishful thinking. Dr. Robert Lanza published his disagreement in Psychology Today. Dr. Lanza received his MD degree from the University of Pennsylvania and has hundreds of publications—with 30 books in natural science. In 2014, he was also selected by Time Magazine as one of the “100 most influential people in the world.” In 2015 he was listed as one of the 50 “Top World Thinkers” by Prospect Magazine.⁹ Of course this doesn't make him right, but it certainly warrants paying attention. The following is Dr. Lanza's conclusion that article:

“Is there a soul? Does anything endure the ravages of time?...[The] current scientific paradigm is based on the belief that...life is just the activity of atoms and particles, which spin around for a while and then dissipate into nothingness. But if we add life to the equation, we can explain some of the major puzzles of modern science, including the uncertainty principle, entanglement, and the fine-tuning of the laws that shape the universe...Experiments make it increasingly clear that even *mere knowledge in the experimenter's mind* is sufficient to convert possibility to reality...The results not only defy our classical intuition but suggest that a part of the mind — the soul — is immortal and exists outside of space and time.”¹⁰

⁷ Traditional Inuits and Their Perception of Death <https://www.deathaspect.org/culture-myth/traditional-inuits-and-perception-of-death>

⁸ Edelstein, Ludwig, *The Meaning of Stoicism* (Harvard, 1966, p.97)

⁹ These accolades are on his website for Biocentrism, <https://www.robertlanzabiocentrism.com/>

¹⁰ Robert Lanza, “Does the Soul Exist? Evidence Says ‘Yes’”, Psychology Today, December 21, 2011: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/biocentrism/201112/does-the-soul-exist-evidence-says-yes>

The Near-Death Experiences Today

Don't let Dr. Carroll or anyone tell you that Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) are shaky claims made by unreliable witnesses. Our understanding today has gone far beyond that level of close-minded ignorance. The same year that Dr.s Carroll and Lanza wrote their articles, a 2011 study in the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences estimated 9,000,000 people have reported NDEs.¹¹ Nine million. I couldn't find an update to that number today, 13 years later, but I'm reasonably confident we can throw a few more million onto the pile.

Three Doctors

I didn't have time to read all 9 million cases, so I have only included a bare outline of three. These were chosen because they show reliable witnesses who had three very different kinds of NDEs. In fact, one was a *shared* NDE. We usually just hear about the NDE in this nutshell: a life review, the light at the end of a tunnel, then seeing a welcoming spirit guide or dead relative full of love who gives them a hug, then tells them, much to their disappointment, they have to go back. The first of the three doctors tells that common story, and a bit more.

In 1999, Dr. Mary Neal, an orthopedic surgeon from Jackson Hole, Wyoming, was kayaking with a group on a river in Chile that was famous for its waterfalls. A fellow kayaker had gotten her boat wedged sideways, blocking the safe passage down the side. Dr Neal was forced to go over the *face* of the falls. She went straight down to the bottom where her kayak wedged 10 feet below the surface. She could feel bones breaking when she fell and she couldn't breathe or move, and yet she felt no pain or fear or panic. In fact, "I felt more alive than I've ever felt."¹² Then, Dr. Neal felt her soul peel away as it rose above her body.

With her body still trapped in the water below, Dr. Neal met a group of people she didn't know, but realized that one was a grandparent that had died before she was born. They greeted her with great love and joy then they walked together on a path with thousands of flowers exploding with color and aroma. At that point there was a shift in the time continuum and she experienced all of eternity in a second; and every second expanded into eternity.

To see things of the present moment is to see all that is now, all that has been since time began, and all that shall be unto the world's end...

Marcus Aurelius (6.37)

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Near-death_experience#:~:text=In%20the%20U.S.%2C%20an%20estimated,affects%20the%20body%20or%20brain.

¹² Dr. Neal's story is told by her in episode 1 of the 2021 Netflix series, "Surviving Death."

Dr. Neal could see her body trapped underwater while her fellow kayakers repeatedly dove down to find her. Just when they had given up trying, her life jacket popped up and one of the rescuers dove in to retrieve it, accidentally bumping into her. When she was pulled out of the water her body was bloated, purple, and her eyes had a fixed gaze. She had been physically dead for 30 minutes, but they still gave her CPR until she reluctantly returned. After several months and several surgeries she made a complete recovery. Despite having a zero chance of being dead for so long without serious brain damage she had none and continues to work as a surgeon today.

. . .

This NDE is from author Paul Perry who has written a dozen books on this subject. It's included here because from all the research he has done it is the one he found the most convincing and because it tells about the kind of experience we rarely hear, the *bad* NDE. The subject was a Dr. Rajiv Parti, Chief of Anesthesiology at a hospital in Bakersfield, California, who had accumulated considerable wealth and prestige from his work. He lived in a mansion, owned several luxury cars, and felt enormous pride and "invincibility." But in 2008 he was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and everything changed.¹³

Complications from routine surgery left him incontinent and in great pain and depression. In 2010 he went to UCLA Medical Center for more surgery, a more complicated procedure, and this time he awoke while heavily anesthetized and his body rose to the ceiling where he watched the surgery being performed on his body. Then he began to drift away from surgery as he followed familiar voices and found himself in India watching his mother and sister preparing dinner. As with the surgery he could see what everyone was doing and saying, which was later confirmed.

Suddenly, he felt fear, and a force pulled him into what he described as a hell where many souls were suffering and screaming. Why, he wondered, was he being punished? Was he paying for some great Karmic misdeeds in his past? Then he became aware of his current life from a new and external perspective. He had not only become very materialistic, but realized he was also arrogant, manipulative, and especially unkind to anyone who he saw as lesser in status. As soon as he became aware of the kind of person he had become, and felt genuine sorrow for his lack of forgiveness and compassion for others, Hell faded away.

. . .

As you probably know, the man most often credited with the popularization of the NDE concept and movement is Raymond Moody, MD, Ph.D. What you may not know is that Dr. Moody was a professor of philosophy before he decided to go to medical school to become a doctor. He was already well-known for the research

¹³ Dr. Parti's story is told by Paul Perry here: <https://time.com/4446877/near-death-experience/>

he had done on the NDE, but still he was surprised when in 1972 as a first-year medical student at the University of Virginia, USA, he was confidentially approached by a respected member of the faculty who would only speak to him in the privacy of her office at the school.¹⁴

Dr. Jamieson said she was not raised in a religious family and had little interest in the subject. Two years earlier her mother had a cardiac arrest at home right while she was visiting. She immediately gave her CPR for at least 30 minutes, then gave up when she knew her mother was dead. At that point Dr. Jamieson felt herself being lifted up and out of *her* body. *She* was having an NDE.

In this state of bewilderment, she suddenly realized her now-deceased mother was hovering right beside her. A great light poured into the room where mother and daughter were floating in spirit form and numerous family members entered the light to welcome mother home. After a joyful reunion with all her mother's old friends and relatives, Dr. Jamieson watched as her mother and the others drifted away back into the light. At this point, the shaft of light faded and she was left with the corpse of her mother beside her.

This was the first time Dr. Moody had heard of what he called, the Shared Death Experience (SDE). It was not the last time, and he tells of many more.

. . .

There is much more that could be included about other kinds evidence of the afterlife in addition to NDEs and SDEs. There are thousands of accounts by perfectly healthy, "normal" people who were regressed under hypnosis back to their last time in the spirit world between their lives here on earth.¹⁵ It's called Life between Lives (LBL) hypnosis and was pioneered by Dr. Michael Newton, a psychologist, who regressed and recorded the reports of over 4,000 clients.

Then there are the psychic reports, and it takes some careful sleuthing to separate the wheat from the chaff here. And more. But all this fascinating evidence of the afterlife is beyond the scope of this article. But we need one more reference to reincarnation before we complete this issue. We won't go back to the metempsychosis beliefs of the Pythagoreans. Instead, we will briefly examine work done by serious contemporary researchers that can be respected.

In the same documentary mentioned earlier about the NDE of Dr. Mary Neal, we begin our story with a boy named Atlas who is no more than two years old and who wakes up night after night screaming in fear and pain for an hour at a time. The little boy of whom we speak lives with his young mother in the state of Indiana, present day, and the mother doesn't know how to comfort the child.

¹⁴ This story is told in chapter one of Moody's book, *Glimpses of Eternity* (Guideposts, 2010)

¹⁵ See the books by Dr. Michael Newton, et al, on the rapidly growing LBL field.

Even her pediatrician can't help, but eventually the boy grows out of it. Then one day, at five years of age Atlas tells his mother that he misses his mom.¹⁶

The mother assumes he's just being silly and plays along. She asks how he could miss her when she's right there, and he says, "No. My other mom." Continuing with the game, the mother asks her son the name of the "other" mom. The boy says his other mom's name is Washington, and that his other name is Jaylen Robinson. The young mother who comes from a very religious Christian family knows nothing about reincarnation but looks up "children who remember past lives" on the Internet. That's when she finds Jim Tucker, MD, a Child Psychiatrist at the University of Virginia who has been studying reincarnation for 20 years.

Dr. Tucker says he always starts from a position of skepticism, but after 20 years he has come to believe that there is much more to the many studies of reincarnation he has examined than he first imagined. In this case, there actually was a woman by the name of Kareen Washington who was the mother of a Jaylen Robinson. The article said Jaylen was murdered by his baby-sitter at the age of 19 months. Dr. Tucker tested Atlas with numerous photos showing the real previous family and home mixed with fakes. Atlas confidently chose the correct photos of people and places he had never seen in his current life with 100% accuracy.

The founder of the University of Virginia program that studies reincarnation, a Dr. Ian Stevenson said, "The assumption is that when your brain dies, your mind perishes also. That is so deeply believed that scientists fail to understand that it is in the end, an assumption only. There's no reason why aspects of the mind shouldn't survive the death of the brain."¹⁷

. . .

Salvation, Liberation, Evolution. When we speak of evolution of the soul, we are not relying upon salvation from an outside source such as Yahweh, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, or Allah Almighty to save us from hell and carry us to heaven. When we speak of evolution of the soul, we are not pursuing promises of liberation after many lifetimes of paying down our karmic debt to free us from bondage to the material world. When we speak of evolution of the soul, we embrace the material world and learn that by study and practice of the virtues a noble being gradually evolves. When the life lessons are complete, the soul will have learned what it needs to know to evolve into a higher order of being—a higher order than human being. That is the subject of our next and final issue on the matter of the soul.

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¹⁶ This reincarnation story is from the 2021 Netflix series, "Surviving Death."

¹⁷ ibid

QUOTE OF THE DAY

And it is the same thing in us that is quick and dead, awake and asleep, young and old; the former are shifted and become the latter, and the latter in turn are shifted and become the former.

Heraclitus (frag. 78, Burnet)

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For the Readers

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