

# Integral Time and the Varieties of Post-Mortem Survival<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** While the question of survival of bodily death is usually approached by focusing on the mind/body relation (and often with the idea of the soul as a special kind of substance), this paper explores the issue in the context of our understanding of time. The argument of the paper is woven around the central intuition of time as an “ever-living present.” The development of this intuition allows for a more integral or “complex-holistic” theory of time, the soul, and the question of survival. Following the introductory matter, the first section proposes a re-interpretation of Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence in terms of moments and lives as “eternally occurring.” The next section is a treatment of Julian Barbour’s neo-Machian model of instants of time as configurations in the n-dimensional phase-space he calls “Platonía.” While rejecting his claim to have done away with time, I do find his model suggestive of the idea of moments and lives as eternally occurring. The following section begins with Fechner’s visionary ideas of the nature of the soul and its survival of bodily death, with particular attention to the notion of holonic inclusion and the central analogy of the transition from perception to memory. I turn next to Whitehead’s equally holonic notions of prehension and the concrescence of actual occasions. From his epochal theory of time and certain ambiguities in his reflections on the “divine antinomies,” we are brought to the threshold of a potentially more integral or “complex-holistic” theory of time and survival, which is treated in the last section. This section draws from my earlier work on Hegel, Jung, and Edgar Morin, as well as from key insights of Jean Gebser, for an interpretation of Sri Aurobindo’s inspired but cryptic description of the “Supramental Time Vision.” This interpretation leads to an alternative understanding of reincarnation—and to the possibility of its reconciliation with the once-only view of life and its corresponding version of immortality—along with the idea of a holonic scale of selves leading from individual personality as we normally experience it, through a kind of angelic self (a reinterpreted “Jivatma”), and ultimately to the Godhead as the Absolute Self. Of greater moment than such a speculative ontology, however, is the integral or complex-holistic way of thinking and imagining that is called for by this kind of inquiry.

**Keywords:** Aurobindo, Barbour, complex holism, complexity, death, Fechner, Gebser, integral, Morin, Nietzsche, reincarnation, soul, survival, time, Whitehead

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## Introduction

What is it that gives ultimate value to a life? What is it that makes anything in life, and the whole of a life, really matter? If all is impermanence (Heraclitus, Buddhism), if to be is to be finite—a “being-towards-death” (Heidegger)—with, as James puts it, “the great spectre of universal death, the all-encompassing blackness” (2002, p. 139) as the constant back-drop of every hour of life, what difference could it make how well we live our lives? What difference, in short, whether we live in love, wisdom, and beauty, or in their dark but presumably equally transitory counterparts? The natural human, which feels its kinship with the larger cycle of life, is perhaps content with the fact of biological continuity, with the sense of its insertion in an unbroken line of ancestors and descendants, and even with the genetic and biochemical solidarity shared by all forms of life. A more philosophically elevated view is represented by the idea of participation in the Heraclitian or Stoic Logos or the Chinese notion of the Tao. The person of culture, similarly, will find solace in the thought of participating in the history of ideas, will recognize spiritual ancestors in the realms of intellectual, ethical, or esthetic endeavor and will perhaps aspire to their own cultural progeny. The natural and cultural dimensions of the human experience, however, cannot of themselves circumvent the fact that this Earth and all of its life forms, as indeed our sun and the entire physical cosmos within which they are embedded, are finite beings, with beginnings in time, and bound to inevitable death.

Religious or spiritual traditions, of course, have always provided answers to the above questions, answers which are either ignored or denied by the perspectives of a strict naturalism or a restrictive humanism. There is a general consensus among these religious traditions, despite significant differences in other respects, concerning the belief that physical death does not spell the end of the personality or soul. Whether or not it is thought to have pre-existed the birth of the body, the personality or soul is more often than not pictured as surviving its death. It is with the particulars of survival, however, that the significant differences among traditional teachings become apparent. For the traditions of the Indian subcontinent, as for Buddhism, many indigenous traditions, and most religions of antiquity, the soul is believed to reincarnate.<sup>2</sup> In this view, the value of any one life, and the value of any element of a given life, can only be determined through consideration of the series of lives to which the individual life belongs. What you do in this life for good or ill matters because your actions flow from choices made in previous lives and will determine, or at least set the parameters for, choices to be made in future lives. The series of lives is said to be bound together by the law of Karma or its analogue, which, whether or not one believes in a transmigrating soul, provides continuity both before and beyond an individual life, and therefore also gives a ground for its value and meaning.

While some ancient Christians may have believed in reincarnation, the vast majority have, for the better part of two millennia, believed that we are given only one life. Or at least, we are given only one life on Earth—I leave aside the belief in the resurrection of the body—which is to be followed by some form of Eternal Life. The quality of this second Life—in its most dramatic form, whether in Heaven or Hell—is in some way directly linked to the manner in which one lives the first, and only, earthly life. The value or meaning of this life, therefore, as of any

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<sup>2</sup> I will not always repeat “soul or personality,” though I am aware of the problems associated with the term soul in connection with Buddhist traditions in particular.

significant action or experience within it, rests in the fact that it is of potentially eternal consequence. What happens now, though itself transitory, is an opening to the everlasting.

These two views of life and survival—the traditional reincarnationist and the once-only with its afterlife—appear to be highly incompatible, and I have yet to encounter any attempt to reconcile them. The bulk of the relevant literature is devoted to arguing the case for one or the other of the standard views (for a compelling philosophical argument in favor of reincarnation, see Aurobindo, 1991; for a Christian-based refutation of reincarnation, see Valea, 2007). Ervin Laszlo (2004) has expanded upon Rupert Sheldrake’s theory of morphic resonance (of which I will have more to say below), arguing against reincarnation but for the reality of past-life recall. Christopher Bache’s understanding of the soul as “higher form of individuality” that “integrates many lifetimes, many ‘persons’ into a meta-personal consciousness” (2006, p. 125), while not explicitly concerned with the kind of reconciliation I am envisioning, is friendly to my proposal. Peter Novak’s (1997, 2003) “division theory” claims to reconcile reincarnation with the Christian belief in Heaven and Hell, but not the traditionally opposed views of one life versus many (and in any case, his “reconciliation” comes at the cost of the postulation of two autonomous souls, only one of which reincarnates; as his theory suggests, the reconciliation is predicated on a “division”). It is of course possible that one, or both, are mistaken. In what follows, I suggest that both views are true in essential respects, but that to see them as such demands a more integral view of time than the one, or ones, normally associated with either view of survival. To articulate such an integral view is, to say the least, very challenging. “It is impossible,” as Whitehead (1920, p. 73) reminds us, “to meditate on time and the mystery of the passage of nature without an overwhelming emotion at the limitations of human intelligence.” I will, accordingly, proceed in what might appear as a somewhat indirect or circumambulatory manner, hoping that, by the time I come to the last section that deals explicitly with a more integral or complex view, what will begin as an indeterminate—though to me, at least, compelling—intuition will have taken on a more palpable and communicable form. While the intuition in question—namely, that of time as an *ever-living present*, and of moments and lives as *eternally occurring*—is grounded in my own experience and many years of contemplative inquiry, instead of jumping immediately to my suggestions for a possible reconciliation of both views of survival, I approach the problem by first considering some positions on the nature of time (Nietzsche, Barbour, Whitehead) and the afterlife (Fechner) which offer fruitful if partial approaches to the core intuition. The more explicitly integral and complex view that I explore in the final section draws from close readings of Aurobindo, Gebser, Jung, Morin, and to a lesser extent, Wilber, all of whom advocate and (at least attempt) to enact various forms of postformal thinking which not only recognize the limits of the principle of contradiction, but remain open to the promptings of intuition and the value of metaphor.

## From Eternal Recurrence to the Eternally Occurring

Discussions of the possibility or nature of survival often focus on the question of whether a different (subtler) kind of substance or body survives the decay of the physical body, or on the question of “where” the soul or personality goes after death. These are important considerations. What is generally not recognized, however, is that to think of survival in terms of place or extended substance, however subtle, is to appeal to only one of two complementary forms of intuition—the spatial—at the expense of the temporal. Without denying the truth or fruitfulness

of approaching the matter from the side of our spatial intuition, it seems to me that an integral view of survival would include a full consideration of the temporal intuition as well. From a philosophical, and specifically Kantian, point of view, the temporal intuition is germane to the internal sense or the experience of consciousness—and therefore to notions of soul and personality—whereas the spatial intuition is associated with the experience of an external world, and therefore also of matter or extended substance.<sup>3</sup> So while the spatial intuition is certainly appropriate and even necessary in any talk of subtle “bodies,” the experience of self-consciousness, of personality or soul, can only be approached or described spatially from the outside, as it were. To approach the question of the soul and survival directly and from the inside, therefore, is to grapple with the mystery of time.

And so I begin with Nietzsche, whose theory of eternal recurrence he considered the central insight of his life’s work, and indeed of the age that he helped to inaugurate. Though his relationship to Christianity is complex, there is no doubt that Nietzsche rejected the traditional Christian view of personal immortality, which he saw as arising out of a hatred of, and revulsion from, life. The belief in any form of after-life was to him an expression of anti-life, a flight from nature and becoming to a lying fantasy of individual imperishability. Having absorbed the full impact of the modern project of disenchantment that began (however unintentionally) with Copernicus, Nietzsche was compelled to reject the possibility of any kind of transcendent “beyond.” What, then, could constitute the ground of value? What is capable of granting meaning and value to our individual endeavors and to life as a whole? His answer was: Life or the cosmos itself—beyond which is nothing—in the form of self-conscious and therefore liberated Will-to-Power.

Earlier in the century, Schopenhauer (1966) had articulated his vision of an infinite though blind and unconscious Will as the ontological ground of reality—a vision in keeping both with the darker side of the later Romantic movement and with a certain reading of Buddhism. The suffering caused by the impossibility of satisfying the Will’s boundless craving could only be countered, according to Schopenhauer, through a systematic negation of the Will in the form of a sublimation of the life-impulse (particularly, through esthetic contemplation). This vision was transformative for Nietzsche. He soon rejected Schopenhauer’s pessimism, however. And while he retained the centrality of the Will, he came to see the life-impulse—with which, for Schopenhauer, the Will was more or less identified—as itself a manifestation of the Will-to-

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<sup>3</sup> Kant’s understanding of the inner sense and its relation to time, though influential in the subsequent history of philosophy, is anything but crystal clear. The key statements from the *Critique of Pure Reason* are as follows: “By means of outer sense, a property of our mind, we represent to ourselves objects as outside us, and all without exception in space” (1929, p. 67). “Inner sense, by means of which the mind intuits itself or its inner state, yields indeed no intuition of the soul itself as an object; but there is nevertheless a determinate form [namely, time] in which alone the intuition of inner states is possible, and everything which belongs to inner determinations is therefore represented in relations of time. Time cannot be outwardly intuited, any more than space can be intuited as something in us” (p. 67). As I understand it, the basic idea seems to be that, *experience as such*—“the mind [which] intuits itself or its inner state”—necessarily involves the fact of *succession* (what James will later call the “stream of consciousness”), and so the form of time. There is also, to my mind, the mysterious role of the *will* which Schopenhauer (1966), in his revisioning of Kant, considered the true *noumenon* and which, as I suggest later in this paper, might play a crucial part in the manifestation of time.

Power, that is, the drive of every being to extend or magnify its proper domain or sphere of influence. According to Nietzsche, this drive is as manifest in the life-affirming worldview of classical paganism as in the life-denying spirit of late-antiquity and historical Christianity. Ignorance of the nature of life—and indeed, of all human striving, however idealistic or spiritual—as an expression of the Will-to-Power constitutes a form of bondage. The bondage is doubly oppressive in the case of the world-deniers, whose illusory “beyond” serves not only, as Marx would put it, as the opium of the people, but as a vampiristic drain on life’s nobler impulses and possibilities for authentic happiness.

By contrast, the liberated, because self-conscious, Will is portrayed as manifesting an unconditional blessing or affirmation of life, of what was, is, and shall be—an unqualified and joyfully uttered “Yes!” to the whole causal nexus, the entire sequence of moments within which the present is embedded. This blessing is a radically free act, which at the same time is yoked to an awareness of a universal and inexorable fatalism (a yoking which Nietzsche expresses with the phrase, *amor fati*, the love of fate). That this awareness does not lead to a sense of oppression or despair, but instead is, or can be, accompanied by a boundless joy, is the result of his insight into the nature of time as eternal recurrence, an insight which he nevertheless characterizes as “*The greatest weight.*”

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!” Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.” If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 273)

The more general idea of recurrence is of course ancient and wide-spread (see Cairns, 1962), beginning with what might be described as a naturalistic cyclism (e.g., most indigenous cultures, ancient Taoism) inspired by the repeating pattern of the seasons and the periodicity of the sun, moon, and stars. Next, and presupposing the latter, there is an ideal-formal cyclism (Plato, Aristotle, Shankara) which sees the natural or cosmic cycles as embodiments of subtler archetypal patterns. Then there is the stronger form of the belief in eternal recurrence, which involves not only seasonal patterns or ideal types, but every last detail of the cycle of becoming. This strong view of recurrence, which Nietzsche adopted, is in fact very close to that of the ancient Pythagoreans, Stoics, and Epicureans, and especially the latter two, since they too were materialists.<sup>4</sup> Though I suspect there are unknown sources in Nietzsche’s own immediate

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<sup>4</sup> According to Nemenius, the Stoics believed that “in stated periods of time a conflagration (*ekpyrosis*) and destruction of things will be accomplished, and once more there will be a restitution of the cosmos as it was in the very beginning. And when the stars move in the same way as before, each thing which occurred in the previous period will without variation be brought to pass again. For again there will exist

experience, a feeling for which we can glean from the passage above, he also articulated a version of the Epicurean argument based on the assumption of a finite set of possible material or formal combinations in a temporally infinite universe.

If the world may be thought of as a certain definite quantity of force and as a certain definite number of centers of force--and every other representation remains indefinite and therefore useless--it follows that, in the great dice game of existence, it must pass through a calculable number of combinations. In infinite time, every possible combination would at some time or another be realized; more: it would be realized an infinite number of times. And since between every combination and its next recurrence all other possible combinations would have to take place, and each of these combinations conditions the entire sequence of combinations in the same series, a circular movement of absolutely identical series is thus demonstrated: the world as a circular movement that has already repeated itself infinitely often and plays its game *ad infinitum*. (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 549)

No one, of course, is swayed by such an argument who is not already predisposed to the worldview it is meant to prove. I, for one, do not find it convincing, though I do find it sometimes compelling and can appreciate the elegance of its logical structure. And while my rejection of eternal recurrence, at least as formulated by Nietzsche, is doubtless grounded in infra-rational, and perhaps also supra-rational, promptings, I also object to the doctrine on logical and phenomenological grounds. Phenomenologically, if each life, each moment, and ultimately the entire history of the cosmos, is one instance of an infinite series of (factually or ontologically) identical instances, then the *experience* of each instance would also be identical. There would be no way, empirically speaking, of telling one apart from any other in the series. Logically, according to Leibniz's Law or the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, we are driven to the conclusion that, in fact, there can only be one of each given instance, whether a moment, a life, or the history of the cosmos as a whole. Still, there is something behind Nietzsche's insight, something in the quality of the experience as the demon whispers in his ear with the moonlight between the trees, that resists the application of Leibniz's Law. It is the sense that, though he could not believe in a redeeming afterlife, nothing of value in *this* life is ever lost—for, as Nietzsche's (1969, p. 333) Zarathustra proclaims, "all joy wants eternity —/ Wants deep, wants deep eternity." The moment, however, must not only be simply preserved in the manner of a dried flower or even a particularly vivid memory, but must somehow *sur-vive*, blessed as it flies, in Eternity's sunrise.<sup>5</sup>

The best illustration I can think of at this point to express what I am trying to get at comes from a dream I used to have periodically. I would discover a secret room in my family's house, filled with all kinds of objects from my childhood. Among these was a stack of the most amazing kind of photographs. Seen from the corner of the eye, as it were, nothing seemed out of the ordinary, but as soon as I focused my attention on one, the scene would come to life. I remember

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Socrates and Plato and every man, with the same friends and fellow citizens, and he will suffer the same fate and will meet with the same experiences and undertake the same deeds...And there will be a complete restoration of the whole, not only once but many times, or rather interminably, and the same things will be restored without end." (Nemenius, as quoted in Cairns, 1962, pp. 220-221)

<sup>5</sup> Blake's lines in "Eternity" run: "He who binds himself to a joy/Does the winged life destroy:/But he who kisses the joy as it flies/Lives in eternity's sunrise" (1988, p. 56).

one in particular, where I am splashing happily in the shallow, sun-sparkled water at the lake where we used to spend our summer vacation. It is perhaps a five to ten second scene, almost like a video clip. As long as you attend to it, it is “playing.” Not in the manner of a loop tape, however—and here the analogy breaks down—since nothing in the scene is repeated. Not the eternal recurrence of the same, in other words, but the scene as somehow eternally occurring.

## Journey to Platonía

Despite Nietzsche’s prominent role in initiating the post-modern turn, his cosmology retains a more or less Newtonian view of space and time, in the sense that they are conceived of distinctly as infinite container and continuous forward flow, respectively (the circular character of the eternal return involves the patterns or configurations of matter rather than the temporal flow itself). All of this changes with the new physics. The dominant tendency, with respect to time, has been to consider it in some fundamental sense an illusion, “even if a stubborn one,” as Einstein said (referring to the distinction between past, present, and future). “Since Einstein,” Paul Davies notes, “physicists have generally rejected the notion that events ‘happen,’ as opposed to merely *exist* in the four-dimensional spacetime continuum” (1995, p. 253). The germs of this tendency are actually already hidden in Newton, Descartes, and Galileo with the formal geometrification of nature and has its roots in the Parmenidian/Pythagorean/Platonic stream of the Western philosophical tradition and its preoccupation with the geometrical and mathematical ideals of stasis and symmetry.

Julian Barbour has recently produced a fascinating and substantial argument for the dominant post-Einsteinian view—or perhaps, more accurately, for an original direction that is consistent with this view—in his book, *The End of Time: The Next Revolution in Physics*. At the core of the argument is an extension of Machian mechanics, which is to say, a vision which does away with space and time as the “ultimate arena” of matter and instead conceives of motion and inertia purely in terms of differences between relative configurations of the totality of objects which constitute the universe. To get at the essence of this vision, Barbour asks:

What is the reality of the universe? It is that in any instant the objects in it have some relative arrangement. If just three objects exist, they form a triangle. In one instant the universe forms one triangle, in a different instant another. What is to be gained by supposing that either triangle is placed in invisible space? The proper way to think about motion is that the universe as a whole moves from one “place” to another “place,” where “place” means a relative arrangement, or configuration, of the complete universe. (Barbour, 1999, p. 69)

Much of the book is devoted to demonstrating the compatibility of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics with Mach’s vision. I will not attempt to rehearse the main steps of the argument, which are not only challenging in their details but include original interpretations of many standard and some highly speculative episodes in the history of physics (from Newton’s bucket experiment around the principle of inertia to the stationary Schrödinger and Wheeler-De-Witt equations).

Barbour's main contribution to the Machian project is the formulation of his concept of "Platonía," which is conceived of as an n-dimensional phase-space, "each point of which corresponds to one relative configuration of all the particles in the Newtonian arena" (Barbour, 1999, p. 273). The invocation of Plato indicates that the phase-space, or configuration space, as Barbour prefers to call it, is to be conceived ontologically on the analogy of the realm of eternal and unchanging Forms or Ideas.<sup>6</sup> Platonía is "the collection of all possible Nows" (p. 177), the totality of instants of what we call time. Despite the use of "Now" and "instants," however, Barbour maintains that time as such does not exist. "[I]nstant of time," he writes, "simply means configuration of the universe" (p. 266).

Barbour's is perhaps the most sophisticated defense of the "block universe" theory of time, where "[e]verything—past, present, and future—is there at once" (p. 143). To do full justice to his argument, I would have to say something about his ingenious theory of "records" or "time capsules," by which he accounts for our experience of the past and of apparent histories, but I must leave this to interested readers to pursue on their own. For my part, while I am very sympathetic not only to much of the reasoning presented, but also to what I take to be the experiential and motivational backdrop to the theory—which I will turn to in a moment—I think at the very least that Barbour has overstated the case, if he is not simply wrong, in asserting the "end" or non-existence of time. It is one thing to demonstrate the formal possibility of an essentially geometric (and therefore already spatialized) model of both motion and the phenomenon of histories in a way that reduces the experience and reality of time to points in configuration space (however high or complex the dimensionality). But to say that, in his model, time is simply "reduced to *change*" (p. 70, my emphasis), merely begs the question of time. The experience or phenomenon of *passage* between instants indeed involves the concept of change (as do *lived* histories), but change itself presupposes the reality of time. Even if one wants to avoid the notion of motion, change in configuration is impossible without some form of *dynamic* principle that selects the new instants, frames the group, or traces the path or trajectory through Platonía. There is *choice* or *agency* involved, in other words, which effects the transition between configurations.

What is this dynamic principle behind change, motion, passage, transition, and therefore time? It is, I would maintain, the *Will*, or something closely analogous to what we experience and call by that name. I am not thereby necessarily endorsing Nietzsche's version of the Will-to-Power, but perhaps we can speak of a *Will-to-Time* that blows across the topography of Platonía. While the block universe—insofar as it draws from platonic idealism—can be considered antithetical to Nietzsche's positive valuation of life and becoming, Barbour at least seems to share key elements of Nietzsche's outlook. "I also feel strongly," he writes, "that *this* created world is something to be marveled at and cherished, not dismissed as some second-best version of what is yet to come" (p. 327). Barbour's Platonía is after all a physics of *this* world, the whole point of which is not to lift us into a contemplation of immaterial forms, but to help us see how the fleeting world of appearance, which for the traditional Platonist is insubstantial and in a sense

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<sup>6</sup> Surprisingly (if I am not myself mistaken), Barbour misreads, and inverts, the famous analogy of the cave, placing the Idea-sensitive mathematician in the cave contemplating the projected images on the cave wall instead of in the clear light of day above-ground.



unreal, is in fact eternally abiding.<sup>7</sup> Though, in my opinion, unable to account for the experience of time as *lived*, Barbour does offer an approach to the same kind of insight that we have seen lies at the heart of Nietzsche's vision—namely, that the now which passes in some sense lives on, as does the now which, from any given perspective, has yet to be. Instead of the (complexified) block universe of Platonism, we are brought once again to the idea of the world as eternally occurring.

## Holonic Survival

“The desire for an afterlife,” Barbour writes in his concluding pages, “is very understandable, but we may be looking for it in the wrong place” (p. 331). Perhaps—or at least we may need to look with different eyes, ones that are sensitive to the subtle hues and fine shades of the afterlife. So far, my readings of Nietzsche and Barbour have yielded the possibility of the survival of a life—and each of its constitutive moments or instants—that does not necessarily involve the common idea of the persistence of the soul or personality beyond the death of the body. In this section I will turn to the more common idea, drawing on the insights of Fechner and Whitehead—two great souls whose theories have much to offer towards what might be called an organic or holonic theory of survival.

Though rightfully recognized as one of the founders of experimental psychology, Fechner (1906, 1946) was also one of the great philosophers of nature (*Naturphilosophen*) in the tradition of Schelling and Oken. What is also generally ignored in the textbooks is the degree to which Fechner's life-work centered on the transpersonal nature of the soul and its likely post-mortem fate. According to Fechner, everything that lives has a within, an inner radiance of consciousness or soul. The soul, or psyche, is in fact nature seen from within, just as nature is soul seen from without. This is the fundamental insight behind Fechner's theory of psychophysical parallelism. On the analogy of the human being, whose consciousness or soul is associated with a body manifesting a certain level of organizational complexity, Fechner reasons that the living Earth, which is equally if not more complexly organized than the human body, must also possess its corresponding consciousness or soul—the *anima mundi* of the ancients and the philosophers of nature.<sup>8</sup> Blindness to the *anima mundi* is result of what Blake called “single vision and Newton's sleep,” or of the dominance of what Fechner referred to as the “night-time view” of the world.

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<sup>7</sup> We see here the effect of the intervening two millennia of western cultural history and the evolution of consciousness, and especially the last five hundred years. The central symbol of the Incarnation which guided the western religious imagination, followed by the modern process of secularization (itself in many ways an organic expression of the symbolic world it was to negate), both involved a radical reevaluation of the cosmos (and especially this “sublunary” realm of becoming) in a direction in many ways antithetical to the otherworldly orientation of Platonism, which, in other respects, has come to dominate the spirit of modern physics.

<sup>8</sup> In his *Zend-Avesta*, Fechner (1906) reasons to the World Soul as follows: “Examining the various points of resemblance as well as of difference between man and earth, we discover on the one hand an agreement between them in every point which in any theory of the relation between body and soul has been established as characteristic of a spiritual individuality connected with a material organism, whereas their undeniable differences make it evident that the earth is an individuality of higher and more independent life than man's lower and more restrained life” (p. 16).

A master of what was known by the Romantics and idealists as “intellectual intuition” or what, more recently, David Bohm has called “intuitive reason” (Bohm & Kelly, 1990; Bohm & Peat, 1987), Fechner explores a series of finely drawn analogies, moving from the bottom up, from the microcosm to the macrocosm, which facilitate a deepening apprehension of the within of things, from the souls of plants to the *anima mundi* and the Divine Mind, or rather Personality, whose body is the cosmos itself. In so doing, he initiates us into the “daylight view,” which is to say a way of “seeing” the inherent luminosity or self-radiance of being which we are, and which surrounds and permeates us. This world soul, at least as far as our earthly life is concerned, constitutes at once the psychic ecosystem of all living souls, and also in some sense a relatively autonomous personality in its own right, with its own memory and biography, its subpersonalities or complexes. At the same time, the world soul is itself a distinct member of the community of souls which together constitute the soul of the cosmos or the mind of God.<sup>9</sup>

Fechner believed that, after the death of the body, the soul awakens to its participation in the life of the world soul. His central analogy for the passage from life to afterlife is the transition from perception to memory or reminiscence. My favorite method of witnessing the peculiar character of this transition involves ringing a bell or bowl, with a single stroke, and tracking the experience of the sounding tone or tones until the very moment one is conscious of not hearing any more of the original sound. Immediately—and by this I mean, without a discernible interval—there is the memory of the sound. I find this lack of distinct border between the two experiences or occasions fascinating to experience, particularly in the context of a sustained meditation on the nature of time and its relation to experience or consciousness, to the continuity of personal identity, and of course the question of survival. In this context, pursuing the analogy, Fechner writes:

When then my eyes are closed in death, and my sensible life of perception is extinct, may there not awake instead of it a life of memory in the higher Spirit? And if through me during my life of sense-perception that Spirit saw clearly and vividly...what is there and in precisely the way it presents itself, will not now the memory of everything that was comprised in the duration of the moment of perception...begin independently to live and stir, and to get into relationship and communication with the circle of memories which the greater Spirit has gained by the death of other men? But just as truly as my life of sense-perception was that of a being sensible of independence and of separateness within that Spirit, just so truly must this be the case with my life of memory [and therefore with personal consciousness in the afterlife]. (Fechner, 1946, p. 256)

As Fechner sees it, therefore, the individual soul survives the death of the body in the form of a continuing experience of personal identity which, without losing its specific individuality, nevertheless finds itself in a more “clear and conscious” (Fechner, 1906, p.18) relation to the “divine spirit” of the cosmos. Similarly, and again on the analogy of the relative gain in imaginative freedom in the passage from perception to memory or recollection, the “means of our mutual intercourse” as awakened soul-beings increase “in intimacy, variety and consciousness” (Fechner, 1946, p. 20).

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<sup>9</sup> Fechner imagines that, intermediary between the world souls and the mind of God, are the souls of the various solar systems. Presumably, had he the benefit of our telescopes, he would have added the galaxies to the scale of cosmic beings.

Though some theologians might question his inclusion of the individual soul within the world soul, Fechner's vision of survival—and I have presented only a kind of line drawing as compared to the richly painted canvas of his many texts dealing with the matter—is consistent with the traditional Christian view of both the uniqueness (“once only”) of the terrestrial life and of the persistence and immortality of personal identity. This vision of survival relies heavily on a fine use of the *spatial* intuition, in the first place with the theory of psychophysical parallelism, where the psyche is characterized as the “within” and the physical as the “without;” and secondly with the idea of organic or holonic *inclusion* (the notion of systems within systems, as with the relation of cells < tissues < organs < bodies < ecosystems), made parallel to the *temporal* relation of this life to the *after-life* by means, as we have seen, of the central analogy of the transition from perception to memory. The time factor enters the picture here with the experience of *transition*, as also in Fechner's characterization of death as a second birth (that is to say, as a *passage* to a new and higher life).

Anyone familiar with Whitehead's philosophy of organism will have no trouble in seeing its profound affinity with Fechner's vision. In contrast with the latter, however, which relies so heavily on the spatial intuition, Whitehead focuses on the nature and, as he sees it, the pervasive reality, of process. Correlatively, while Fechner's cosmos—despite its thoroughgoing organicism in other respects—is still more or less Newtonian in its view of time (which, independently of matter, “flows equably without relation to anything external” [Newton, 1846, p. 77]), Whitehead's view of both space and time are fully consistent with the cosmology of the new physics. These contrasts have profound, if decidedly complex and by no means unambiguous, implications for our understanding of survival.

If I could only present a poor sketch of Fechner's vision, my rendering of Whitehead's insights, couched as they are in such challenging language and dealing with the most abstruse of scientific and philosophical preoccupations, must be considered as a kind of hurried silhouette, though hopefully one that captures the likeness. “One all-pervasive fact,” writes Whitehead, “inherent in the very character of what is real is the transition of things, the passage one to another” (1969, p. 93). This fact is highlighted by the idea of nature or reality as *process* (hence the reference to Whitehead's system as “process philosophy”), and is consistent with the dominance, beginning with and continuing throughout the modern period, of the experience of change, whether in the form of social or political revolutions, the ideology of progress, the theory of evolution, or scientific and technological advance. In keeping with this experience, Whitehead characterizes the nature of reality as consisting not of things, stuff, or abiding substance, but rather of “actual *occasions*” or “*events*.” From the point of view of more recent science, matter, he notes, “has been identified with energy, and energy is sheer activity; the passive substratum composed of self-identical enduring bits of matter has been abandoned, so far as concerns any fundamental description” (Whitehead, as quoted in Datta, 1961, p. 429). In a direct challenge to the Cartesian dualism, actual occasions are said to emerge through and as a process of “prehension” and “feeling,” which not only grants an irreducible subjectivity or interiority to the world's constitutive elements, but points as well to the essential fact of *relationship* in the definition of these elements. Equally challenged is the Newtonian view of “simple location,”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> “To say that a bit of matter has *simple location*,” writes Whitehead (1969, p. 58), “means that, in expressing its spatio-temporal relations, it is adequate to state that it is where it is, in a definite finite

since the pervasiveness of process prohibits the setting of fixed boundaries between occasions or events. This fact is only amplified, of course, when Relativity and quantum non-locality are brought into the picture. “In a certain sense,” Whitehead therefore feels free to say, “everything is everywhere at all times. For every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location. Thus every spatio-temporal standpoint mirrors the world” (p. 91). Here we have a particularly vivid expression of the organic or holonic (or holographic) quality of Whitehead’s vision—which explains why, along with “process philosophy,” it is referred to as the philosophy of *organism*.

The organic or holonic quality expressed in the above quotation appeals primarily to the spatial intuition (with the words “everywhere,” “location”, and “standpoint”), despite the reference to “times” at the beginning and to “spatio-temporal” at the end. The same quality, however, is evident through a more direct—though, as we shall see, somewhat paradoxical—appeal to the temporal intuition with Whitehead’s notion of the “satisfaction” of an actual occasion and its passage into the state of “objective immortality.” “The final phase in ... constituting an actual entity,” writes Whitehead, “is one complex, fully determinate feeling. This final phase is termed the ‘satisfaction’” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 48). The entity or occasion “terminates its becoming in one complex feeling involving a completely determinate *bond with every item in the universe*, the bond being either a positive or a negative prehension” (p.44, my emphasis).

What is described here from the point of view of the actual occasion as a culminating “complex feeling” can also be understood as “the attainment [which] halts its process, so that by transcendence it passes into its objective immortality as a new objective condition added to the riches of definiteness attainable, the ‘real potentiality’ of the universe” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 223).

I am reminded here of Fechner’s analogy of the transition from perception to memory, though of course Fechner has in mind the immortality of the soul or personality (and not an elementary occasion), and envisions a subjective rather than an “objective” immortality.

I said above that Whitehead’s appeal to the temporal intuition is paradoxical because the concepts of an actual occasion’s “satisfaction” and “objective immortality” involve the “*termination* of becoming” and the “*halting* of process.” The difficulty here has to do with the fact that any talk of “termination” or “halting” presupposes a backdrop of time—or, which comes to the same thing, a perception of continuous motion as measured against a stationary and extended background. Although Sherburne, who speaks authoritatively for Whitehead, speaks of a “succession of phases” in the “genetic process” or “conrescence” of an actual occasion, he claims that conrescence<sup>11</sup> itself “is not in time; rather, time is in conrescence in the sense of being an abstraction from actual entities” (Sherburne, 1966, p. 36). I cannot claim to resolve these seeming paradoxes, and in this respect I am no further along than Augustine, who was the

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region of space, and through a definite finite duration of time, apart from any essential reference of the relations of that bit of matter to other regions of space and to other durations of time.”

<sup>11</sup> Conrescence “is the name given to the process that *is* any given actual entity; it is ‘the real internal constitution of a particular existent’ .... Conrescence is the *growing together* of a many into the unity of a one” (Sherburne, 1966, p. 212).

first to point them out.<sup>12</sup> Though perhaps irresolvable, however, they are nevertheless potentially generative of a higher or more complex kind of insight, the nature of which we shall consider in more detail in the next section.

The idea that time is “in” actual occasions rather than the reverse is an expression of the “epochal” theory of time. In this theory, time is said to be structured or generated by the configurations of actual occasions as “drops of experience,” which, though themselves the “atoms” of time, also have “duration.”<sup>13</sup> These temporal occasions can be arbitrarily divided according to various abstract metrics, though not without destroying the concrete depth and texture of the occasion’s duration (and hence its subjective immediacy or experiential integrity). One can imagine such occasions as subsumed in more complex temporal occasions (or “events”)—for instance, this moment as I hold the thought while typing this sentence is integral to the period I spend at the computer working on this particular section of the paper. Since this period, however, though distinguishable as a kind of gestalt from what came before it and what is to follow, is nevertheless continuous with the same, the division into higher-order temporal occasions is somewhat arbitrary. *As I see it, perhaps the only natural boundary one encounters in the scale of temporal occasions, apart from the proposed atomistic “drops,” is a completed life.* The point I want to make, however, is that the drops of experience, as atoms of time, are not, as we have seen, themselves “in” time. Their duration is qualitative and not subject to the same kind of metrical mapping (by coordinate grids) as is possible in the comparison *between* occasions. By the same token, a complete(d) life, as a complex or higher-order temporal occasion, is also not “in” time, which doesn’t mean that, from the perspective of the life as incomplete, time does not flow. What this does mean is that, appearances to the contrary, there is a sense in which, or a (meta-) perspective from which, a life is both complete and fully present (not merely passed or yet to be), along with all of its constitutive moments or “drops” of experience.

Such a meta-perspective, of course, can only be that of God (by any other name). That Whitehead’s position suggests what Hartshorne (1951, p. 543) describes as “the unfading everlastingness of all occasions in God” is supported by Whitehead’s claim that “[e]ach actuality in the temporal world has its reception into God’s nature. The corresponding element in God’s nature is not temporal actuality, but is the transmutation of that temporal actuality into a living, ever-present fact (Whitehead, 1978, p. 350).” Questions remain, however. There is no consensus among process theologians as to whether or not this immortality or “everlastingness” involves the persistence, in the form of the continuing experience, of personal identity—what is normally

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<sup>12</sup> See Augustine’s unparalleled (in insight and beauty) treatment of time in Book XI of the *Confessions* (1979) where, along with the idea of that the past and the future (as memory and anticipation) exist only as inflections of the present, he treats of the paradox of time as, on the one hand, the present or the now which is discrete and not extended (*spatium*), and on the other, the association of time with measurement (longer and shorter, before and after) which implies continuity and extension.

<sup>13</sup> This is the idea of the “specious present,” most notably associated with James, which argues against the identification of the experienced present with the non-extended or one-dimensional “instant.” James’s understanding of the matter was influential in Bergson’s idea of “duration” and Whitehead’s idea of actual entities as “drops of experience” and “atoms of time.” On the specious present, see Robert de Poidevin’s article in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, @ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/time-experience/> (3/6/04).

understood by the term “soul”—or merely the essence, everything “that can be saved” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 346), of the world’s becoming or “fluency,” as Whitehead calls it.<sup>14</sup> An intermediary position, the gist of which we have already seen with my reading of Nietzsche’s eternal return and with Barbour’s notion of Platonia, would be that what to us are past occasions—including, for instance, your subjective experience of waking up this morning or of greeting your neighbor in the street, with all of its phenomenological particularities—remain as vivid and livingly present, or eternally occurring, actualities for God. According to Bergson, we ourselves could, in principle, experience what this might be like. As Richard Field points out in his paper on “William James and the Epochal Theory of Time:”

It is not ... inconceivable, according to Bergson, for the whole of a person’s past to be thrust into the immediate awareness of the present... for Bergson attention is directed by interest. Remove practical interest, and it becomes quite possible that our normal distinction between the past and present would cease to be a psychic fact. If such an eventuality actually took place, experience "would . . . include in an undivided present the entire past history of the conscious person, not as instantaneity, not like a cluster of simultaneous parts, but as something continually present which would also be something continually moving." (Field, 1983, pp. 260-274)<sup>15</sup>

Also at issue is the question of the future, and more generally, of the ultimate significance of time from the point of view of God or the Divine. According to Kraus in her *Metaphysics of Experience, A Companion to Whitehead’s Process and Reality*, not only is it the case that, “from the divine vantage point, the endless fruitions of the creativity are simultaneously co-present in the immediacies of their self-creative activities,” but the divine concrescence is always already in some sense “complete insofar as past and future are not relevant terms....” Again: “From the divine perspective, time becomes space in the sense that all ‘times’ are co-present in divine feelings....” At the same time, however, Kraus also recognizes that “God’s physical feeling” is “incomplete, in that the future from any perspective is not yet actual and is perpetually actualizing itself” (Kraus, as cited in Edwards, 1981, pp. 30-34). Edwards, for one, strenuously objects to what he describes as Kraus’s Boethian and Thomistic reading of Whitehead. “The view that the future is incomplete and indeterminate only from our finite perspective,” he writes, “whereas it is complete and determinate from the divine perspective is just the view which

<sup>14</sup> Whitehead seems to have left the matter open, through lack of both compelling evidence, on the one hand, and of a sufficiently coherent theory, on the other. In *Religion in the Making* he notes: “Also at present it is generally held that a purely spiritual being is necessarily immortal. The doctrine here developed gives no warrant for such a belief. It is entirely neutral on the question of immortality, or on the existence of purely spiritual beings other than God. There is no reason why such a question should not be decided on more special evidence, religious or otherwise, provided that it is trustworthy. In this lecture we are merely considering evidence with a certain breadth of extension throughout mankind. Until that evidence has yielded its systematic theory, special evidence is indefinitely weakened in its effect.” Retrieved February 29, 2004 from <http://website.lineone.net/~newthought/ritm1.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Two realms of contemporary research provide analogues to Bergson’s imagined scenario: the experience of the “life-review” in Near-Death-Experiences (NDEs), and a certain class of non-ordinary experience (potentially present, for instance, in psychedelic work or other, non-drug, engagements of the deep psyche or “mind-at-large”) which could be characterized as transpersonal, in that it involves the transcendence of the temporal constraints that help to define the personal ego in its ordinary state of consciousness (see Grof, 1988).

process theology rejects rather than affirms, though there may be more than one way of developing an alternative metaphysic available to process thinkers” (Edwards, 1981, pp. 30-34).

I would like to consider such a metaphysical alternative in the following section. To conclude this one, however, I will simply say that my own metaphysical musings have led me to side more with Kraus than with Edwards as far as the above seeming paradox is concerned. For, as Whitehead puts it: “All the opposites are elements in the nature of things, and are incorrigibly there. The concept of ‘God’ is the way in which we understand this incredible fact—that what cannot be, yet is” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 350).

## **An Integral or Complex-Holistic View**

The metaphysical alternative that I will focus on in this last section is based largely on the philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and Hegel, though I will draw as well from the work of Jean Gebser and Edgar Morin when I turn to more specifically epistemological considerations. So far, with the possible exception of Fechner, the theoretical schemes we have entertained have brought us to the threshold, without fully crossing over, of what I would consider an integral view of survival—a view, that is, which is capable of accommodating, through the consistent application of a single generative principle, apparently mutually exclusive views (including in particular the mainstream Christian, or “once-only” view, and the idea of reincarnation). The articulation of such a view, I have suggested, must involve a correspondingly integral view of time. Aurobindo and Gebser, as we shall see, each have very suggestive things to say in this respect. As for a potential candidate for the generative principle that might exemplify the meaning of “integral,” I have proposed in other contexts the principle of “complex holism,” which I derived primarily from a sustained dialogue between Hegel and Jung (see Kelly, 1993) but which has since been significantly inflected by Edgar Morin’s work on the principles of complexity (see Morin, 1977, 1980, 1981, 1982). The principle itself involves the recognition that:

such terms as nature and spirit, the finite and the infinite, the universal and the particular, the individual and the collectivity, are dialectically related or mutually implicative. Any position which maintains the absolute priority of either term is necessarily abstract and, therefore, ultimately false. The only concepts not subject to the same constraints are those of the Whole or the Absolute which, though normally contrasted with the notions of the parts and the relative, include these, their apparent opposites, in their very concepts. That the holism advocated... is *complex* points to this necessary inclusion of particularity, differentiation, and relativity within the whole under consideration. The complexity in question also involves... the elements of dynamism and process. “The True,” as Hegel says, “is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development.” (Kelly, 1993, p. 2)

The friendliness of this principle to Whitehead’s overall approach (and specifically with respect to his central insight into the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness”) should be obvious. To my knowledge, Aurobindo’s understanding of “integral non-dualism” represents the richest, most creative, and far-reaching application of the principle of complex holism. One advantage of my terminology is that it is not *necessarily* associated with any particular metaphysical position.

Secondly, it allows for a more easily established rapport with contemporary scientific and philosophical developments. Still, it will sometimes be sufficient, or more precise, to use “integral” or “complex” instead of the more awkward “complex holistic.”

Along with his commitment to a metaphysical Absolute—which, aligning himself with the Vedic tradition, he calls Brahman and describes as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, or infinite Being-Consciousness-Bliss—Aurobindo argues forcefully against the once-only view of life and in favor of the doctrine of reincarnation.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, however, his eloquent plea (Aurobindo, 1951, p. 295) for a “logic of the Infinite” which rejects the “closed system” and “rigid definition” and instead looks for the “complete and many-sided statement” ought, in my opinion, to allow for the peaceful coexistence of both views. The possibility, and even the necessity, for such coexistence becomes even more apparent if one places the question of survival in the context of Aurobindo’s statements about what we might call integral time. In the *Life Divine*, Aurobindo speaks of three “states of consciousness with regard to its own eternity” that the “Being” can assume (p. 327). The first he describes as the “timeless eternity” of the “Self in its essential existence,” a state “without development of consciousness in movement or happening.” The second is the “stable status or simultaneous integrality of Time,” where “what we call past, present and future stand together as if in a map or settled design or very much as an artist or painter or architect might hold all the detail of his work viewed as a whole.” The third is the “Time movement,” that is, a “progressive movement” and “successive working out of what has been seen...in the static vision of the Eternal” (pp. 327-328). While he speaks of three states, or a “triple status,” he also refers to the first and third together as the “two powers of the self-awareness of the infinite and eternal Reality,” or to “the same Eternity viewed by a dual self-awareness” (p. 329). This leads me to suggest that a more coherent sequence would put the third “state” (the “Time movement”) second, and that the “simultaneous integrality of Time,” as the new third, would correspond to the “simultaneous integrality of Time” proper to the self-awareness of Brahman as the truly “infinite and eternal Reality.” My suggestion is borne out by the concluding paragraph of the section of the *Life Divine* from which I have been quoting where he writes that the “coexistence” or “simultaneity” of these two moments or “powers”—“a power of status and non-manifestation [the first moment], a power of self-effecting action and movement and manifestation [my second moment]:

however contradictory and difficult to reconcile it might seem to our finite surface seeing, would be intrinsic and normal to the Maya or eternal self-knowledge and all-knowledge of Brahman, the eternal and infinite knowledge and wisdom-power of the Ishwara, the consciousness-force of the self-existent Sachchidanada. (Aurobindo, 1951, p. 329)

There is a fascinating parallel here with a brief and undeveloped passage in the closing section of *Process and Reality* on “God and the World” where Whitehead refers to the “threefold

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<sup>16</sup> Aurobindo’s main argument can be summarized as follows: The universe is engaged in the evolution of consciousness. This evolution depends upon the emergence of ever more realized individuals who carry the process forward. If the spiritual gains of individual lives were lost at death, evolution could not proceed. Therefore, “the rebirth of the soul in the body becomes a natural and unavoidable consequence of the truth of the Becoming and its inherent law. Rebirth is an indispensable machinery for the working out of a spiritual evolution; it is the only possible effective condition, the obvious dynamic process of such a manifestation in the material universe.” (Aurobindo, 1951, p. 672)



creative act” of the universe. The first moment of this act is “the one infinite conceptual realization,” by which I understand the infinite potential of the “primordial nature” of God. This corresponds quite nicely to Aurobindo’s first moment of “timeless eternity.” Whitehead’s second moment is “the multiple solidarity of free physical realizations in the temporal world”—a clear match with Aurobindo’s “Time movement.” The third is “the ultimate unity of the multiplicity of actual fact with the primordial conceptual fact” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 346), which again is a very good match with my suggestion for Aurobindo’s third moment, the “simultaneous integrality of Time” (the earlier qualifier—“stable status” is perhaps less compatible with Whitehead’s insistence on divine process, though this is a matter of interpretation).

Now, anyone familiar with the history of philosophy will immediately see, if not the influence, then certainly the shadow of Hegel on both of these threefold formulations of the nature of time and its relation to the Absolute or to “God and the World.” As to the question of influence, Whitehead claims not to have been able to read Hegel, which is ironic, given the same claim so often made by those who try to approach Whitehead. While the “logic of the Infinite” which pervades all of Aurobindo’s work is clearly Hegelian in spirit, there are no references to Hegel (other than to him being a “great philosopher”) in his voluminous works. Both Aurobindo and Whitehead, of course, were educated in England during the ascendancy of the British neo-Hegelians and so would have absorbed much of Hegel’s spirit without necessarily even being conscious of the fact. Influence or no, however, it remains the case that Aurobindo’s integral non-dualism and Whitehead’s philosophy of process or organism are both profoundly resonant with key features of Hegel’s speculative vision. Along with the dominant stress on holism, there is, as the above correspondences clearly indicate, the idea of a threefold dialectical structure or organizational pattern with respect to time and its relation to the divine and/or the cosmos. In place of the hackneyed, though still in some ways helpful, sequence of thesis, antithesis, synthesis, it is more revealing to contemplate such categorial triads as identity, difference, and the identity of identity and difference;<sup>17</sup> universal, particular, and individual; essence, appearance, and actuality. All of these triads map onto Aurobindo’s (in my reconfiguration) and Whitehead’s threefold distinctions in a way that clarifies their shared deeper meaning. From a Jungian point of view, these triads are all expressions of the dialectical relations between the archetypal sphere of the collective unconscious (first moment) and that of the conscious ego (second moment), relations which constitute the nature of the Self as complex whole (third moment) (see Kelly, 1993, especially Chapter One: *Logical Categories and Archetypes*).

Putting aside the question of influence, Aurobindo claims that his logic of the Infinite is an expression of the deeper truth of the Vedas and their philosophical elaboration in the tradition of Advaita Vedanta. In contrast with the classical Advaita (“non-dualism”) of Shankara, however, Aurobindo’s is qualified by the term “integral” (*purna*) so as to avoid not only the typical advaitan “negation” of the world (and therefore of time) as illusion, but also that of the modern West which has tended in the direction of the denial of transcendence and the reality of Spirit. Whitehead gives no explicit pedigree for his notion of God as the harmony of “antitheses” or “ideal opposites” (including, at their head, that of permanence and flux, and then one and many, transcendent and immanent, potential and actual). He does, however, use Christian allusions, most notably the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” (Whitehead, 1978, pp. 348-350), but also with

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<sup>17</sup> The “identity of identity and difference” was Hegel’s first definition of the Absolute (see Hegel, 1977).

reference to the “judgment,” “patience,” and “love” of God. Notably absent in the writings of both figures are any references to the Christian Trinity. I say notably since, according to Hegel, the Trinity is the mythic or symbolic source of the idea of the dialectic, which is certainly the case for Hegel’s foundational articulation of the idea.<sup>18</sup> The point I want to make here is that, regardless of possible routes of influence, the integral or complex holistic view of time that I am envisioning, given its clear compatibility with both Aurobindian non-dualism and Whiteheadian organicism, should be able to accommodate the simultaneous truth of the (predominantly eastern) reincarnationist and (dominantly Christian) once-only views of life and survival.

Before pursuing this compatibility any further, I want to give the reader a better idea of what an integral or complex-holistic time-sense, in its most developed form, would look like by quoting an extraordinary passage from the last chapter of Aurobindo’s *Synthesis of Yoga*, which he calls “Towards the Supramental Time Vision.” The passage is striking not only because of the flow and rhythm that seem to mirror the manner in which the insights appear to have come to him, but also because of the way the insights themselves challenge us to remain open to the possibility that, as Whitehead says, “what cannot be, yet is.” “All intuitive knowledge,” writes Aurobindo,

comes more or less directly from the light of the self-aware spirit entering into the mind, the spirit concealed behind mind and conscious of all in itself and in all its selves, omniscient and capable of illumining the ignorant or the self-forgetful mind whether by rare or constant flashes or by a steady instreaming light, out of its omniscience. This all includes all that was, is or will be in time and this omniscience is not limited, impeded or baffled by our mental division of the three times and the idea and experience of a dead and no longer existent and ill-remembered or forgotten past and a not yet existent and therefore unknowable future which is so imperative for the mind in the ignorance. Accordingly the growth of the intuitive mind can bring with it the capacity of a time knowledge which comes to it not from outside indices, but from within the universal soul of things, its eternal memory of the past, its unlimited holding of things present and its prevision or, as it has been paradoxically but suggestively called, its memory of the future. (Aurobindo, 1999, p. 897)

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<sup>18</sup> Significant for a deeper exploration of this matter would be a consideration of the traditional distinction and relation between the so-called “immanent” and “economic” Trinities (that is, God in eternity and God in time, respectively). In “Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God,” Wolfhart Pannenberg provides a contemporary Christian reflection on the relation of the Trinity to time: “[T]he presence of God is different, since it is no other than his future. Furthermore, it is important that this statement refers to the trinitarian God as a unity, not to the three persons in their distinctiveness, except as they participate in the one divine essence. Concerning their mutual relationships it may be said that the Son is the future of the Father, because it is the Son who establishes the kingdom of the Father on earth. Similarly, the Spirit is the future of the Son since it is the Spirit who raises Jesus from the dead. But again, the Father is the future of both, the Son and the Spirit, since it is the Father’s kingdom they bring about by their joint activities. As they all share in the communion of the one living God, however, they share in his eternal life that has no future outside and beyond itself to occur to it. The trinitarian God has eternal life within himself.” Retrieved February 28, 2004 from [http://www.ctinquiry.org/publications/reflections\\_volume\\_3/pannenberg.htm](http://www.ctinquiry.org/publications/reflections_volume_3/pannenberg.htm)

Obviously, if one has not been graced with the kind of “intuitive knowledge” Aurobindo alludes to here, the supramental time vision that he describes will be more or less credible or coherent, depending not only upon what one has been able to ascertain through conceptual analysis, but doubtless as well upon all kinds of unconscious or pre-reflective beliefs and assumptions. I will not argue the case here. Granting for the moment the authenticity of Aurobindo’s experience and the conceptual coherence of integral time, what are the implications for the notion of reincarnation, the truth of which Aurobindo so strongly advocates?

To begin with, if it is the case that all of what to our ordinary consciousness is conceived of as lives yet to be lived, from the integral perspective of the intuitive mind “stand together,” in Aurobindo’s analogy, “as if in a map or settled design” along with the present life and those of the past (one is reminded here of Barbour’s Platonica), one cannot cling too firmly to the idea of a soul which migrates from body to body, from life to life. We have seen that, for Whitehead’s God, all (to us) past occasions are experienced in their “unfading everlastingness.” For Aurobindo, at least, this is true as well for all future occasions, so that, despite the analogy of memory that is commonly invoked, it is more a matter, from the point of view of the Divine, of a *living* supersensory *presence*. Each life, in other words—however seemingly distant in our past or future—is always and already ensouled, is inalienably associated with its own soul, whose personal and singular drama is ever unfolding in the Eternal Now. And just as on a map—or better, in the actual experience of the territory—one cannot conflate two distinct locations and still know where one is, so one cannot conflate or identify, without significant qualification, any two lives, whether yours and mine in this shared present, or this life (yours or mine) and another in the apparent past or future. All of which seems to support the traditional Christian view of the soul as linked to only one life (and my reinterpretation of Nietzsche’s view of the eternally occurring quality attaching to each individual life).

What then of reincarnation? To begin with, it is important to distinguish between the belief in a soul *substance*—which, at least in the way it is normally pictured, exists in the same space-time as the body with which it is associated and which, having “left” the body at death, “enters” a new one in a future life—and the *experience* of past-life recall and associated phenomena. Rupert Sheldrake (1989), in his book *The Presence of the Past*, suggests that his theory of morphogenetic fields provides a way of modeling what is experienced as past-life recollections without having to assume the literal belief in a transmigrating soul. The idea would be that, through the process of “morphic resonance,” aspects of a current life (whether specific events acting as triggers, or more deep-seated structural or organizational patterns of a life or personality) call up memories stored in the non-local, immaterial, and potentially everlasting field associated with the previous life (or lives). Aurobindo’s “supramental time vision” implies something very similar, only that it is not merely a question of residual fields but, as we have seen, of continually unfolding and fully present lives—a vital presence, not only of the past, but of the future as well in the “simultaneous integrality of Time.” Given this presence, one can even more readily imagine how all the phenomena associated with the idea of reincarnation could be attributed to a kind of resonance between (from the perspective of the Divine) mutually present lives.

It is of course possible that the distinct souls I have evoked in association with all of our eternally unfolding lives are not the souls that people who believe in reincarnation have in mind,

are not the “I” that says, “I was such and such in a past life,” but are rather mere egos or personalities. Even if we grant these personalities the kind of vital immortality I am suggesting, and even if we can account for past-life phenomena without appealing to anything beyond them, how are we to answer Aurobindo’s claim that, without rebirth, there is no way to provide for the evolution of consciousness—that is, for the “return” of Brahman from the scattered multiplicity of His self-induced involutory trance? But Aurobindo has already supplied us with most of the necessary elements for an alternative formulation of this admittedly highly complex and speculative issue. In the first place, he himself, despite the premium he attaches to universal evolutionary process, speaks from a noetic certainty of the supramental realization, which he invites us to intuit, of Brahman as Infinite Being-Consciousness-Bliss, which means that the trance is not only self-induced but always and already broken. Or we could say that, as paradoxical as it might sound, Brahman or the Divine is *simultaneously* in the deepest of hypnotic slumbers *and* completely wide-awake. Without denying the reality of evolution, or more generally of time as passage (the second of our three “moments” above), therefore, we must be able—and indeed are called upon to do so given the complexity of the matter—to conceive of the nature of the soul and its relation to life and the after-life or survival in a way that does not depend *solely* on the image of a single soul substance journeying through time from body to body.<sup>19</sup>

The second element to consider is the notion of the Jivatma or “spiritual Person” who “is one in his nature and being with the freedom of Sachchidananda who has here consented to or willed his involution in the Nescience for a certain round of soul-experience, impossible otherwise, and presides secretly over its evolution” (Aurobindo, 1951, p. 680). This “Person” does not itself evolve but is “unborn and eternal although upholding the manifested personality from above” (Aurobindo, 1972, *Letters*).<sup>20</sup> It is to this Jivatma that I take Aurobindo to be referring, in the passage I quoted earlier on the supramental time vision, when he speaks of “the spirit concealed behind mind and conscious of all in itself and in all its selves.” It is this Person too who stands in full possession of “its eternal memory of the past, its unlimited holding of things present and its prevision or, as it has been paradoxically but suggestively called, its memory of the future.” Given this, to us, paradoxical relation to time, could we not conceive of the many “selves” which, from one perspective (that of the second “moment”), manifest sequentially as a number of karmically related lives, as (from the third, integral or complex holistic moment) *also* so many *co-existing sub-personalities* of the more complex Person? Would we not have here an analogue to Fechner’s understanding of World Spirits or Angels?<sup>21</sup> A scale of beings or selves begins to

<sup>19</sup> As Bache (2006, pp. 120-121) points out: “There is nothing inherent in the theory of the soul that commits us to the atomistic isolation of previous theories. The soul is a quantum-like phenomenon, an open field suspended in dynamic tension with surrounding fields.”

<sup>20</sup> Aurobindo calls the evolving soul the “psychic being,” the *caitya purusha*. It is the representative of the *Jivatma* or “soul essence.”

<sup>21</sup> In the fourth volume of his *Vehicles of Consciousness*, Poortman asks: “What, then, *is the* world-mind? Is it the sum total of the whole scale of the units of consciousness embracing each other? In that case, there must be an increasing—and perhaps also decreasing—degree of unity or perfection. What in fact it comes down to is that we are concerned here with concrete, superposed units which are at the same time limited, in which case we can never come to the point where we have a transcendent unit which really embraces everything. These limited units may, in their own way, be quite venerable...as were Ishvara in Indian thought and Plato’s Demiurge, but they remain what I have called infrasubjects. It is even possible

suggest itself, in order of increasing complexity and—with certain qualifications—wholeness, each with its own constraints and freedoms with respect to the experience of space and time. At the highest or most inclusive level there would be the Godhead (Aurobindo's Brahman or Sachchidananda), the Whole or Absolute by any other name. Next would be the cosmic Deities, of which there might be an indefinite number, and which might include the God of Fechner and Whitehead. Whether or not such Deities experience themselves in their own kind of time with an unknown future is, as we have seen, open for debate. Presumably the World Souls would exist as sub-personalities or part-selves of the Cosmic Deities (again, not knowing if solar systems, galaxies, or even larger cosmic structures have corresponding selves), just as individual soul-personalities would be members of the community of selves that constitute, or are gathered together in, a given World Soul. In this logic, the Jivatma would be a Self intermediary between a World Soul and the soul-personality or "Psychic Being," as Aurobindo most often calls it.<sup>22</sup> As for the Jivatma's time sense, there is no reason why it could not, while being simultaneously conscious of standing "outside" or "above" time as experienced by its many part selves (that is, as you and I experience it most of the time), also be capable of novel experience and so, even if it doesn't evolve, has something at least analogous to our experience of an unknown future. Whatever the likelihood or specific nature of such a scale of selves, it ought to be clear in any case that there is no reason to accept a forced choice between one life or many, or indeed, as we have seen, between the members of any number of categorial oppositions that present themselves to the metaphysical imagination.

What is needed above all in such matters is the cultivation of a way of thinking, a way of "seeing" and "hearing" that is sensitive to the wholeness and complexity of the things we name self or soul, life, and time, and knowing that the naming in no way diminishes the mystery we are trying to fathom. Two of my great allies in this respect have been Edgar Morin and Jean Gebser. From Morin I have learned to see the complexity of wholeness in terms of such principles as the *dialogic* and *recursivity*. Like Hegel's dialectic, the dialogic concerns the relation between antitheses or incompatibles. Muting somewhat Hegel's stress on the reconciling potential of the third moment, Morin defines the dialogic as the "symbiotic combination of two [or more] logics [that is, discourses or dominant categories] which remain *both* complementary *and* antagonistic" (see Morin, 1977, p. 80; 1980, p. 82). Recursivity refers to the circularly causal relation between structural elements or categories that constitute a complex system. A process is recursive when it "causes/produces the effects/products necessary for its own regeneration" (Morin 1977, p. 186; 1981, p. 162). It is "the circuitous process whereby the ultimate effect or

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to imagine these demiurges—however central or exalted their status might be within their own sphere—coming together from time to time on a friendly basis and perhaps even... making mistakes. This is a clear example of their infrasubjectivity and I can only say how right Heymans was to refuse to place the world-consciousness of psychical monism, with all its sub-divisions..., on the same footing as the traditional concept of God." (Poortman, 1978, p. 110).

<sup>22</sup> See Frederick Myers's suggestive conclusions: "I hold that ... it is possible that other thoughts, feelings and memories, either isolated or in continuous connection, may now be actively conscious... in some kind of coordination with my organism, and forming some part of my total individuality. I conceive it possible that at some future time, and under changed conditions, I may recollect all; I may assume then various personalities under one single consciousness, in which ultimate and complete consciousness, the empirical consciousness which at this moment directs my hand, may only be one element out of many." (Cited in Taylor, 1996, p. 66)

product becomes the initial element or first cause" (Morin, 1977, p.186). With the help of Morin I see how the relation of the one to the many (whether of lives or of selves), of stasis to flux, or the eternal to time, is to be conceived dialogically and recursively, giving up the need for what Hegel calls the "fixed determinations" of merely intellectual knowing (Hegel's *Verstand*, Aurobindo's "lower Mind"). The One both produces and repels the Many, which produce and repel the One. "Eternity is in love with the productions of Time," says Blake. Yes, but there is also enmity, strife, or opposition. Blake again: "Without Contraries is no Progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*).

From Gebser (1985) I get the suggestive coupling of "integral" (which he derives from Aurobindo, without, however, adopting his metaphysics) with "aperspectival," which to him means the overcoming of the kind of spatial-perspectival mindset now commonly associated with the Cartesian-Newtonian worldview. The "single vision" of this mindset is more or less locked in the second "moment" of difference and forced alternatives (transcendence or immanence; many lives or one, etc.). For the integral-aperspectival consciousness, by contrast, incompatible categories are "transparent" or "diaphanous" to one another, as are the structures of consciousness (in this case, especially the mythic—which is "preperspectival"—and the mental, which is perspectival) within or in relation to which the categories are variously inflected.<sup>23</sup> According to Gebser's characterization of the structures of consciousness, the traditional view of reincarnation—with its associated view of cyclical time, and with its more symbolic or imagistic and narrative qualities (the soul as a migrating entity)—would seem to be more at home in the mythic structure. The Christian once-only view—with its associated view of linear time, and despite its mythical elements (view of last Judgment, of Heaven and Hell)—could only arise after the emergence of the mental structure. The modern secular view—linear time, materialistic, and therefore no real survival—is firmly embedded in the late or "deficient" mental (where a more contemplative and qualitative reason is increasingly reduced to a more instrumental and quantitative rationalization; see Gebser, 1985, p. 93f). Whereas a merely or predominantly mental approach (and particularly in its deficient mode) to the question of survival will tend toward an exclusive identification with one of the possible alternatives—say, the (seemingly more "scientific," and therefore mental) view of a single life that "resonates" with the fields of past lives versus the more traditional (and originally mythic) view of reincarnation as transmigration—an integral-aperspectival view will see the virtues of both alternatives, along with their limitations, and will feel free to shuttle from one to the other as the context demands. What I have stressed in this paper is that such an integral-aperspectival view will require a suitably complex rethinking of the nature of time. "The coming to awareness of 'time' in its full complexity," as Gebser says, "is a precondition for the awakening consciousness of time-freedom [that is, freedom from mental-perspectival, and therefore spatialized, time]. The freedom from [perspectival] time in turn is the precondition for the realization of the integral

<sup>23</sup> The ancient Stoic view of eternal recurrence—which is both cyclical and materialistic, imagistic (the universal fire) and rationalistic (determinism)—is typical of a period (late antiquity) where mythic and emergent mental elements coexist in various syncretistic forms (the Christian view represents another such form). Nietzsche's version of eternal recurrence, though so close to the Stoic view in many respects, also manifests the dawning of the integral-aperspectival. This is evident in Nietzsche's stress on openness and freedom, and in the transparency between myth and philosophy, between the symbolic and the conceptual, in his major writings (especially *Thus Spake Zarathustra*).

consciousness structure that enables us to perceive the aperspectival world” (Gebser, 1985, p. 289). The integral-aperspectival can therefore be interpreted not so much a structure of consciousness (like the mythic or the mental) as it is an “opening” or clearing, as Heidegger might put it, between or in the midst of the various structures and their associated categories.

Jennifer Gidley summarizes Gebser’s position as follows:

Gebser’s nuanced *concretion of time* does not represent a linear developmental endpoint like that of the modernity project, nor is it endlessly recursive in non-directional cyclical space as in Eliade’s “myth of the eternal return”..... Integral consciousness as understood by Gebser does not place mythic and modern constructions of time in opposition to each other, as both modern and traditional approaches tend to do. Alternatively, Gebser’s *temporic concretion* is an intensification of consciousness that enables re-integration of previous structures of consciousness—with their different time senses—honoring them all. It opens to new understanding through atemporal translucence whereby *all times* are present to the intensified consciousness *in the same fully conscious moment*. (Gidley, 2007, p. 176)

This integral “moment” where “all times are present” resonates well with my proposal for all lives as participating in an ever-living present. I also applaud Gidley’s insight that Morin’s paradigmatic notion of “RE” (which is primarily associated with the notion of *recursivity* or circular causality, as epitomized in all living or self-organizing processes)<sup>24</sup> “appears to align with Gebser’s concretion of time” (p. 183). In this context, however, the recursion in question is not that of evolutionary processes, though neither does it contradict these processes. Rather, here it is question of a theoretical and methodological recursion between different “temporics” or time perspectives (see Gidley, 2007, p. 174) and their related conceptions of the soul and its associated life/lives. In contrast with an integral or complex-holistic (meta-) point of view, these conceptions are generally embedded within the mythical and (sometimes deficient) mental structures. The latter’s perspectival ordering, in particular, militates against a generative encounter among competing views and conceptions.

While through the glass of merely mental consciousness we see ourselves and our world but darkly, in the clearing of the integral-aperspectival we can wander freely in worlds without borders and behold one another face to face.

## Concluding Remarks

In contrast to most reflection on the nature of the soul and its relation to the afterlife, this study’s focus on the dimension of time has led to several novel proposals:

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<sup>24</sup> For Morin, living processes are not only self-organizing, but auto-eco-*re*-organizing, where “eco” refers to the necessary coupling of the organism or system with its environment, and “re” indicates that, as *living*, the organization is ever renewed. This renewal involves a cluster of related processes, including repetition, regeneration, and reproduction. At the heart of RE is a dialectic—or dialogic, as Morin prefers to call it—between the “retro” (preservation or reestablishment of the same) and the “meta” (the emergence of novelty). See Morin (2005).

1. *A neglected possibility for the nature of survival: the “past” (along with all moments, all lives) as “eternally occurring” in an “ever-living present.”* This is suggested through the pursuit of an intuition through encounters with Nietzsche, Julian Barbour, Whitehead, and Aurobindo. This leads to:
2. *A (modified) resonance model of past life phenomena* (modified since, in contrast to Sheldrake and Laszlo, it is not merely a question of resonance between a given presently embodied life and the residual fields of past lives, but of resonance among the fields of so many mutually present lives); and
3. *The possibility of harmonizing the traditional Christian (and Jewish and Muslim) “once-only” view with the many lives view normally associated with belief in reincarnation.* Provided, that is, we work with:
4. *A more integral, complex-holistic model of personality: including the possibility of a higher-order personality (jivatma; daimon? angel?) as an intermediary between human personality and the Godhead as the Absolute Person.* Here we are guided by Fechner (*anima mundi*), as well as by the analogy of sub-personalities (Myers) or complexes (Jung). The suggestion here is that what to us appears as a series of lives arrayed in a line leading up to the present might, to the higher-order personality, be experienced as so many mutually contemporary *dramatis personae*. (Given the properties of resonance, we need not imagine that the “cast” of any given higher personality be fixed. By the same token, we can imagine that any one life might belong to several different “casts” simultaneously. There is no reason, moreover, not to consider the possibility of more than one person sharing the same past life).
5. *This kind of inquiry and research demands the articulation and enactment of an integral or complex-holistic method/way of thinking and speaking/writing,* especially when dealing with such difficult issues as the possibility of survival. The model here is Hegel and Aurobindo’s “logic of the Infinite,” which I read through the lens of Morin’s principles of complexity and Gebser’s notion of the integral-aperspectival. Such a logic allows us to hold in creative tension what otherwise appear to be mutually exclusive points of view.

For this kind of logic—whether we call it integral-aperspectival or complex-holistic—the question of time and the nature and fate of personality or the soul is an occasion for subtle musings and intuitive leaps, which to the uninitiated (or simply uninterested) seem both wild and gossamer thin. “It is not indispensable to formulate mentally to oneself all this,” Aurobindo once counseled one of his disciples,

one can have the experience and, if one sees clearly with an inner perception, it is sufficient for progress towards the goal. Nevertheless if the mind is clarified without falling into mental rigidity and error, things are easier for the sadhak of the yoga. But plasticity must be preserved, for loss of plasticity is the danger of a systematic intellectual formulation; one must look into the thing itself and not get tied up in the idea. Nothing of all this can be really grasped except by the actual spiritual experience. (Aurobindo, 1972, pp. 265-287)

Even awaiting the experience, we can take his good counsel and strive, since we cannot escape the bodily death, to avoid that all-too-common intellectual rigor mortis which would pronounce the matter closed and settled one way or another.



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