

The Great Discovery

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PART I

The Great Discovery

This story is presented in the form of a supposed dialogue between two friends — Tom and Roger — with completely different views on life.

After a brief silence, Roger asks:

— Tom, why do you keep defending the existence of God? There is no scientific proof of God, so I do not believe in Him. I only believe in what I see and in what science proves. Get ready, my friend, get ready for the end, for nothingness.

Tom laughs at his friend's dramatic tone and asks:

— So we are going into nothingness? What is nothingness?

Roger takes his friend's question like a punch in the stomach and, surprised by what Tom has asked, replies:

— Nothingness is nothingness, it is non-existence, it is the void.

Tom, who already expected his friend's answer, asks:

— You say that the existence of God has no scientific proof, so it makes no sense to believe in His existence. But what about nothingness — does nothingness have scientific proof?

Roger, once again surprised by Tom's question, replies:

— Tom, stop philosophising. That question of yours makes no logical sense. Of course nothingness exists, everyone knows that.

Tom asks further:

— How can nothingness have scientific proof if it does not exist? Yes, nothingness does not exist, my dear Roger. And even though nothingness does not exist — which obviously means it has no scientific proof — you

still believe in its existence.

— It does not exist? — asks Roger, incredulous at his friend's statement — Of course it exists. If something exists, then nothingness must exist too. Nothingness is the opposite of everything.

— Now it is you who are philosophising, Roger. Nothingness does not exist. Since it does not exist, it cannot have scientific proof. Think with me: does man know everything about everything?

Roger answers quickly:

— Of course not, what nonsense, we are very far from knowing everything about everything, if we are ever able to know everything about everything at all.

Tom then asks:

— How, then, can you believe in the existence of nothingness? How can you speak of nothingness if you do not know everything? How can you consider nothingness to be the final destiny of the soul?

Roger is astonished by his friend's argument and says:

— Such a thing had never crossed my mind.

— That is natural — Tom replies — Few people devote themselves to such reasoning. Almost everyone lives a very mechanical life: they are born, they grow, and they depart from this life without ever having questioned this order of ideas.

Roger, clinging to a lifeline like a drowning man to sustain his atheistic thinking, says:

— Wait a moment, Tom. There is something you are missing.

— What? — asks his friend.

— Science speaks of the vacuum and, more recently, quantum physics speaks of the quantum vacuum. Is that not nothingness? — asks Roger.

— For someone who does not know everything, yes, the vacuum, or the quantum vacuum, could indeed be nothingness. But it is not. And as we have already concluded, no one knows everything about everything.

Roger, not entirely satisfied, insists:

- But Tom, does quantum physics not show that there are events which happen without a cause? Particles that arise spontaneously from the vacuum, without any apparent reason? Would that not be proof that chance exists and that nothingness can produce something?

Tom answers calmly:

- That is an excellent question, Roger, and it shows that you keep yourself informed. But there are two errors here that must be separated. First, the quantum vacuum is not nothingness — it is a field of energy with well-defined properties, governed by precise mathematical laws. A field of energy with laws is not nothingness, it is something. Second, when quantum physics speaks of events without an apparent cause, the key word is apparent. It means that we do not yet know the cause, not that the cause does not exist. It is the same principle as nothingness and chance — they express the limit of our knowledge, not the absence of reality.

Roger falls silent for a few moments and says:

- So the quantum vacuum, far from being proof of nothingness, is one more proof that there is always something rather than nothing.
- Exactly — says Tom — The question is not what quantum physics still cannot explain, but that everything it discovers confirms the same thing: there is always order, there is always law, there is always something.
- Yes, that is true, but just as I cannot say that nothingness exists, you also cannot affirm that nothingness does not exist. Right?

Tom looks at his friend and says:

- My friend Roger, in a way I can, because to this day there is no scientific evidence that could point us to the existence of nothingness. And we have already realised that the vacuum, or the quantum vacuum, is not evidence of the existence of nothingness. On the other hand, if you think about nothingness, you realise that it is nothing more than a completely abstract concept, devoid of any meaning. It is truly an absurdity.

Roger is impressed by his friend's reasoning. He never expected the conversation to lead him to clash head-on with his own convictions and to reconsider them.

When Roger was about to speak, Tom says:

— There are completely absurd expressions that people commonly use. Some people say, for example, I want a roll with nothing, or I want a roll without nothing. The correct thing would be to say: I want a roll without anything. A roll without anything is a roll without any other food or ingredient.

— That makes sense — says Roger — We often use certain expressions to which we pay not the slightest attention. They are absurd expressions, repeated from generation to generation, without ever being abolished from everyday vocabulary.

— A great truth, Roger. When we do not know that we are using an absurd expression, how can we eliminate it from our vocabulary?

Roger, settling comfortably on the sofa, says:

— I confess that I was very impressed by your reasoning on the question of nothingness.

Tom takes the glass of Port wine that his friend hands him and says:

— It is understandable that it should be so. One of the great pillars of atheism has been destroyed. Yes, I am referring to nihilism.

Roger, curious, asks:

— Nihilism? Explain that to me better.

— Nihilism is the belief that existence has no meaning, purpose or value. And its ultimate foundation is precisely nothingness — the idea that in the end everything dissolves into the void. If nothingness does not exist, nihilism loses the ground on which it stands. There is no way to argue that existence is meaningless if there is no nothingness to receive it in the end.

Roger, taking a sip of his wine, says:

— But I remain an atheist. It is not because nothingness does not exist that I abandon my conviction.

Tom laughs and says:

— I expected that from you, my friend. So, after death, where do we go? You can no longer say that we go into nothingness.

Roger already expected his friend's question and says:

— It is true, I can no longer say that we go into nothingness. But we simply cease to exist.

Tom, taking something to eat, states:

— No, my dear Roger! Neither the body nor the soul ceases to exist. The body is transformed; the soul is a matter for another conversation.

Roger, intrigued, says:

— Transformed? Explain that to me.

— Science itself tells us that energy is neither created nor destroyed, it is only transformed. The physical body, after death, does not disappear — its elements return to nature, they are transformed. The matter that constitutes us existed before us and will continue to exist after us. Therefore, not even on the physical plane is there annihilation. There is transformation. The question of the soul, that indeed will be left for another conversation.

Roger laughs and, also taking something to eat, says:

— If the soul is a creation of God, and God does not exist, then no soul exists either.

— We will speak of the soul in another conversation. — says Tom — Answer me one question...

— Which one? — asked Roger.

— Who, or what, created the universe?

Roger takes his glass, drinks a sip of wine, and states:

— The universe is the work of chance and of the laws that gave rise to it and govern it.

Tom replies, saying:

- My friend Roger, the work of chance! That is another pillar of atheism which is also easily destroyed.
- Tom, explain to me your point of view as to why the universe is not the work of chance.
- Yes, Roger, the universe cannot be the work of chance.
- Why? – asks Roger – How can you affirm that?
- When someone affirms that a certain thing is the work of chance, does that mean that this thing is truly the fruit of chance? Or is it rather that the one who affirms it does not understand the reason or the motive why that thing happened? Would that person have an understanding of everything related to what caused that thing to happen? It is once again the same principle, my dear Roger. How can we speak of the existence of chance if we do not understand everything about everything? Nothingness and chance are words, they are expressions that reveal our ignorance of something.

Roger was, once again, surprised by his friend's reasoning. For a moment he was unable to articulate any reply. It took him some time to process Tom's answer. After a while, he says:

- Yes, we often call chance certain events that we do not know or do not understand. But are there not situations where it truly is the work of chance?

Tom, who already expected Roger's question, says:

- It is the same principle as nothingness, Roger! Chance is an expression of language that people use to refer to an unknown cause of an event.

Roger becomes thoughtful and says:

- If chance does not exist, if it is only an expression of language, the product of our ignorance of the cause of a given event, how do you explain that the universe is full of chaos, of disorder, of stars that are destroyed, absorbed by black holes, of destructive cosmic events? How can you believe that the universe is the work of an intelligent being?

Tom breaks into a smile and says:

— My wife is alarmed when she sees my study and says that everything is disorganised, untidy, a chaos. Yet, if no one touches anything, I know where each thing is. When she tidies or organises my study, I no longer know where anything is. I only know again when I put everything back according to my own order.

Roger bursts out laughing and says:

— But Tom, that analogy presupposes precisely what you are trying to prove — that there is an intelligent being behind the order!

Tom smiles and replies:

— You are right, Roger, and that is exactly the point. The analogy is not a proof, it is an illustration. What it shows is that the appearance of chaos always depends on the point of observation. The order of my study looks like chaos to my wife because she does not know my system. In the same way, what seems to us like chaos in the universe may simply be an order that our intelligence is not yet able to understand. And notice — even what we call chaos in the universe obeys precise mathematical laws. Black holes, supernovae, the expansion of the universe — everything follows laws. And laws, as we shall see, do not arise from chance.

Roger lets out a booming laugh and says:

— My friend, the universe is far larger and more complex than your study!

Tom and Roger could not stop laughing.

— Yes, it is true — says Tom — The universe is far larger. But if you think about it a little, you will realise that the intelligence of the most intelligent man on Earth is incapable of understanding the order of the universe. And because we do not understand it, it seems wrong to us, a matter of chance.

Once again, Roger is caught off guard by his friend's reasoning.

— Yes, but would the laws that govern the universe not be capable of creating it and sustaining it?

— Laws, codes, are the fruit of an intelligence. Things are as they are because something made them so. Where did those laws come from? From nothingness? From chance? We have already reached the

conclusion that nothingness and chance are only expressions of language.

Roger, thoughtful, says:

— You are right. A law always implies a lawgiver. I know of no law — neither physical, nor mathematical, nor moral — that arose by itself, without an intelligence behind it.

Tom nods and says:

— Exactly. And notice the sophistication of those laws. The gravitational constant, the speed of light, the charge of the electron — if any one of these values were slightly different, the universe would not exist, stars would not form, life would be impossible. The probability that all these constants have the exact value they have, by chance, is mathematically indistinguishable from zero. Physicists themselves call this the problem of the fine-tuning of the universe.

Tom, after a pause, continues:

— Some people think that the human race was created by extraterrestrials. They think that beings from other worlds interfered and created the human being.

— How absurd! — says Roger.

— Let us not dwell now on the question of the existence of intelligent life on other worlds. Let us, rather, for a few seconds, grant that those people are right. Yes, let us grant that it was beings from other worlds who created the human race. The question that arises is: who or what created those beings from other worlds? If people think that with this argument they can disprove the existence of God, it backfires on them.

— Yes, that is true! — says Roger — It is a good question.

— There are people who think that the life existing on Earth was brought by asteroids that fell here, coming from the universe. Let us, for a second, grant that yes, it was brought from space to here. The question that arises is: what created that life that came from the universe? It is the same principle as those who claim that beings from other worlds created the human race.

— Indeed, it really is the same principle. Wherever life comes from, it must come from somewhere.

— Precisely. As Voltaire said: If God did not exist, He would have to be invented. Voltaire said that because without Him the universe could not exist and we could not be here having this conversation.

Roger, curious, asks:

— Voltaire? Was he not one of the greatest critics of religion?

— Exactly. And it is precisely for that reason that it is so significant. Voltaire was not religious, he was a deist — he believed in a creative intelligence through the force of reason, not through faith. And it was precisely through reason that he reached that conclusion. This shows us that the path we are treading is not exclusive to believers or the religious. It is a path open to anyone who thinks with rigour.

— I am beginning to understand your point of view. But tell me: can you prove that the universe is not the work of chance?

— Of course! — says Tom — The simple fact that chance does not exist is already a proof in itself. But I could add yet another.

— Which one? — asks Roger.

— My dear Roger, do the following: gather sheets of paper, and on each one place each of the letters that make up the poem *The Lusiads*, as well as each comma, each full stop, each space... everything. Take all those papers and get into a helicopter. When you are high up, throw all those papers down to the ground. If chance exists, it will arrange them all so as to form that poem. Make as many attempts as you like. On the day you achieve that feat, tell me, and I will abandon my conviction of the existence of God and will come to admit that chance exists and that it is the cause of the universe. And notice, that poem is a far smaller and simpler work than the universe. When you succeed, let me know.

Roger, smiling, says:

— It is a magnificent image. But I imagine there is a way to make it even more concrete.

— There is. The mathematician Fred Hoyle calculated that the probability of the proteins necessary for the simplest life forming by chance is one in ten to the power of forty thousand. To give you an idea, there are approximately ten to the power of eighty atoms in the entire observable universe. A number with forty thousand zeros surpasses any human notion of possibility. Hoyle, who was a convinced atheist, was so disturbed by this calculation that he ended up admitting that life could not be the work of chance. His own words were: The probability of life having arisen by chance is comparable to the probability of a hurricane sweeping through a scrapyard and assembling a Boeing 747. And notice — Hoyle was not religious. He was a scientist who followed the numbers as far as they led him.

— It is impossible! — says Roger.

— Just as it is impossible that the universe is the work of chance.

Roger, realising that his atheistic conviction was going down the drain, says:

— All right, nothingness does not exist. Chance does not exist. But that does not prove that the universe is truly the work of God.

Tom became excited by his friend's question and said:

— The universe exists, correct? Then, whatever created the universe is what I call God. Other people call it by many other names. Names do not matter. What matters is the being. The cause of causes. The primary cause of all things.

Roger, thoughtful, says:

— But Tom, is calling it God not giving it characteristics that we cannot prove? It could simply be a force, an energy, something impersonal.

— That is a legitimate observation, Roger. And notice one thing — the correct question is not who God is, because who already presupposes a personal, human figure. The correct question is what God is. And what reason tells us is that this cause exists, that it is intelligent — because it produced laws and order

— that it is eternal — because if it had had a beginning it would require a prior cause — and that it is unique — because if there were two primary

causes, one would necessarily be superior to the other, and that one would be the true primary cause. Call it what you will. What you cannot deny is the being.

Roger, raising his hand, says: — Wait, Tom. Before I accept that, there is a contradiction that troubles me. You say that this cause created the universe. But science says that nothing is created, everything is transformed. If nothing is created, how could this cause have created the universe? Either nothing is created, or the universe was created. It cannot be both.

Tom smiles and says: — The law that nothing is created and nothing is destroyed is a law that operates within the universe, after it exists. It is a law of the system. But the primary cause is not within the system — it is the cause of the system. It was the cause that established that very law. The creation of the universe is not a transformation of energy that already existed. It is the origin of energy and of the laws that govern it. Conservation applies to what is within the universe, not to the act that gave rise to it. That is why there is no contradiction: within the universe, nothing is created; but the universe itself was created.

Roger nods slowly: — The rule holds for the game, but not for the one who invented the game.

Tom smiles: — You could not have put it better.

— You are right, my friend! God exists. I have no further arguments that could deny His existence. Do you think God cares about us?

Tom breaks into a smile and says: — Just as you and I want the best for our children, and we are imperfect, how much more must God want for us?

Roger, thoughtful, says: — But Tom, that is an emotional argument. How can you prove by reason that God cares about His creatures?

— By the same reasoning we have used so far. We have already concluded that the primary cause is intelligent and that it produced laws with extraordinary precision — the fine-tuning of the universe we spoke of. Now, an intelligence that calibrates with such precision the conditions for life to exist does not do so out of indifference. Indifference does not build so carefully tended a house for a guest it despises. But there is an

even more solid answer, Roger, and it requires that we first come to know the very nature of God — His attributes. When we do, you will see that God's care for His creatures is not a wish nor a hope, but a necessary consequence of what God cannot fail to be. Let us leave that conversation for our next meeting.

THE END

PART II

The Great Choice

This story is presented in the form of a supposed dialogue between two friends — Tom and Roger — who have completely different views on life. In the first part, we addressed the question of God, the cause of causes, and the scientific-philosophical proofs of His existence.

After a brief silence, Roger asks:

— Tom, is today the day you will speak to me about the soul and its destiny after death?

— Before we speak of the question of the soul and its destiny, we must seek to know at least a little of the nature of God. We do not yet know all that He is, but we can already form an idea of what He cannot fail to be. We already know of His existence; now we need to understand His attributes.

— And what are those attributes? — asks Roger, growing ever more curious.

— God is the supreme and sovereign intelligence. He is eternal, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, sovereignly just and good, infinitely perfect, unique. These are the attributes that God cannot fail to have.

Roger looks at his friend and says:

— Explain that better. Why can God not fail to have these attributes?

Tom, pleased by Roger's question, explains:

— God is the supreme and sovereign intelligence because He encompasses the infinite. For that reason, it must be infinite. If we supposed it limited at any point, we could conceive of another being more intelligent, capable of understanding and doing what the first could

not, and so on, to infinity.

Roger signals to his friend to continue.

— God is eternal because He had no beginning and will have no end. If He had had a beginning, He would have come out of nothingness. Now, since nothingness is nothing at all, nothing can it produce. Or else He would have been created by another prior being, and in that case, that being would be God. If we supposed Him a beginning or an end, we could conceive of an entity existing before Him and capable of outliving Him, and so on, to infinity.

Roger, recalling an earlier conversation with his friend, says:

— Yes, we reached that conclusion in an earlier conversation. Truly He cannot fail to be the supreme and sovereign intelligence and, of course, He also cannot fail to be eternal. Can you continue?

— God is immutable because, if He were subject to change, the laws that govern the universe would have no stability.

Roger, frowning, says:

— Immutable? But the universe is in constant change, evolution, expansion. How can the cause of all that be immutable?

— It is an important distinction, Roger. The universe changes — but the laws that govern it do not change. Gravity worked in the same way a billion years ago and will work in the same way a billion years from now. The speed of light is constant. The mathematical constants are eternal. If the primary cause changed, the laws would change with it — and the universe would be unpredictable, chaotic, impossible for science to comprehend. The fact that science is possible — the fact that we can discover laws and rely on them — is in itself evidence of the immutability of the cause that sustains them.

Roger signals to his friend to continue.

— God is immaterial because His nature differs from everything we call matter. Otherwise, He would not be immutable, for He would be subject to the transformations of matter.

Roger, thoughtful, says:

— But Tom, if God is immaterial, how can He interact with a material universe?

— Notice, Roger, Einstein demonstrated that matter and energy are two forms of the same reality — $E=mc^2$. Steam is not solid like stone, yet it moves locomotives and ships. Even within the universe there are profoundly different realities that interact with one another. Invisible fields move particles. Gravity acts at a distance. Modern physics itself has shown us that reality is far deeper than the old idea of solid matter. Therefore, the mere fact that God is of a nature different from matter does not mean that He cannot act upon it. It means only that our understanding of reality is still limited.

Roger is amazed at the connection between the attributes and says:

— It is incredible, Tom. The attributes need to be connected to one another for them to make sense. Continue, my friend, continue.

— God is omnipotent because, if He did not possess supreme power, one could always conceive of a more powerful entity, and so on, until reaching the being whose potency no other being could surpass. That one, then, would be God.

Roger nods to his friend to continue.

— God is sovereignly just and good because the providential wisdom of the divine laws reveals itself in the smallest things as in the greatest, that wisdom not allowing His justice or His goodness to be doubted. The fact that a being possesses one quality infinitely excludes the possibility of a contrary quality, for the latter would diminish or annul it. An infinitely good being could not contain the most insignificant portion of malignity. God, therefore, could not be simultaneously good and evil, for, not possessing either of these two qualities in the supreme degree, He would not be God; all things would be subject to His caprice and for none of them would there be stability. He could not, consequently, fail to be either infinitely good or infinitely evil. Now, since His works bear witness to His wisdom, His goodness, and His solicitude, it will be concluded that, not being able to be at once good and evil without ceasing to be God, He must necessarily be infinitely good. Sovereign goodness implies sovereign justice, for if He acted unjustly or with partiality in a single

circumstance, or with regard to a single one of His creatures, He would no longer be sovereignly just and, consequently, would no longer be sovereignly good.

Roger, frowning, says:

— But Tom, if God is infinitely good, how do you explain the suffering in the world? The wars, the diseases, the death of innocents. How can an infinitely good God allow that?

— That is an excellent question which we will look at later. First you need to understand a series of details that you do not yet grasp.

Roger is once again surprised by his friend's arguments and says:

— I am impressed by the arguments you use concerning the attributes of God. You may continue.

— God is infinitely perfect because it is impossible to conceive of God without the infinity of perfections, without which He would not be God, for one could always conceive of a being possessing what He lacked. So that no being may surpass Him, it is essential that He be infinite in everything. Being infinite, the attributes of God are not susceptible to increase or diminution, otherwise they would not be infinite and God would not be perfect. If the smallest portion were taken from any of His attributes, there would no longer be a God, for a more perfect being could exist.

Roger asks his friend to continue.

— God is unique, because the uniqueness of God is a consequence of the fact that His perfections are infinite. Another God could not exist, save on the condition of being equally infinite in all things, since, if there were between them the slightest difference, one would be inferior to the other, subordinate to the power of that other, and then would not be God. If there were between the two absolute equality, that would amount to there existing, from all eternity, one same thought, one same will, one same power. Thus merged as to identity, there would be, in reality, no more than a single God. If each had special attributions, one would not do what the other did; but then there would not be perfect equality between them, for neither would possess sovereign authority. In short, God

cannot be God except on the condition that no other surpass Him, because the being that exceeded Him in whatever it might be, even if only by the thickness of a hair, would be the true God. So that this may not occur, it is indispensable that He be infinite in everything. (1)(4)(5)

Roger is filled with wonder at the irrefutable logic his friend presents to him concerning the attributes of God and says: — Tom, I am astonished by your exposition of the attributes of God. I understand them all and I see that some cannot exist without the others. Yet, what is the relationship between the soul and its destiny and the attributes of God?

Tom breaks into a smile and says:

— Roger, they are indispensable for us to understand the soul and its destiny. But we are still only at the beginning, and there are many points left to connect.

— My dear Tom, the destiny of the soul after death is merely a matter of faith. Some religions say one thing, others say another. Some speak of heaven, hell, paradise. They speak of souls, spirits, angels, demons. In short, all of that is nothing but a matter of faith.

— No, Roger, that is not a matter of faith. Our conversations have no religious character. We do not intend here to defend religion A, B, or C. Our conversations are always scientific-philosophical.

Roger, surprised, says:

— But Tom, how can you speak of the soul without speaking of religion? The soul is a religious concept.

— It is true that religions have spoken of the soul for millennia, Roger. But the soul is not the exclusive property of religion. Plato explored the nature of the soul as a philosophical and rational question, through the force of pure reason, independently of any belief. Pythagoras, the Stoics, the Neoplatonists did the same. What is most interesting is that thinkers from completely different eras, cultures, and traditions arrived at the same conclusions about the soul — not through faith, but through reason. And more recently, researchers such as Dr. Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Dr. Ian Stevenson, and Dr. Pim van Lommel have studied the soul and the survival of consciousness with full scientific rigour. The question of the

soul can be approached with philosophical and scientific rigour, without any need to invoke religion. That is precisely what we shall do. (6)(7)(8)

Roger is surprised by his friend's answer and says, animated:

— Very well, then let us speak of the soul and its destiny. Does the soul exist only for as long as the body exists?

— That is an excellent question, but before we speak of the destiny of the soul we need to know what it is. The soul, or the spirit, is the intelligent being, and it does not depend on whether or not it is linked to a material body.

As Tom was about to continue speaking, Roger asks:

— What is the difference between soul and spirit?

— It is the same thing. We say soul when it is linked to a physical body, and we say spirit when it is detached from it.

Roger signals to his friend to continue.

— The soul, or the spirit, is the individualised intelligent being. It is endowed with feelings, with will. The soul had a beginning and will have no end. It is immortal. The spirit does not need to be linked to a material body in order to exist, to have intelligence, individuality, and feelings. The two of us are a spirit with a physical body, and not a physical body that has a soul or spirit.

Roger, thoughtful, says:

— But Tom, science tells us that consciousness is a product of the brain. That when the brain dies, consciousness disappears. How can you affirm that we are a spirit with a body and not the other way round?

— Roger, it is not science that says consciousness is a product of the brain. It is merely the supposition of some scientists, not of all. We will clarify this question further on, with scientific arguments that will surprise you. For now, follow the reasoning.

— I understand. The difference between the soul and God is that the soul had a beginning and will have no end. God, on the other hand, had no beginning and will have no end. But is intelligence not a characteristic of the brain?

— No. Intelligence is a characteristic of the spirit. The brain is merely a machine that receives the instructions of the spirit, just as the television shows the images transmitted to it by cable or by antenna. The source of the transmission shown on the television does not originate in the television. If you like, in computing terms, the software is the spirit and the hardware is the brain. Of course, the soul communicates with the body, and the body influences the soul.

Roger, curious, says:

— Can you give me an example of that mutual influence between the body and the soul?

— With pleasure. When you are ill, your physical state affects your mood, your thoughts, your disposition — the body influences the soul. But when you are anxious or sad, your body responds — your heart races, your stomach tightens, you lose your appetite — the soul influences the body. They are two distinct realities but profoundly connected. The software and the hardware communicate constantly.

— And why is the soul immortal?

— By the same reasoning we used to understand the attributes of God,

Roger. If God is infinitely just and good, and created souls with feelings, memories, relationships of love and friendship, it would be profoundly unjust and contradictory to His own nature to destroy them after so brief an existence. All the bonds of familiarity, of love, of friendship would be lost. The good deeds practised in life would be lost. An infinite intelligence that creates something as complex and as rich as an individual soul, only to annihilate it after a few decades, would be contradicting its own attributes of justice, goodness, and perfection. The immortality of the soul is not a caprice of God — it is a logical and inevitable consequence of His own nature.

— Was the soul created for that body, or did it already exist before it?

— An excellent question, yet a very easy one to answer. If the soul were created for a particular body, how do we explain the fact that some children are good and others bad, rebellious, within the same family, placed in the same environment, both having a similar upbringing? They

are very different souls. Where would that difference come from? Where would that goodness, that gentleness in some, and in others that wickedness, that rebelliousness come from, if they did not exist before their material bodies? Did God create some souls better than others? Obviously not. That idea violates the attribute that God is infinitely just and good. God being supreme justice and goodness, He cannot create some souls better than others. God must create them all in the same state, at the same level of development.

Roger interrupts Tom and says:

— I now understand why we cannot comprehend the soul and its destiny without comprehending the attributes of God. Continue, Tom.

— Without doubt, Roger. If we do not comprehend the attributes of God, we cannot comprehend the soul and its destiny. Still speaking of children, imagine two children: one is born into a good family, which gives it good examples. The other is born into a bad, perverse family, which gives it the worst examples.

Once again, the idea that souls are created for the body violates the attribute of God's sovereign justice and goodness, because, while one soul would find it easier to follow the good path, the other would more easily be dragged towards wickedness and perversity (it is a tendency, not an irresistible dragging, since good families can have bad children and bad families can have good children); why would God place one soul in a good family and another in a bad family? The thought that the soul is created for the body, that it did not exist before it, violates the attribute of God's supreme justice and goodness.

Roger signals to his friend to continue.

— If the soul were created for the body and did not exist before it, what would be the destiny of that soul when a child dies at a tender age or shortly after being born? That soul had no time to do either evil or good. Then, where would it go after the death of the physical body? To some hell? No, because it did nothing to justify such a punishment. To some kind of heaven or paradise? But what good did it do to justify such a reward? To some limbo? Would that not already be a punishment or a reward? That idea violates the attribute of God's supreme justice and

goodness.

Roger is astounded by his friend's reasoning and says:

— Yes, yes, it makes no sense at all that the soul is created for the body. Yes, God can only have created all souls equal.

— Without doubt, my friend. God created all souls equal, like a blank sheet. Little by little, they write their own history, marking it with the traits of their own will.

— Then where do souls come from? When were they created?

— We will look at that later. Before that, we need to understand where the soul goes after death. Will it go to a heaven or paradise? To a hell? To a limbo? Will it go into the universal whole, as the pantheists maintain?

— I do not know, tell me.

— If the soul went to a heaven or paradise, would it remain eternally in a useless beatitude? Does that not seem to you a different kind of punishment?

— Indeed, an eternal contemplation would be a torment. Continue.

— If it went to a hell, would it remain in suffering eternally, without any possibility of repentance? That idea contradicts at least two attributes of God: that of supreme intelligence, because, if even one of the souls He created went to a hell, it would be the confirmation of His failure towards that soul; and that of supreme justice and goodness, because God would need to be very evil to leave one of His children in eternal suffering without remission. A single misdirected existence would suffice for God to decree upon that spirit an eternal torment, in an act of vengeance against His creature. That is not just, it is not good, and it is not intelligent.

— Indeed, the idea of hell turns God into a terrible and punishing being. Continue, my friend.

— If it went into the universal whole, it would lose its individuality for all eternity. We saw that the soul is an individual being, it had a beginning and will have no end, therefore it cannot lose its individuality. Pantheistic thought has yet another problem: the idea that the universal whole is

constituted by God and by His creatures contradicts His attributes. If that were so, then God would no longer be the supreme intelligence, since there are beings of very little intelligence who would form part of the universal whole. The attribute of God's immutability would also be annulled or diminished by the same principle, as would the attribute of God's omnipotence. The attribute of sovereign justice and goodness would also be annulled or diminished, because some souls are more good than others. The attribute of God's infinite perfection would also be annulled, since some souls are better than others.

Roger then says:

— Yes, one understands that the soul had a beginning and will have no end. That it will be eternal. One also understands the impossibility of the soul's destiny being some heaven or paradise. One also understands the impossibility of the soul's destiny being some eternal hell. One also understands the impossibility of the pantheistic ideas. It is also logical that the soul's destiny is not some limbo. Yes, my dear Tom. All of that is profoundly logical. There is no way to sustain those absurd and irrational ideas. But, after all, what will be the destiny of the soul?

Tom breaks into a smile and says:

— My dear Roger, the soul has already lived before, animating other bodies, and it will live again afterwards, animating new bodies. In a succession of material existences. The name for that is REINCARNATION.

Roger, surprised, says:

— Reincarnation? But is that not a religious, Eastern idea?

— That is what many think, Roger. But reincarnation is not the property of any religion. In ancient Egypt, more than three thousand years ago, the idea of the survival of the soul and of its return was central to their view of the world. In India, philosophers explored reincarnation long before the rise of the great organised religions. Plato defended it in ancient Greece. So did Pythagoras. So did the Celtic druids. The philosopher Giordano Bruno was burned by the Inquisition, in part for defending similar ideas. Cultures that never communicated with one another arrived at the same conclusion — which is in itself significant. And more

recently, as we shall see, scientists from various continents have investigated this phenomenon with academic rigour. Reincarnation is not a matter of faith — it is the logical conclusion of everything we have already discussed. It is the only answer that does not violate any of the attributes of God that we have established.

— So we have already lived before? And we will live again when these bodies die?

— Yes, precisely. Reincarnation is the pedagogy of God. It is the great choice of God.

— Wait a moment, this is incredible, and it explains all those things we had been talking about. Yes, of course. Now I can connect all the dots. The good child was the soul that had already progressed in other existences, and the bad, rebellious child is the soul that has not yet managed to improve itself. And that example you gave about the child who is born into a good family and another into a bad family — I think the bad soul that is born into a good family may be a soul that is making every effort to become good. And the good child that is born into a bad family has the task of improving that family through good examples. I now also understand that case of children who die at a tender age or shortly after being born. Through the soul's multiple existences, it passes through every kind of experience in order to become better. All right, all right. But tell me, after the death of this body, will the soul take another body immediately?

— No, Roger. The soul remains in the universe, or you may call it the spiritual reality. Outside matter as we know it here.

Roger frowns and says:

— If the soul remains in the spiritual reality between lives, why does it not remain there forever? And I am not talking about remaining idle — that, I know, would be a punishment. I am talking about remaining there active: evolving, learning, helping other spirits. Why return to a body through reincarnation?

Tom smiles, pleased with the question, and says:

— There are lessons that only matter provides. In the body, the soul has the possibility of experiencing temptations that it does not have in the spiritual reality. On reincarnating, the soul receives the gift of the partial forgetting of the past, which is the veil that allows it to begin anew, to face each life without the weight of all the previous ones, to undergo trials and expiations that would otherwise be impossible in the spiritual reality. The soul lives each existence as an entirely new experience, with challenges it would never face if it remained forever in the spiritual reality, with its memory intact. It is the endless variety of these experiences, always begun afresh, that makes the soul evolve.

Roger falls silent for a long moment and then says: — I understand now, Tom. The soul evolves on both sides — in the spiritual world and in bodily life. But there are lessons that only the body teaches, trials that only matter offers, fresh starts that only forgetting makes possible. That is why the soul does not remain eternally on one side alone: it needs both in order to grow completely.

Tom nods slowly: — Now we have closed the last door, Roger. There is no other hypothesis left standing.

— And does the soul only link itself to human bodies, or can it link itself to the bodies of animals?

— Roger, what would be the evolutionary use of linking ourselves, in a future existence, to the body of an animal? No, the multiple existences serve for the soul to improve itself. The soul needs equipment — bodies — that can help it become better. The soul may remain stationary for a time, but it never regresses in its evolution. And beyond the question of usefulness, there is the question of logic: an animal's body does not possess the instruments that a human soul already has — reason, language, the moral sense, self-awareness. To place a human soul in an animal's body would be to deprive it of everything it has already conquered, it would be to make it go backwards. And going backwards is precisely what the law of evolution does not permit. It would be like asking an adult to unlearn how to speak and to think. That is why, once the human degree has been reached, the soul always incarnates in bodies equal to what it already is, or that make it grow still further — never below that.

— Tom, I know that our conversation has no religious character, but can you tell me whether in the Bible or in the Gospels there is any passage referring to successive existences or reincarnation?

— We can speak about the Bible or the Gospels without a religious character. For example, the Gospels are, as it were, biographies of Jesus of Nazareth. We can also speak of Jesus of Nazareth without a religious character. Jesus was an extraordinary soul who incarnated on Earth to help humanity progress. Jesus is far more a philosopher, a healer, than a religious figure. It was the religions that tried, each in its own way, to take God and Jesus for themselves. But Jesus is a soul far above any religion existing on Earth. But, to answer your question, yes, they exist. I will tell you some of them, the clearest ones.

Roger thanks his friend for his willingness and signals to him to proceed.

— Now, among the Pharisees there was a man named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, who came to Jesus by night and said to Him: Master, we know that You have come from God to instruct us, for no one could perform the miracles that You perform if God were not with Him. Jesus answered him: Verily, verily, I say unto you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Nicodemus said to Him: How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? (2)

— Do you see there the idea, conveyed by Jesus, of successive existences?

Roger, thoughtful, says:

— But Tom, many Catholics and many Protestants interpret being born again as a spiritual conversion, not as a physical reincarnation. How do you respond to that?

— That is a possible interpretation, Roger. But notice Nicodemus's reply — he asks literally whether a man can enter again into his mother's womb to be born a second time. If Jesus had been speaking only of spiritual conversion, Nicodemus would not have asked that question. Nicodemus's reply shows that he understood Jesus to be speaking of a physical birth. And Jesus did not correct him. If Nicodemus's interpretation had been wrong, Jesus would have corrected him immediately — as He did on so

many other occasions.

Roger signals to his friend to continue.

— If you, then, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to those who ask Him? (Matthew) — In these words of Matthew the impossibility of eternal punishment is clearly demonstrated. If we, the parents of the Earth, who are imperfect, give good things to our children, imagine what God will do for all His children, without exception. Would it make sense for God to give eternal suffering to any of His creatures? If parents, who are imperfect, are always ready to forgive their children, imagine what infinite goodness will do for its children so that they may follow the path of good. (2)

Roger signals for Tom to continue.

— As I live, I do not desire the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. (Ezekiel, ch. XXXIII, v. 11) — Is this passage of the Bible not clear enough to show us the impossibility of any eternal hell?

— Without doubt, Tom, the idea of an eternal punishment is entirely contrary to the supreme justice and goodness of God. If souls reincarnate, they always have the possibility of improving themselves. Are there more passages?

— Yes, there are. There is a passage in the Gospels which clearly shows that John the Baptist is the reincarnation of Elijah, one of the prophets of the past.

Roger, the idea of eternal punishments was useful in the time of Moses, when it was necessary to believe in a punishing and terrible God so that those people would come to respect Him out of fear and not out of love. The men of that time would not have been impressed by moral penalties, and would even have come to regard God as a weak being who did not command respect. Jesus, however, came later to proclaim a merciful, compassionate God.

Roger, curious, says:

— What is that passage about John the Baptist and Elijah?

— In Matthew, chapter 11, verse 14, Jesus says clearly to His disciples, concerning John the Baptist: And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. And in Matthew 17, verse 12, Jesus says further: Elijah has already come, and they did not recognise him. The disciples themselves understood that Jesus was speaking of John the Baptist. It is one of the most direct references to reincarnation in the Gospels — and it comes from the very words of Jesus. (2)

Roger signals for his friend to continue.

— Jesus, again and again, taught us to forgive our enemies. Could God be merciless, condemning even one of His creatures to eternal torment? Of course not.

— Indeed, because forgiveness would be good for souls. Would souls be better than God? No. God, taking vengeance through an infinite punishment, would then be infinitely vengeful, and so could no longer be infinitely good. If God did not forgive the repentant, He would be merciless, and being merciless He could no longer be good. If God is wholly merciful to the repentant soul before death, why would He cease to be so for one who repents after it? Why should the efficacy of repentance last only during life, a brief instant, and not in eternity, which has no end? Confined to a given time, the divine goodness and mercy would have limits, and God would not be infinitely good. If the penalty were irrevocable, repentance would be useless, and the guilty one, having nothing to hope for from his correction, would persist in evil, so that God would not only condemn him to suffer perpetually, but also to remain in evil for all eternity. In that there is neither goodness nor justice nor intelligence. (3)

— Excellent observations, Roger.

— Tom, why does that spiritual reality exist between existences, that reality devoid of matter as we know it?

— Because we came from there to here. Our true home is not here. Our true home is there. On the other hand, the spirit confronts, in the spiritual life, the consequences of all the imperfections it could not correct in bodily life.

Roger, thoughtful, says:

— But Tom, how can you affirm that our true home is there and not here?

— Notice, Roger. We spend a few decades here — a brief instant compared to the eternity of the soul. The soul existed before incarnating and will continue to exist afterwards. Bodily life is a passage, not a destination. It is like a student who goes to study in a city far from home — the city where he studies is important, it is where he grows and learns, but his true home is another. And when he finishes his studies, he returns. The spiritual reality is not an empty waiting place — it is where the soul reflects on what it has lived, faces the consequences of its imperfections, and prepares for the next existence.

— How many times does the spirit reincarnate? Or is the process of reincarnation also eternal, like the soul?

— The spirit incarnates as many times as necessary. At the moment when it is no longer necessary for it to incarnate, it lives solely and only as a spirit.

— So incarnation only occurs while the spirit is imperfect, is that it?

— Yes, precisely. When it no longer needs to incarnate, it is because it has already attained the state of purity. It has evolved, both intellectually and morally, to the point of being a pure spirit. Complete happiness is bound to perfection, that is, to the complete purification of the spirit. There is not a single imperfection of the soul that does not entail inevitable consequences, just as there is not a single quality that does not result in enjoyment. By virtue of the law of progress, which gives every soul the possibility of acquiring the good it lacks, as of divesting itself of the evil it has, according to its own effort and will, evolution is open to all creatures. Suffering depending on imperfection, as enjoyment depends on perfection, the soul carries with it its own punishment or reward, wherever it may be. The good and the evil we do arise from the evolutionary stage we have reached. Not to do good when we can is, therefore, the result of an imperfection. If every imperfection is a source of suffering, the spirit will suffer, not only for the evil it did, but also for the good it failed to do in its life. The spirit suffers for the evil it did, so that, its attention being constantly directed to the consequences of that evil, it better understands its drawbacks and seeks to correct itself. The

justice of God being infinite, good and evil are rigorously taken into account, there being not a single action, a single good or evil thought that has no consequences. There is not a single good impulse of the soul that is lost, even in the most perverse, such actions constituting a beginning of progress. Every fault committed, every evil done is a contracted debt that must be paid; if it is not paid in one existence, it will be in the next or the following ones, because all existences are bound together in solidarity. He who settles his debt in one existence will not need to pay a second time. (3)

— Hence the supreme justice and goodness of God. Justice must not annul goodness, nor must goodness annul justice. Justice and goodness must go hand in hand so that justice does not turn into mercilessness or vengeance, and goodness without justice does not turn into injustice.

— Without doubt. God reconciles justice and goodness in perfection.

Roger signals for Tom to continue.

— The spirit suffers, whether in the corporeal world or in the spiritual one, the consequence of its imperfections. The miseries, the vicissitudes endured in bodily life, spring from our imperfections, they are expiations of faults committed in the present or in preceding existences. By the nature of the sufferings and vicissitudes of bodily life, one may judge the nature of the faults committed in a former existence, and of the imperfections that gave rise to them. Expiation varies according to the nature and gravity of the fault, so that the same fault may, therefore, determine different expiations, according to the circumstances, mitigating or aggravating, in which it was committed. There is no absolute or uniform rule as to the nature and duration of expiation. Its duration depends on the improvement of the guilty spirit. If there were a condemnation for a predetermined time, it would have the double drawback of continuing the martyrdom of the unrepentant spirit, or of freeing it from suffering while it still remained in evil. Now, God, who is just, punishes evil only while it exists, and ceases to punish it when it no longer exists. On the other hand, moral evil, being in itself a cause of suffering, will make that suffering last as long as it subsists, or will diminish in intensity as it decreases. (3)

Roger, suddenly, says:

— Tom, do you remember that earlier I asked you how an infinitely good God can permit suffering in the world? You said you would resolve that later. I think I can now answer that question myself.

— Tell me, Roger.

— Suffering is not an arbitrary punishment from God. It is the natural consequence of the imperfections of souls and of the use they make of their free will. God gave His creatures the freedom to choose — and with that freedom comes responsibility for the consequences of their choices. Evil does not come from God — it comes from the imperfection of the spirits that are still evolving. And the moral laws that God created work like a compass — when we violate them, we suffer the consequences, not as vengeance, but as learning. Just as when someone eats to excess and ends up with a stomach ache — it is not a punishment, it is a natural consequence that teaches.

— I could not have put it better, Roger. Suffering, seen through the prism of a single existence, seems unjust. Seen through the prism of the eternity of the soul and of reincarnation, it reveals itself as part of a process of evolution and improvement. The justice of God is not human justice — it is infinitely wiser and more far-reaching.

— How should the punishment of God be understood?

— As an act of goodness, because as long as the spirit persists in evil it will be far from happiness. And God created spirits for supreme happiness. The punishment of God is an act of education and not of vengeance.

Roger asks his friend to continue.

— A condition inherent to the inferiority of spirits is that they are unaware of the end of their trial, believing it eternal, just as such a punishment seems to them it must be eternal. Repentance, though it is the first step towards regeneration, is not enough by itself; expiation and reparation are also required. Repentance, expiation, and reparation therefore constitute the three conditions necessary to erase the traces of a fault and its consequences. Repentance may occur during earthly life or

in the spiritual state, at any time; if it is late, however, the guilty one suffers for longer. Expiation consists in the physical and moral sufferings that are its consequence, whether in the present life, or in the spiritual life after death, or yet in a new bodily existence. Not all faults bring direct and effective harm; in such cases, reparation is carried out by doing what should have been done and was neglected; by fulfilling the duties despised, the missions left unfulfilled. Responsibility for faults is entirely personal, no one suffers for the errors of others, save if he gave rise to them, whether by provoking them through example, or by not preventing them when he could have done so. Certainly, the mercy of God is infinite, but it is not blind. The guilty one whom it reaches is not set free, and, as long as the cause exists, he suffers the consequence of his errors. (3)

— The logic, the justice, and the goodness of God are incredible. One question: could the two of us have also been friends in previous existences?

— It is possible. But we could also have had a relationship of father and son, of brothers, or any other degree of kinship. All the good relationships in this life may already have a greater antiquity than one supposes. Reincarnation strengthens the bonds of family, whereas the uniqueness of existences breaks them.

— And how do you explain certain family relationships troubled by hatred, resentment, animosity?

— Certain spirits, who were already enemies in previous existences, come together in a family in order to dilute those antagonistic feelings. It is an attempt at reconciliation between those spirits, who do not always achieve that aim.

— Can it happen that two spirits who do not know one another incarnate into the same family?

— Yes, it can, they are the indifferent ones. Neither friends nor enemies. But normally, in space the Spirits form groups or families interwoven by affection, by sympathy, and by the similarity of their inclinations. Happy to find themselves together, these Spirits seek one another out. Incarnation separates them only momentarily, because, upon returning to spiritual life, they gather again, as friends returning from a journey.

Often, indeed, some follow others into incarnation, coming here to gather in the same family, or in the same circle, in order to work together for their mutual advancement. If some incarnate and others do not, they do not thereby cease to be united in thought. Those who remain free watch over those who are in captivity. The more advanced strive to help the laggards to progress. After each existence, all have advanced a step along the path of improvement. (2)

— Since we have already had many existences, does our kinship extend beyond that which forms part of our present existence?

— It cannot be otherwise. The succession of bodily existences establishes between spirits bonds that go back to previous existences. That is why, often, the sympathy or antipathy that exists between two or more people seems strange to us.

— Can the spirit that animated the body of a man animate that of a woman, and vice versa?

— Evidently. The spirit must pass through every kind of experience that makes it better. If the spirit only ever animated the bodies of men, it would only know what men know, and vice versa.

Roger, thoughtful, says:

— That has enormous implications, Tom. It means that any man who today despises women may have been a woman in previous existences. And any prejudice of gender loses all meaning entirely.

— Exactly, Roger. And the same applies to racism, to xenophobia, to differences of social class. Science has already confirmed that there is only one human species — what exist are different ethnicities. If the spirit can incarnate in bodies of different ethnicities, genders, nationalities, and social classes, then all those prejudices reveal only the ignorance of those who hold them. Deep down, when we look upon another human being with contempt, we may be looking at what we once were or at what we shall be.

— What are angels?

— Angels are more evolved spirits. It could not be otherwise. If God created angels different from spirits, He would be being unjust, because

spirits would only progress through their own effort, while angels would have nothing to endure. That idea annuls the principle of God's supreme justice and goodness.

— Yes, it makes complete sense that it should be so. And demons, devils, what are they?

— There are no beings eternally turned towards evil; they are merely a figure representing wickedness. If spirits continually perfect themselves, there is no room left for the existence of demons, of devils, or of any other name one might wish to give them.

— Yes, reincarnation makes all spirits good.

— Yes, there is no escaping evolution. Sooner or later, spirits become pure.

— What scientific investigations are carried out on the spirit and its destiny after the death of the physical body?

— They are many and of various kinds, more recent or older, on every continent. There are investigations carried out on near-death experiences, on deathbed visions, on out-of-body experiences, on children who recall past existences, on instrumental transcommunication, on memory regression to previous existences, on mediumship, and others. They are investigations carried out by scientists from various fields.

Roger, curious, says:

— Can you give me some concrete examples of these researchers and their discoveries?

— With pleasure. Dr. Ian Stevenson, of the University of Virginia, devoted forty years to studying children with memories of previous lives, documenting more than three thousand cases on every continent. Cases in which children described with precision places, people, and events from previous lives that they could never have known (7). The Dutch cardiologist Dr. Pim van Lommel published in the scientific journal *The Lancet* a rigorous study on near-death experiences in patients in cardiac arrest, without measurable brain activity, who reported detailed and verifiable conscious experiences (8). And Dr. Alexander Moreira-Almeida,

a psychiatrist, published through Springer Nature — one of the largest scientific publishers in the world — a comprehensive investigation into the survival of consciousness after death. (6)

Roger, even more curious, says:

- Tom, the names and the fields of investigation are convincing. But do you have concrete cases? Specific cases that impressed you?
- You are quite right to ask that, Roger. The cases are the part most difficult to ignore. I will give you a representative case of each type of investigation.

Children with memories of previous lives

The case of Shanti Devi, investigated in India in the nineteen-thirties and later documented by Ian Stevenson. This child, from the age of four, described in detail her previous life as Lugdi Devi, in a city called Mathura, hundreds of kilometres from where she lived. She described the husband, the children, the house, the habits, details of her death during childbirth. A committee of investigation was formed and took the child to Mathura for the first time. She recognised the city, found her way to the house on her own, identified her former husband among a crowd, and mentioned details that only someone who had lived there could know. Everything was verified and documented. (7)

The case of James Leininger, investigated by Jim Tucker of the University of Virginia. James was an American boy who, at the age of two, began to have recurring nightmares about an aeroplane crashing in flames. He described in detail being a World War II pilot named James Huston Jr., he identified the name of the aircraft carrier on which he served, the names of squadron comrades, and the model of the aeroplane. His parents, initially sceptical, verified that all the information corresponded to a real pilot who had died in combat in the Pacific in 1945. Tucker published this and other cases in the book *Life Before Life*. (7)

Near-death experiences

The case of Pamela Reynolds, documented by the cardiologist Michael Sabom in the book *Light and Death*. Pamela underwent brain surgery in which her brain was completely drained of blood and cooled to a temperature that made any neurological activity impossible — the

electroencephalogram was completely flat. She was clinically dead. When she was resuscitated, she described with precision the surgical instruments used, the conversations of the medical team, and the details of the procedure. The surgical team confirmed the accuracy of her descriptions. This case is considered one of the most rigorously documented in this field. (9)

From Pim van Lommel's study, in *The Lancet*: a man was admitted in cardiac arrest, unconscious. During resuscitation, a nurse removed his dentures and placed them on a trolley of materials. When the patient regained consciousness, days later, he recognised that nurse, told her where his teeth were, and described the trolley with precision — as well as details of the resuscitation room and of the procedures that took place while he was clinically dead, without brain activity. (8)

Deathbed visions

The case documented by the physician Sir William Barrett in the book *Death-Bed Visions*. A woman named Doris, in the terminal phase, began to describe visions of her deceased father coming to fetch her. The extraordinary thing is that Doris also described the presence of her sister — but the family had deliberately concealed from Doris that her sister had died days earlier, so as not to distress her. Doris could not have known of her sister's death by normal means. Barrett documented dozens of similar cases in which the dying described the presence of people they did not know had died, eliminating the hypothesis of hallucination fuelled by expectation. (10)

Out-of-body experiences

The case investigated by the psychologist Kimberly Clark Sharp. A patient named Maria suffered a cardiac arrest in a hospital in Seattle.

After being resuscitated, she reported that during the arrest she had left her body and seen, on the ledge of a third-floor window, a blue sports shoe with a specific detail: the lace was tucked under the heel. Clark Sharp verified this personally and found exactly the shoe described, in the place indicated, with the lace under the heel — a detail invisible from any window of the hospital, which Maria could never have observed by normal means. (11)

Memory regression to previous existences

The case documented by the psychiatrist Brian Weiss in the book *Many Lives, Many Masters*. A patient named Catherine, treated for phobias and chronic anxiety, underwent therapeutic hypnosis. Unexpectedly, she began to describe in detail lives in different historical eras. What made the case scientifically remarkable was that Catherine conveyed specific information about Weiss's own family — including the name of his deceased son and details of that son's death — which were unknown to the public and which Weiss verified to be accurate. Weiss, a sceptical academic psychiatrist, published the case after years of hesitation, aware of the cost it would have for his reputation. (12)

Mediumship

The case of Leonora Piper, investigated by William James, professor of philosophy and psychology at Harvard and founder of American psychology. James was profoundly sceptical when he began to investigate Piper, a medium who conveyed messages from deceased persons. After years of rigorous investigation — including private surveillance to verify that she did not gather information beforehand, and sessions with anonymous participants — James concluded that Piper conveyed information impossible to obtain by normal means. His report published in the proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research is considered one of the most rigorous documents in this field. James wrote: I have found my white crow — a single white crow is enough to prove that not all crows are black. (13)

Instrumental transcommunication

The investigations of the engineer Friedrich Jürgenson, in Sweden, in the nineteen-fifties. Jürgenson was recording birdsong for an ornithological documentation when, on reviewing the recordings, he discovered voices that answered his questions and mentioned the name of his deceased mother. These investigations were taken up by the psychologist Konstantin Raudive, who documented more than one hundred thousand voice recordings under controlled laboratory conditions, with equipment shielded against radio interference. Raudive's book, *Breakthrough*, was analysed by engineers at Pye Records, in the United Kingdom, who confirmed the presence of the voices without being able to explain them. (14)

Roger falls silent for a moment and says:

— Tom, these cases are extraordinary. And what makes them different from mere stories is precisely the fact that they were investigated with rigour, by people with no interest in proving anything, and that the details were verified independently.

— That is exactly it, Roger. The strength of these cases lies not in the faith of those who lived them. It lies in the independent verification of the facts. And they are in the thousands, not in the dozens. On every continent. With patterns that repeat consistently, regardless of culture, religion, or era.

Roger, thoughtful, says:

— But Tom, do you remember that earlier the question of whether consciousness is a product of the brain was left unanswered? Do these studies answer that?

— They do, Roger. If consciousness were merely a product of the brain, it would be impossible for patients in cardiac arrest, without any measurable brain activity, to have detailed and verifiable conscious experiences. And it would be impossible for children to recall previous lives with precision. The correlation between the brain and consciousness does not mean that the brain produces it — it means that the brain is the instrument through which the spirit manifests itself in the material world. When the instrument fails, the spirit's ability to manifest through it is reduced — like a radio with interference, which distorts the signal without the source of the transmission ceasing to exist. The complete liberation of the spirit from the physical body only happens at death.

Roger says: — When a person suffers a brain injury, their personality changes. They lose their memory, or their speech, or their judgement. There are cases of people who changed completely in character after an injury. If the soul were independent of the brain, how do you explain that a blow to the head changes what a person is?

Tom says: — Return to the image of the television. Imagine a faulty television set. The picture appears distorted, the colours wrong, the sound broken. Would you say, on seeing that, that the fault changed the programme being broadcast? No. The programme, at the broadcasting

station, remains intact. What changed was the set's ability to show it faithfully. The brain is that set. When it is damaged, the spirit does not change — what changes is the way it is able to manifest itself through a faulty instrument. The personality we see altered is not the soul that changed; it is the soul expressing itself through a broken receiver. Remove the fault, and the signal passes through clearly again. And there is something that materialism cannot explain: if the brain produced consciousness, an injury should only diminish it, erase it little by little. Yet there are documented cases of terminal lucidity — patients with brains severely destroyed by dementia who, hours before dying, suddenly recover their clarity, recognise their relatives, say their goodbyes. If consciousness were the brain, that would be impossible. A destroyed organ does not produce lucidity. But a source that is intact, freeing itself from an instrument that no longer confines it, does.

Roger falls silent, and then says: — The faulty television does not ruin the programme. It only ruins the way of seeing it. I understand the analogy.

Tom smiles: — Exactly.

Roger, intrigued, says: — But Tom, if these investigations exist and are conducted by serious scientists at respected universities and published in leading scientific journals, why are they not accepted by the entire scientific community?

— That is a very pertinent question, Roger, and the reasons are several. First, there is a deeply rooted scientific prejudice — many scientists start from the conclusion that consciousness is a product of the brain and analyse any contrary evidence with that conclusion already formed. That is not science, it is dogma in scientific language. Second, there are religious prejudices — and this may seem surprising, but there are scientists tied to Catholic or Protestant churches for whom reincarnation is a heresy, and this unconsciously influences the way they assess the evidence. Third, there is a career problem — a scientist who publishes investigations on the survival of consciousness risks being marginalised by his peers, losing funding, and seeing his academic reputation compromised. The professional price of going against the dominant consensus is very high. Fourth, there is simply a lack of interest — many

scientists consider the subject irrelevant to their fields of investigation and have never studied it seriously. And finally, there is the problem of method — traditional science was built to study the material and measurable world. Phenomena that transcend matter challenge the very instruments and methods of conventional science. That does not mean they do not exist — it means they require broader and more humble methods of investigation.

— Reincarnation, if it were known by all of humanity, not as an act of faith but as an incontrovertible fact, could bring about a great positive revolution on Earth.

— Without doubt, my friend. Xenophobia, racism, the differences between men and women, the differences between social classes would cease to be a problem for humanity. Xenophobia, because we may incarnate in countries that today we consider our enemies, and our enemies may incarnate in our own country. Nationalism, and worse still, ultranationalism, would cease to make sense. Racism, because we may incarnate in bodies of any ethnicity. And those who today do not belong to ours may come to incarnate in it. The same would happen with the differences between men and women, because the spirit can incarnate in the body of a man or of a woman; and with social differences, because we may incarnate in every social class.

— What truly distinguishes us is not the country in which we incarnate, the colour of skin we have, whether we are men or women, whether we are rich or poor. What distinguishes us is our degree of evolution in relation to others. The spirit that is superior does not seek to debase anyone. The superior helps the inferior to become better.

— It is true. Wars, conflicts of every kind would cease to make any sense. Hunger, extreme poverty would disappear from the Earth.

— Indeed. There would still be people richer than others, because absolute equality is a utopia. Spirits are not all on the same level of equality with regard to their evolution. If we distributed equally all the wealth that exists in the world, in less than five minutes there would already be people richer than others. The problem does not lie in the existence of wealth itself, but in the excess found in the way wealth is

distributed. It makes no sense that there should be extremely rich people and others dying of hunger.

— You are right. Humanity would become extremely cooperative.

Roger, thoughtful, says:

— Tom, do you remember that earlier I asked where souls come from and when they were created, and you said we would look at that later? You have not yet answered.

— You are right, Roger. The truth is that we do not know when they were created. God created them, but the moment of creation is beyond our present knowledge. What we know is that they were created simple and ignorant — like a blank sheet — and that since then they evolve, through their own effort and will, towards perfection. The path is long, but no soul is left behind forever.

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THE END

"You shall know God and you shall love God." — Spinoza

"Reincarnation is the pedagogy of God and His great choice to lead man to complete happiness."