

The Afterlife

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I want to be very circumscribed in the enquiry that follows because there are far more questions in relation to the afterlife than there are answers, but equipped with our understanding of the purpose of Creation we can make some headway.

We have established in *The Purpose of Creation* that God had a purpose in creating, which is that we His creatures shall be in a relationship of eternal love with Him. It is necessary that the person stay alive for this experience to be possible and so the person must remain alive after death. The word 'afterlife' is, therefore, a contradiction in terms because if life were to leave the person at bodily death, then every person would eventually cease to be and that would be contrary to God's purpose. It is my contention that what we call the soul is identical to the person and that the person continues in existence for as long as it is attached to life. Not so the body, which ends lifeless in the material world.

Because in God life is identical to essence, all life in creation is not only from God; all life is God. During corporeal existence the body houses life. When the body can no longer house life it is left behind in this world as the person or soul goes on its way. That is of course assuming that God has decided to keep us. If we return to Him with our God-given souls degraded or stunted, then I cannot think of any good reason for Him to keep us and there are in some cases good reasons why He should not, and so I believe He would simply annihilate the miscreants by taking His life from their person with the effect that those persons cease to exist (Psalm 145:20). The person God keeps lives on. Love is in and of the person. Therefore our love for God will continue after we die and we will be in an eternal relationship with Him.

But why believe that the person or soul becomes embodied again? Is it simply because it is the option with the widest superficial appeal? Why not instead believe that we continue as disembodied persons living in eternal relation to one another and to God? That makes good sense to me and so I see no necessary place for a new body, perfect as it may be. On the other hand, God did choose to embody us in the first place and so perhaps He would do the same again only this time as an experience of bliss. Perhaps, but I think most people of

faith would accept that being embodied frequently entails hardship and that it is therefore more likely that being embodied is only intended as a testing ground and growth opportunity for the person. The testing and growing having been done, there would be no further need for a body. Moreover, there are all kinds of practical problems associated with the belief in bodily resurrection, such as which precise version of our embodied selves will be resurrected; e.g. child, adult or elderly, single or married, and so on.

As regards the idea of Hell, I reject the idea that there is eternal suffering for any person after death. Once again all we have to do is cast our mind back to the condition of existence before Creation when God was alone and was perfect in power, love and knowledge. Why would He have created a place of eternal suffering that He knew would come to be occupied by some of His creatures? Would that not contradict His perfect love for His creation and make Him a willing torturer? Would that not imply that God is imperfect? Why not instead believe that the justly condemned person ceases to exist when God withdraws His life from them? It makes more sense and it is compatible with a God who is absolutely perfect and absolutely loving towards His creation.

I think that in the matter of corporeal resurrection we should settle for the maxim that 'God knows best' because it is certain that God in His omniscience knows what is better for us in eternity than we do. So carry on believing, if you do, that there will be a corporeal resurrection. I am not sure that it is true, but it might be, and it is a harmless belief anyway. What is important is that we have in this world the opportunity of eternal personal life with God after corporeal existence.

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