

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Related exam questions:

- Could it be rational to believe a report that a man had been raised from the dead? (2013/4)
- Is there a plausible argument for the immortality of the soul? (2012/14)
- 'If there is no immaterial human soul, it is impossible for any human being to survive death.' Discuss. (2011/7)
- Could there be life after death even if there is no God? (2010/8)
- 'And I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.' Is this hope coherent? (2006/14)
- Is there any sense which is both spiritually and metaphysically plausible in which we might survive the death of our bodies? (2004/13)
- Does the idea of reincarnation make sense? (2003/13)
- Is the doctrine of immortality by bodily resurrection coherent? (2001/10)

The claim that we'll survive our death is part of classical theism, and some texts talk about this alleged process specifically in terms of the resurrection of our physical body. There are two main philosophical issues here. (1) If resurrection means the resurrection of our physical body, then, if resurrecting a physical body is impossible, classical theism is false. (2) If it is generally highly unlikely that we could be resurrected, then it is highly unlikely that classical theism is true. Specifically, if we have reason to think that only nonphysical beings could be resurrected but it is highly unlikely that we are nonphysical beings, then classical theism is unlikely to be true.

In the last 30 years or so, the philosophical debate about resurrection has focused on the compatibility of physicalism and theism. Very roughly, the situation (according to many people) is this: We have reason to think that physicalism is true, and we have reason to think that resurrection is impossible if physicalism is true, hence theism is faced with both problems (1) and (2) from above: theism is provably false if it embraces physicalism and unlikely to be true if it embraces antiphysicalism.

Here's a famous description of the basic dilemma concerning the compatibility theism with the claim that we are identical with our bodies and so resurrection means resurrecting these very bodies:

Suppose a certain monastery claims to have in its possession a manuscript written in St. Augustine's own hand. And suppose the monks of this monastery further claim that this manuscript was burned by Arians in the year 457. It would immediately occur to me to ask how *this* manuscript, the one I can touch, could be the very manuscript that was burned in 457. Suppose their answer to this question is that God miraculously recreated Augustine's manuscript in 458. I should respond to this answer as follows: the deed it describes seems quite impossible, even as an accomplishment of omnipotence. God certainly might have created a perfect duplicate of the original manuscript, but it would not be *that* one; its earliest moment of existence

would have been after Augustine's death; it would never have known the impress of his hand; it would not have been a part of the furniture of the world when he was alive; and so on.

Now suppose our monks were to reply by simply asserting that the manuscript now in their possession *did* know the impress of Augustine's hand; that it *was* a part of the furniture of the world when the Saint was alive; that when God recreated or restored it, He (as an indispensable component of accomplishing this task) saw to it that the object He produced had all these properties. I confess I should not know what to make of this.

(Peter van Inwagen: The possibility of resurrection)

Some readings that might be relevant:

Peter van Inwagen: The possibility of resurrection. A clear exposition of the whole issue (and the source of the quote above). The first two pages should be ignored; they relate to an independent conference discussion. The paper contains van Inwagen's infamous suggestion that resurrection should be explained by assuming that, upon death, God teleports our (still living) body somewhere else and replaces it with a (dead) replica.

Kevin Corcoran: Physical persons and postmortem survival without temporal gaps. A long and detailed attempt to make sense of van Inwagen's suggestion in a metaphysically clearer and somewhat less absurd way.

Dean Zimmerman / Lynne Rudder Baker: Should Christians be mind-body dualists? A debate between a dualist and a physicalist about the importance, and cogency, of physicalism from a Christian viewpoint.

Lynne Rudder Baker: Death and the afterlife (in the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*). Contains a more detailed exposition of Baker's version of physicalism and a sketch of the standard positions about the metaphysics of (human) persons.

van Inwagen: Dualism and materialism—Athens and Jerusalem? Argues that the Bible implies materialism about humans and that dualism (i.e. belief in souls) is a later imposition on Christianity, originating in Greek philosophy.

John Cooper: Christian anthropology and the body-soul problem. Argues that the Bible is either noncommittal about materialism or it implies its denial.