

THE HANDBOOK OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS ON LIFE AFTER DEATH

Chapter 10 of this book discusses the evidence for life after death.

It says that the six theories about what takes place after death are,

- 1 that we do not survive
- 2 that we live like some kind of half-person or ghost in some gloomy world
- 3 that we return in another body
- 4 that we are all part of one God and at death just merge back into that God
- 5 that only the soul survives
- 6 that the whole person returns to life in a resurrection.

Then it has a look at the objections to life after death.

The first objection is that consciousness is dependent on the brain and when the brain dies there is nothing to survive. This can mean that the brain causes the conscious self or that the brain is identical with it. If the brain causes the conscious self or is identical with it then death is the end when the brain dies. Consciousness dies with it. But if the brain causes the self is the self, the self could perhaps use other forces to interact with and survive when the brain dies.

Christians argue that consciousness is spirit - spirit means something that is non-material or has no parts. So their answer is that we are not just material beings.

The book asks if we are just material beings then how come we can have notions like equality or truth which are not material things? But even a computer can see that two material things the same size and shape are equal and it sees this equality as truth. If the argument were right then we would have no perception of material things at all for you cannot have this perception without having it in terms of measuring quantity and what is true and what is equal.

The next argument says that there is a unity in our thinking. Thoughts may differ but they are united in being mine. I can be aware of many different things at the one time though I can only concentrate on one but this many is united in my awareness. I have only the one awareness with which to be aware of all of them. It has been proposed that there is some kind of scanning mechanism in the brain that does this so fast that it seems to happen all at the one time. It is easy to agree with the argument that this would require some material thing circling around the brain but there is no such thing and besides how is it going to move inside the head when the head is full of matter? But what if it is some kind of undetectable material energy that is able to do that? Radiation can penetrate matter.

The book says that this scanner is not a material thing because if it were, it would be replaced the way the cells in our bodies grow new cells to replace the body that was there before and that would mean you change into somebody knew every so often. But there is no proof apart from memory that this replacing of the self does not happen and rationally speaking it would prove nothing if it didn't keep being replaced. And if I had my sister's memories replace my own this moment it would feel exactly like I was her and always had been. The book argues that if the brain is the self then there is no self for the self is just a pile of bits and pieces. But bits and pieces can compose one thing and the self is a thing.

Then the book argues that if the self is a material thing then it was made by random forces and so any conclusions it makes are questionable for no intelligence made it. But the senses verify and random or not the conclusions are remarkably right. Throw some things together and some things will seem to fall into order. The self could have been made by a spirit. It could still be a material thing. The authors of the book know fine well that if the self is material that doesn't necessarily mean that something random made it.

The materialist idea that thought is not an action of the brain but is produced by it the same way as the creak of a machine is attacked in the book. You could put it this way: "Thought is not an action of the brain, but is produced by it the same way as the creak of a machine is produced without being a part of the machine". The mind could not influence the matter of the body if that were true for a creak does not influence the machine. The doctrine is called epiphenomenalism.

But a thought is not like a creak. Nobody knows what it is. We know thoughts recorded by the past are stored in cells of the brain. The machine is influenced by the creak – the creak means wear and tear.

The book then says that though the self or consciousness needs the body and brain to learn it does not follow that the consciousness will die with the brain. Correct. But it might be implausible for it to survive. This is a question of probability.

The book argues that the view that if we become disembodied beings there will be no way of making a distinction between person and person because on earth we use the body to do that. But the distinction will still exist for my consciousness is not your consciousness. The distinction is still there even if we will not be able to make it in the afterlife. The distinction issue has nothing to do with proving that we do not exist after death. The book says that the body is replaced with a new body and can change radically in appearance and still be the same person.

The book then gives the argument from authority, majority opinion and the sages like Jesus that there was life after death for the doctrine of the afterlife. But what use were any of these people for they never provably had experience of life after death? Jesus said more about life after death before the resurrection and nothing after it so we can't take him too seriously. As Christianity is about Jesus, its focus is on defending life after death for he said was true. Make no mistake - its concern for the doctrine is about him not you.

The argument from the conservation of energy says that that matter is never destroyed but only transformed is then introduced. The book reasons from this that it is more likely that spirit cannot be annihilated than that matter couldn't be and concludes that it is very likely that spirit is not destroyed. The only thing I would do is substitute consciousness for spirit. Consciousness is not matter as we know it so it will be better matter. Religion cannot use the argument because it says that matter came from nothing and can go back to nothing. The disingenuous authors are desperate when they use an argument they cannot believe in to encourage you to believe in life after death.

Then the book dishes up the argument from the dead cow. This argument says that you have two cows and one is dead and the other alive and yet there is an incredible difference between the two. The book says that you cannot explain what makes the live one live so it is something outside the rules of nature as we know it and which can survive death. The book complains that the only catch is that it has everything that has life surviving death. The book says it only proves that life survives but life could be one force so there would be no individual immortality. But who cares as long as we survive? Another problem is that the life that survives might die another way. Perhaps it could recycle itself if intelligent and incarnate again to prolong its life. The energy of life could preserve itself by drawing upon other forces to feed itself after death. Maybe that is the reason there are things like plants that die for disembodied beings use their energy to stay alive after death. But if life survives will it be conscious life? If my life survives my death it could be like a living being such as a nettle and have no consciousness at all.

I would add that if you put a dying cow in a tight bodysuit that completely covers it and then encase it all in concrete, nothing leaves that cow when it dies. The cow does not get lighter or anything and no energy comes out but there is still a huge change. This suggests that life is a force that is beyond the laws of matter as we have them. But can we say this? We know a lot less about the laws of matter than we think. So we cannot use the supernatural as an explanation. To say that forces beyond the laws of matter do this is not to say that the forces are non-material or spiritual. When something moves there is an amazing difference between it then and when it doesn't move. Yet you don't speak of some force leaving the moving object when it stops moving. But you don't see any difference between a clock that is wound up and ticking and one that isn't wound up and not ticking either.

The argument from magic comes next. It says that since we can do magic things like levitating an arm by lifting it that the self can do magic and the self must be more than matter and will live on if its bodily matter dies when it has this supernatural magic power about it. This argument is dealt with very inadequately in the book. One could object, "But a robot can lift its arm." Religion might respond that a robot can only do that if a person programmed it so it was a person's magic that gives it the power. It is possible to imagine the forces of chance accidentally making a robot that does this but the difference is that there is no self to make it do this so there is no magic. This thought suggests that it is magic when a person lifts an arm but not magic if a crude robot made by chance does it which is silly. It is like saying that tea is only tea when a person makes it and not when a machine makes it. The book says that the magic can involve lifting our arms against the law of gravity by sheer willpower and thought alone. This is not true. The willpower and thoughts tell the nerves to move the arm up and the muscles contract through an electrical impulse. The thoughts do nothing. It is the electricity in the brain that does the moving.

Christianity nowadays says magic is nonsense. The argument from magic should have led to the authors of the book failing to get published for they are cranks. And there is the not small problem that the Bible God severely condemns magic as gravely evil and demands that practitioners be put to death.

Magic is whatever does mad things with nature. For example, water is turned into blood. But what if the idea of spirit is even more magical? It is. If magic is nonsense then it is probably saner to believe that trees talk than that souls exist.

Plato's argument is next. It goes as follows. The mind is meant to be rational so if it becomes evil it tries to destroy this rationality. Plato said that evil destroys. The self which he calls soul is full of evil and it is not destroyed despite the evil. The person who is good is just as aware and conscious as the one who is evil. So Plato concluded that the self must be immortal.

The book says that this argument is good but inconclusive for evil spirits or God might destroy the self after death.

Or what if the self could run out of energy and die?

The notion that you have an immortal soul for it survives the evil it does and becomes contradicts the notion that evil is not a power but merely good in the wrong place. The Catholic doctrine that evil is an abstract thing not a force is ignored by the book here. The Church reasons that a painting is not damaged by having ugly images put on it to enhance it. So it concludes that good and evil are not powers - they are about how you use the powers so evil cannot necessarily damage your existence as a person.

If evil somehow damaged your personhood then you would lose full responsibility for it. If your brain is made less of a brain how can you be held responsible for what you do? Even if you are responsible you cannot know if you are or if it is just the brain errors.

If evil spirits can destroy your soul literally, then they would be killing spirits now and taking their live bodies. They would be putting themselves in your place in your body. And why not? What use would it be killing anybody after death? Why kill selves after death especially when it is somebody that might be converted to join the dark side? It would seem that if spirits damage themselves by doing evil then if they fail to diminish their selfhood to the degree that they cease to exist then they should damage their power by being so evil. So how could they kill anybody?

And a good God wouldn't kill the spiritual self. We don't need belief in God. If we accept the trials of life and recognise things like depression that even faith cannot help we don't need the God crutch. We don't need him to be God before we can love him. In other words, if God gave away his godship and his powers would we still love him? We don't love him for him if we don't. God has the power to end our lives at death even if the self could live on without the body. He intervenes to snuff out the life. Suppose we need to believe in life after death and it is good to. Then if the God concept makes us less sure that we live on after death then the concept should be scrapped. We should not degrade ourselves by desiring belief in God.

Does the self run out of energy? Why does the self never run out of energy on earth? People die of physical causes so it is the body that does the damage. Nobody dies just because their self died. If their self did die the body would live on and be a shell. Plato is thought to prove the spirituality of the soul. From where I see it, Plato proves that the soul is not necessarily spiritual but that it is able to patch itself up where it damages itself by evil. The damage is done but it will not be fatal for the soul is able to draw on other forces to survive on to make up for the damage.

The argument that being evil destroys your soul is nonsense. An evil thing can exist forever intact. If the soul is spiritual then it is one being without parts. It cannot lose any of itself or fade away. It either exists or it doesn't.

The argument from the soul's simplicity that comes after gives no proof at all that the soul has no parts. It says you can have half a body but you never have half a soul. But that proves nothing as this here shows. You can have half a chicken but not have half a lamb when there are no lambs in the country.

The argument is begging the question. It assumes that there are no parts in the soul and then argues from this assumption that the affair is proven.

The argument from being versus having is dished out by the book. The argument claims that I am self, I don't have a self. The book says that I have a brain and have a body but I do not have a self for I am a self I am not the brain or the body. My body and brain belong to me. There has to be something to do the owning and that must be my immaterial or non-material and therefore spirit self. I must live forever for I am not the body. I am spirit not a material thing. This is nonsense. What is my self? Is it the scanner faculty I call consciousness? Is any thought I am having me as well? If it is then it follows that I am not me for I can look at my thought like I was outside of it. The argumentation doesn't work.

The book uses an argument which says the power to think and will are immaterial powers and can only be functions of an immaterial soul or spirit. Like Fulton J Sheen in *The Life of All Living* it would say that though my thoughts are distinct from my soul they are not separate from it so I am a spirit for I can be my thoughts and see them at the same time (page

28). But when I can separate my self from my thoughts as with my body they should say that I am not my thoughts just as they say this proves I am not entirely my body. The interesting thing about this is that if I do evil, I must think evil to do the evil. So my evil thoughts are part of me and I am evil. A doctrine like that makes it impossible to say that you can love the sinner and hate the sin. Jesus demanded that we hate sin intensely so that we would rather lose an eye for life than use that eye even once to sin with.

The book then argues that mystical experience proves life after death for the mystics despite all the serious disagreements in interpreting their experience all agree that the consciousness lives on after death. I would add that most mystics have had no interest in caring for others which adds outstandingly pathetic weight to their testimony of an afterlife!

The argument that life has no meaning or purpose if death is the end is unsatisfactory for meaningless events do happen. For example, viable babies can be lost and suffer and die without the mother knowing. The arguments that we should believe in a life after death in case there is one and that the desire for life after death proves there is such life should not be in the book at all for they are simply appalling. Meaning in life is got from countless sources not just religious faith or belief in an afterlife!

How important is the argument from meaning to those who say there is a life after death? If it is the main thing for them then believers are too biased to be taken seriously. Believing in the afterlife in order to comfort yourself is not believing in it in reality. It is only telling yourself you believe for wanting an afterlife does not mean there should or will be one. A doctrine based on emotional or existential blackmail is not good even if it feels good.

The remainder of the arguments are:

1 Since God is creative and just and loving we must live on after death

This assumes that God has no purpose that we are unaware of for letting us pass out of existence. It contradicts the view that God's mind is not ours for he knows all things.

2 Feeling the presence of the dead proves they are still alive

This is not a good thing to encourage. It can lead to denial being prolonged when the person needs help to move on. The person needs to feel the person is gone but somehow still linked to you. Perhaps the link is the memories or little things that belonged to them and were special.

3 Near-death experiences (NDE) are put down as evidence - though rather cautiously because nobody can be proved to have had an experience after dying and because they contradict Christian theology. No NDE without brain activity has ever been verified. If that happened the person would count as a resurrected person!

The fact that the authors would use an essentially non-Christian miracle, which usually involves meeting a being of light who does not care about your sins, smacks of sheer desperation and is an alarming lapse of logic. That miracle, if miracle it is, refutes the core doctrine of Christianity which is that repentance or forgiveness is necessary and is what religion should be all about. Even the resurrection of Jesus cannot be true if repentance is immaterial for it is about expressing and incarnating the principle of mercy.

Evidence from history that Jesus rose is superseded by evidence that there is a being of light who does not judge and who is certainly not Jesus! Testimony from people you can talk to always supersedes even similar testimony from those who are no longer with us. Unlike the resurrection accounts, the being is glorious. Christianity's core doctrine that the resurrection of Jesus does not mean a return to life but an exaltation to eternal life and glory is granted no evidence at all even in the Bible. Jesus could have risen for all we know and died later and his revival from death is not the only one that is claimed in history.

The handbook's treatment of near death experiences violates the assertion of the handbook and the Christian Church and the Bible that miracles are signs of the truth and tell us truths about God, religious truths. Here miracles that contradict the Church are downplayed though recognised as satisfying the conditions for deserving to be believed.

Near death experiences do not really support spirituality or religion. They support the idea that the brain has the power to create experiences and credible visions and to deceive. As believable as they are the experiences are not real. If the brain can do all that when somebody is very ill what is it up to the rest of the time? They could well be the strongest evidence that religion is about some subliminal need and not really about God or Jesus though that may not be apparent.

4 The resurrection of Jesus is supposed to prove life after death.

The dubious thing about the resurrection is that Jesus allegedly raised people from the dead before he raised himself and these testimonies are not focused on historical authentication like you would expect. When the Jews were saying the resurrection must have been a hoax, the natural thing for the Christians to have done would have been to verify the other resurrections as much as Jesus' own. But far from having done that, we have the story of the raising of the widow's son in Luke alone and Lazarus in John alone and they are treated soberly and briefly. More importantly no effort is made to authenticate the stories – another hint of a late origin for the gospels and that they were making a lot of the stuff up. The gospels of Matthew and Mark and Luke are similar to a great degree. John is very different. How the three gospels, Matthew and Mark and Luke can claim a right to encourage us to believe in the resurrection when they show collaboration is just like the three witnesses of a crime being allowed to confer together before being brought into court. No - its worse for there was no court for Matthew and Mark and Luke.

The book says that nature would not go to the trouble of evolving us to let us go out of existence at death

Nature goes to a lot of trouble to make babies and most babies die before birth even unknown to the mother. Many scientists would reject the idea that nature has a purpose. If nature purposely went to a lot of trouble to make us it would want to give us bodily immortality for it makes bodies. If we survive death as spirits then that is beyond the scope and grasp of nature and so separate from it. If nature results in spirits that have no bodies it is not doing a very great job after going to all the trouble to make the bodies!

The Handbook is not worth talking about never mind purchasing. It avoids problems it cannot deal with. Evidence for the afterlife is desirable but not as desirable as proof. After all, to say somebody is going to live on after death is not a trivial matter. What if they are told they will live on and they do not? What if you think they are alive still and they are not? The argument that it is comforting and thus justified insults the fact that it is not about comfort but truth. If you believe in love, you want people to have a relationship with you as an existent being. No truly good person wants to go out of existence with relations and loved ones thinking the relationship is going on still.

It is not right to be willing to accept that evil has a purpose even if you don't know what it is and when no answer seems to work just so that you can believe in God and maybe enjoy an eternal afterlife. And what if you want to believe in the afterlife for the sake of others? Why do you believe others suffer for the greater good even if they are unwilling and will never reap the benefits when you would turn down life after death if it demanded that you suffer forever for others because it was the only way to help them?