

Thoughts on the Afterlife

Part 1

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Why “thoughts”?

- Everything I discuss in this series is simply my own thoughts
- Nothing is based on books, articles, or anything else I have read or videos I have seen, or lectures I have attended, etc.
 - Today there is little discussion on this topic as far as I know
 - I have not had a near death experience
- I will raise far more questions than I can answer, and in fact I can answer none with certainty; this will be just my thoughts, my questions, all derived from my imagination and what makes sense to me
- Since nothing can be proved, why do this?
 - I think it is mind expanding, helping us to see the “big picture”, putting things in perspective
 - It may help us in leading life now, here on earth
 - It is the ultimate in thinking outside the box!
- Though nothing can be proved, I do believe some things can be argued convincingly enough to become a viable *working hypothesis*

Why did I start on this?

- Fundamentalist Christians have some beliefs that contradict the pillars of my faith, and so I was motivated to address these issues; since I rejected their beliefs, I wanted to “fill the void”
- For example, I do not believe in hell, but I also do not believe that evil people should get away scot free; there must be some accountability, so what would that be?
- I also think going to heaven and automatically having a blissful life just for believing the right idea seems very shallow
- I wanted to find a plausible, fair, realistic, model of the afterlife that made sense to me
- I reject the idea that Jesus died for our sins, so why did he come to earth? It must be that he came to make life better for us on earth; he did not tell us to just endure and the reward will come later; he stressed the importance of love and the kingdom of God, which I believe is realized in the afterlife

Agenda

- Assumptions
- Mysteries
- Pillars of my faith
- Heaven and hell
- Body and Soul
- Hierarchical Societies
- Jesus
- Free will
- Mixed Societies
- Near Death Experiences
- Prayer

Assumptions

- There is an afterlife we all will live in eternally
- We will maintain our individuality, live with other people and somehow communicate with each other
- Life is continuous, by which I mean that as soon as our bodies die, our soul will enter the afterlife immediately and we will, in the short-term, be the same person we were just before dying
 - We will not be fundamentally changed by external forces just by dying; like a newborn baby who is no different after birth than just before (though it does start to breathe on its own)
 - A baby separates from the umbilical cord, and our soul will separate from our body
 - Whatever understanding of life we have when we die carries over though we will obviously learn a lot soon thereafter
 - Over time, we can and will learn more, learn from our mistakes, confront our past, etc. and be able to change for the better, but each person has to do this for himself or herself

Mysteries

- Some topics are too unknowable and will be skipped:
 - What is God?
 - How did God get to be God?
 - What is God's history?
 - Did God make the physical universe or just find it and use it?
 - In the afterlife, will we ever learn anything about the answers to the questions above, or will they remain mysteries forever?
- Of course if any of you have any ideas or comments about these questions, feel free to bring them up

Pillars of My Faith

- I believe God is good, loving, and forgiving
- I believe the overall message of Jesus was that we are to be good, loving, and forgiving, just as God is
- I reject the idea of hell as a place of *eternal* anguish to which God condemns some people
- I do not believe the afterlife will automatically be as simple as the common notion of heaven held by many in which no one is held accountable and everyone lives totally blissfully and harmoniously (there seems to be an unspoken assumption here that God changes everyone automatically, else heaven would not be so blissful)
- We won't suddenly become better people just by dying!
- Many believe the afterlife consists of these two extreme polar opposites, but the first (hell) should be rejected by anyone who claims to follow Jesus, and the second (heaven) is way too naive and simplistic to say the least

Articles of My Faith

- Instead of the two polar opposites of hell and heaven, I believe that the afterlife will be a *multitude* of states in between these two
- Despite many people's longstanding adherence to the idea of God as judge, I do not believe God will judge us
- I believe God is the *creator* of life, and that we, not God, will judge each other in the afterlife
- Jesus taught us that nothing separates us from the love of God, but love does not translate, as we can see here on earth right now, into a secure, safe, comfortable life; we have to earn that
- If God were to hand out security, why would He not do so to *all people?*
- Despite God's love, we suffer from the evil and malice of other people
- But by the same token, God's eternal love prevents us from being condemned by *anyone, not just God, from eternal anguish, so there can be no eternal hell*

Articles of My Faith

- I believe that God willingly *gives the gift of life to each of us, with no strings attached, and for eternity*
- Not only do I believe that God condemning us to hell grossly violates God's love, but I think that doing so would mean that God never really gave us the gift of life in the first place, because He would be taking it back; when you give someone something, it becomes theirs; if it comes with the possibility of being taken back, it is not really a gift
 - Some people believe that God is willing to take back what He gives us, but I disagree; I believe God is more noble than that
- The foremost part of the gift of life that God gives us is *free will*
- Without free will, we are just robots
- Free will means we have the right to make our own decisions, and thus God cannot perfectly predict the future

Articles of My Faith

- In their (shallow) effort to heap as much praise on God as they can, I think many people are guilty of just assuming without thinking that every magical attribute they can think of belongs to God, such as knowing everything that will happen, being in total control, etc.
- This mentality overlooks basic contradictions: for example, fear is what drives people to be “control freaks”. Why should we think God has to be in control of our every move when we consider that behavior to be undesirable in other people?
- To me, it is *noble* of God to give us free will and to allow us to live our lives freely, even when what we decide to do ends in destruction. It is obvious to me that God does allow this: why else do we live in a world so full of preventable misery?
- “Man’s inhumanity to man” *is the price of having free will*, but free will is worth that price because our becoming good and loving becomes truly meaningful *only* when it is our decision to do so.

Heaven

- Why is the common notion of heaven too simplistic?
- When I say heaven is too simplistic, I do *not* mean that it is unachievable; in fact I think it can be achieved, but it must be *earned; it is more meaningful when it is merited*
- What I do mean is that it is naive to think that just because one believes Jesus died for our sins (which is the most common Christian belief of “salvation”), or *any other belief*, that one will instantly be rewarded with eternal bliss, especially when there is no “down-side” in believing this
- To believe in an eternal reward for one simple belief, while also believing that many people will receive eternal punishment for not believing it, is extremely callous and cold-hearted, devoid of the love Jesus commanded us to show for all our fellow human beings

Body and Soul

- I believe that the essence of each of us is our soul
- For now, in our brief life on earth, our soul lives inside a body
- What we call death is merely the death of the body, not the soul
- When the body dies, the soul, perhaps after an initial period of confusion, realizes the body is dead and disengages from it, and begins to live life in the afterlife
- I believe that the soul will live eternally
- Our life on earth is important, but as we live longer and longer in the afterlife, the portion of our life that was lived on earth becomes smaller and smaller, to the point eventually where we may not even remember anything about it
- Nevertheless, I do think life on earth is important; our character developed in life on earth projects us into the afterlife for better or worse; we set a direction for our life on earth, and it continues in the afterlife, though reform is always possible

An Alternative to Heaven and Hell

- My idea is that in the afterlife, we will form our own societies, with our own rules about how to live, and our own authority to decide who can and cannot live in our society
- These societies will range from hellish ones where evil people, unwanted by all other societies, will dwell, to almost heavenly ones where the most loving, but not perfect, people will live together in wonderful harmony
- All manner of societies in between these two extremes will exist
- People will, after some period of time, and when an invitation comes, advance from their current state to a higher one as they learn, grow, develop, mature, and become more loving people
- God's ideal is for everyone to reach the highest society (heaven), but that is meaningful only if each person there achieves the right to live there

The Nature of Societies

- If we will form our own societies, what would they be like?
- I think people are willing to live with people like themselves, but do not want to live with people of lesser character
- If so, then communities will naturally develop as a hierarchy of societies of many levels, each defined by the character of the people who live in it
- Evil people, being rejected by good societies, will be left with a choice of living alone or with other evil people
- People advance from one level to the next, somewhat as students advance from grade to grade but advancement is not automatic, or on a schedule; the complacent might languish in one society for a very long time while the more ambitious might climb the hierarchy much faster

Societies as Learning Mechanisms

- My idea of a hierarchy of societies is consistent with Jesus's statement that "my Father's house has many rooms"
 - How else could this be interpreted?
- I think the idea of each person living in a society in which everyone else has the same degree of character is extremely *fair* and *beneficial*
 - The idea of liars living with liars is a perfect recipe for making each of them confront the misery of having people lie to them, and thus makes a perfect setting for them to confront how bad it is to lie and forces them to admit they are with other liars because they are dishonest
 - Else, a liar living among honest people may think it is advantageous to lie; this situation is not conducive to change
 - Likewise, the good people are rewarded for being good by living in a society of people they can trust
- Looking at higher societies shows them how they can improve themselves and earn the right to advance to a better society