

Thoughts on the Afterlife

Part 3

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Agenda

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

Godly Love

- In his classic The Road Less Traveled, Scott Peck defines love as “The will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.”
 - This love, unlike romantic love, *has nothing to with emotion* or how much you like someone; it is about *doing* something to help that person (though of course your emotional feeling about them can motivate you to act)
- I think Jesus’s warnings to the scribes and Pharisees can be seen as love, though uttered in anger; he is not condemning them outright, but is giving them a warning to heed; he knows no other approach will work with them because they consider themselves (falsely) to be wiser about God than Jesus is
- I believe God has us start life in a body to provide a mechanism for us to be *unique* and for us *to learn, by experience, what Godly love is all about*

Logistics of the Afterlife

- On earth, in a body, we are accustomed to being in one place at a time; our vision and hearing are limited to what our eyes and ears can detect where we are in this physical world
- But in the afterlife, where we presumably live as souls, is there such a thing as “place”? Do we move around?
- What can we sense? How do we communicate?
- These are mysteries for now, but obviously we will learn answers to these questions when we get to the afterlife
- Does God want our lives to be filled with mystery?
 - Is this an attempt to make us ponder God?
 - Or is it just a product of our limitations?
 - Why is there such a completely opaque curtain separating life on earth from the afterlife?

Free Will

- I believe God has given us free will; it is essential to life
- I could write a computer program that prints, ad infinitum, “Steve is a great guy!!” Would that make me feel good about myself? Of course not! It would be utterly meaningless.
- But if someone else, free to state what they truly believe, compliments me, then that would be very meaningful
- Even God cannot circumvent this logic: for our love of God to mean anything, God must create us to be *independent* of Himself; we must have *free will* for our love of God to be genuine
- Over the ages people have asked why there is so much evil in the world; how can God allow this?
- I think the answer is that God has chosen to give us free will
- When our free will results in evil, God protects our free will by not interfering to save us from ourselves and others

Why Did God Make Us?

- Perhaps God made us to love Him, but that is meaningful *only* if we truly have free will
 - If God creates us with any built-in inclination to love Him, then our loving God is meaningless
- So to me the *more difficult* question is this: *How (not why)* can God create us to be completely independent of Himself?
 - To me this is similar to the mathematical problem of writing a random number generator, which for the laymen is a much more difficult mathematical problem than it sounds like
 - The problem is that any algorithm you use will generate a set of numbers that are *not* purely random since there will be calculated based on the algorithm chosen; it boils down to this: how can you make anything that does not act in the way that you created it to work?

Why Begin Life in a Body?

- Given that eventually, after we live the afterlife billions of years, the first few decades of each our lives lived on earth will become harder to even remember: this raises the question of why does God have us begin life in a body? Why not just start life as a soul in the afterlife?
- I see two possible answers:
 - God wants us to be independent of Him, not a robot!
 - God wants each of us to be unique
- Each one needs elaboration about how it works
- Both make use of sexual reproduction of the human body, but leave open the more important question of how the *soul* originates
- Given my belief that we are ultimately just a soul, but for now are a soul in a body, the question of the origination of the soul is the key question (I do assume the soul is created by God)

Origination of the Soul

- If souls are given at conception, then presumably miscarriages would produce some souls who were never even born before their body died and they entered the afterlife
- My assumption is that all bodies have a soul but even that is uncertain; might God decide, for whatever reason, to *not* put a soul into certain bodies?
- I tend to believe that God creates our initial soul, and that it has the capability to develop, grow, and mature; but the origination is mysterious
 - Our human species evolved biologically, but the issue that most differentiates humans from animals is the soul, not the larger brain, opposable thumbs, or walking upright
- Given that the atoms our planet are made of come from stars and that life took billions of years to evolve, even the preliminary step of developing a body for the soul to live in appears to have been accomplished as independently of God as possible

Origination of the Soul

- I believe God wants each of us to be *unique*, and this may be the reason we start life in a body
- We are influenced by our environment and our DNA and both are tied to living in a body
- Are all souls identical to begin with?
 - If so, then living in different bodies, at different times, in different places, with different parents, etc. is what causes each person's soul to develop differently than other souls
- ***Or***, is each soul unique to begin with?
 - If so, how does God create so many different souls?
 - If souls are different from each other to begin with, then doesn't that mean that some souls are inherently better than others? Or are they somehow different but equal?

Origination of the Soul

- The initially identical soul notion makes more sense to me
- It seems unlikely to me that souls are initially different and unique for two reasons: (1) it seems unfair that some souls would simply be created as better than others without doing anything to earn it; and (2) that removes the one reason I can think of that would prompt God to have us start life in a body
- When does the soul start to develop in relation to its body?
 - Is the soul created by God at the union of sperm and egg? Sometime after conception but before birth? At birth? After birth but while the body is an infant? Even later? This *would* answer the question “when does life begin?”, except it is impossible to know.

Origination of the Soul

- I believe the body and soul grow and develop together, but this raises a multitude of questions
- What characteristics of a person belong to the soul, and are thus eternal? Which belong to the body and die with the body?
- We know much about the body: much is determined by its DNA, half of which comes from each parent; sexual reproduction is the mechanism that, with few exceptions, give people unique *physical* characteristics, but these are precisely the characteristics that die with the body
 - But they do influence the development of the soul since the body is what the soul grows up in, learning how to control it
 - Bodies are both gifts and challenges to the soul
 - Each soul faces different challenges as it learns to live with its unique body, so different bodies help make our souls develop differently

Eternal Life of the Soul

- Is it possible that souls are *not* guaranteed to live eternally?
 - An analog is that healthy bodies live longer than sickly bodies
 - Could it be that loving souls develop robustness and live eternally, while evil souls wither and die?
- John 3:16 - “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that who so ever believes in him shall not perish but *shall have eternal life.*”
 - Despite the deeply flawed interpretation of this verse by many (“believes in him” should mean believe in what he says, not believe he died for our sins, which totally contradicts the message of Jesus that God is forgiving), the last phrase does seem to indicate that having eternal life depends on believing in the *message* of Jesus, which is that *we* are supposed to be good, loving, and forgiving, and that gives eternal life
- Nevertheless, I tend to believe that *all* souls will live eternally
 - For a soul that becomes hopelessly miserable, is suicide in the afterlife possible?