

H&M, *Beyond Death*



Their objective: to show the immortality of the human soul to be true *beyond reasonable doubt*.

Degrees of belief, $\text{Pr}(\text{P})$ = the *epistemic* probability that P

- *Counterbalanced*: $\text{Pr}(\text{P}) \approx 0.5$. It is reasonable neither to believe nor to disbelieve P. One should suspend judgment.
- *Probable*: $\text{Pr}(\text{P})$ is *clearly* > 0.5 . It is unreasonable to *disbelieve* P, but it may be reasonable to *withhold* belief that P (i.e., suspend judgment) if the probability is close to 0.5.
- *Beyond reasonable doubt*: $\text{Pr}(\text{P}) \square 0.5$. It is unreasonable to either disbelieve or withhold belief that P.
- *Evident*: $\text{Pr}(\text{P}) \approx 1.0$.
- *Absolutely certain*: $\text{Pr}(\text{P}) = 1.0$.

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Note: What degree of belief is most reasonable for a person to have in a proposition depends significantly on what *other* beliefs they already hold.

To resolve the impasse, H&M will try to appeal primarily to evidence that is *neutral* between the competing worldviews, e.g., rational intuition, observational evidence, etc.

But first, they mention a few explicitly *theological* arguments for immortality.

- *Kinship with the divine*: Because of their high intrinsic value, it would be wrong for God to annihilate human souls or allow anything else to annihilate them. Therefore, human souls are immortal.
- *Justice*: Not everyone gets their just deserts in this life, so it is necessary that they receive them in an afterlife.
- *Divine love*: A loving God would want the highest good for us. This is eternal life in loving communion with God and each other.
- *Revelation*: The Bible says human souls are immortal. The Bible is reliable on such matters. Therefore, human souls are immortal.

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An argument from the *simplicity* of the soul.

1. There are only two ways something can be destroyed:
(a) by annihilation or (b) by separation or loss of parts.
2. Souls are simple.
3. Simple things do not have parts. (definition of “simple”)
4. Hence, souls cannot be destroyed by loss of parts. (by 2 and 3)
5. All cases of destruction that we have experience of involve separation or loss of parts.
6. Therefore, we have no reason for thinking that anything can be annihilated. (by 5)
7. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that souls are immortal. (by 1, 4, and 6)

The main problem is with (2). Souls can have multiple faculties, have multiple experiences, and perform multiple acts. Hence souls are *complex*, not simple.

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However, it may be argued that, while souls have a complex internal structure, they don't have *separable* or “*proper*” parts.

An argument from the *unity* of the soul.

1. There are only two ways something can be destroyed:
(a) by annihilation or (b) by separation or loss of parts.
2. Souls do not have *separable* parts.
3. Hence, souls cannot be destroyed by loss of parts. (by 2)
4. All cases of destruction that we have experience of involve separation or loss of parts.
5. Therefore, we have no reason for thinking that anything can be annihilated. (by 4)
6. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that souls are immortal. (by 1, 3, and 5)

Again, the crucial premise is (2). Is there any reason to think it's true?

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There are many different kinds of unities

- A pile of sand (spatial proximity)
- An automobile (proximity + static functional arrangement)
- A living organism, e.g., an amoeba (proximity + dynamic functional arrangement)
- A self, soul, or mind. There seems to be irreducible *ego* or *I* that *has* all of its faculties and experiences and that *performs* all of its acts.
 - Kant called this the “transcendental unity of apperception.”

There is *some* reason for thinking, then, that souls don't have the kind of complexity that admits of dissolution.

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An argument from the *desire*.

1. Desire for life after death (LAD) is a natural desire.
2. All natural desires admit of fulfillment by the obtaining of the object of that desire.
3. Therefore, the desire for LAD admits of fulfillment by the obtaining of LAD. (by 1 and 2)

Objection to (1): Desire for LAD is not natural but acquired.

- Reply: Desire for LAD seems to be deeply embedded in all cultures throughout history.

Objection to (2): Possibly, not all natural desires admit of fulfillment by the object of that desire.

- Reply: How could we *come to have* natural desires that don't admit of fulfillment? Who or what could have programmed them into us? Not God, since he wouldn't do that to us. Not evolution, because desire for LAD is irrelevant to biological survival.

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Arguments against LAD usually boil down to

1. Evidence for LAD is inconclusive, and since the burden of proof lies on the affirmative, we shouldn't believe in LAD.
2. The very idea of LAD is incoherent or unintelligible.
3. All our mental functions are wholly dependent on brain functions; hence, no soul or self could exist after the death of the body.
4. The apparent finality of death.

(1) and (3) are by far the most serious, so H&M will focus on them.

Two beliefs underlying much (not all) skepticism about LAD:

- *Empiricism*: all substantive knowledge about the world is derived from sense experience
- *Scientism*: it is only reasonable to believe substantive claims that can be tested scientifically—observed, measured, quantified, etc.

In their purest forms these beliefs are *self-refuting*.