

## **Editorial: Death and the Afterlife**

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Questions concerning death and the afterlife are amongst the most perennial in philosophy and theology. Traditionally, the afterlife was the answer that many religions offered in response to the mystery with which death presents us. This answer has metaphysical, anthropological, and ethical implications in that it appeals to a transcendent justification to ground our understanding of human nature, the concepts of justice and moral obligation, as well as more general propositions pertaining to the nature of reality. In recent years, with the advances in science, which have helped us to better understand the processes surrounding death and the developments in our thinking about personal identity, which have influenced how we construe the possibility of an afterlife, the more traditional conceptions of what we might expect after death have come under pressure.

However, the metaphysical, anthropological, and ethical implications we have inherited from these conceptions continue to play an important role in how we think about ourselves, our relations to others, and our place in the world. Although other ways of supporting the systems of value we organise our lives around in the face of death have been put forward, it is unclear whether these are able to replace the traditional beliefs in the afterlife without destabilising those systems. On the other hand, there is a long tradition in philosophical and theological reflection of emphasizing the threat that death poses, rather than simply relying on the promise of the afterlife to dismiss it. On these views, conversely, we risk ignoring fundamental facts about our lives if we fail to acknowledge the consequences death has for the systems of value we organize our lives around.

By their nature questions concerning death and the afterlife prompt interdisciplinary approaches at the intersection of philosophy and theology. The papers collected in this special issue of *TheoLogica An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* on the theme of Death and the Afterlife present a variety of perspectives ranging from interpretations of classic ideas of hell and the afterlife in St. Anselm of Canterbury and Kant, through implications we may draw from the psychology of transience for our conception

of the afterlife to the rationality of holding a belief in the afterlife in the absence of putative evidence. Other contributions look at the implications of some aspects of the afterlife for the ontology of time, the ontology of non-existent objects and the meaning of life, as well as the place of embryonic afterlives in Christian bioethics.

The first paper in this volume looks at St. Anselm of Canterbury's theory of retributive justice. The authors, T. Parker Haratine and Kevin A. Smith, apply this theory to the idea of retributive, damnatory, and irreversible punishment after death and defend, what they call, a retributive model of hell. In the first part of the paper, the authors discuss Anselm's claim that apart from Christ's sacrificial death, which atones for human sin, punishment can also satisfy God's justice and create a good state of affairs. Haratine and Smith explain the account of punishment offered by Anselm and propose a way to reconcile these two ways of satisfying God's justice by observing that Anselm's doctrine of punishment addresses what happens in cases where satisfaction is not made or applied. In the second part of the paper, the authors argue that an updated account of Anselm's retributive justice can make a constructive contribution to the contemporary discussion of hell. For example, this updated account can successfully respond to the objection that sin committed by a finite agent should not merit infinite guilt and punishment and provide grounds for an argument that retributive punishment is good also in this context.

In the second paper, "Examining a Late Development in Kant's Conception of Our Moral Life: On the Interactions among Perfectionism, Eschatology, and Contentment in Ethics," Jaeha Woo considers a shift that takes place in Kant's conception of moral life which has important consequences for Kant's conception of the afterlife. In the first part of the paper, Woo draws a contrast between the account of our moral life which follows from Kant's moral argument as it is presented in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and maintained up until the publication of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and the account of our moral life present in his later writings. This contrast consists in, as Woo argues, two conceptions of the highest good: the secular conception, which Kant moves away from, and a theological conception of the highest good. According to this revised conception the perfect moral will is not merely oriented towards an endless moral progress toward perfect sociological or political conditions but rather anticipates moral perfection in the afterlife. In the second part of the paper, Woo considers the importance of the alternative between these two views for moral reasoning. Woo argues that, in the absence of a convincing theoretical proof for or against the afterlife as well as apodictically certain knowledge of how demanding the moral law is, the Kantian strategy would be to ask which account of our moral life delivers the kind of contentment that can sustain our moral resolve.

In the third paper, “What the Experience of Transience Tells Us About the Afterlife” Line Ryberg Ingerslev considers the experience of transience and argues that the refusal to accept loss and change, which is characteristic of this experience, is motivated by an implicit denial of the afterlife. Following Freud, Ryberg Ingerslev looks at the refusal to accept loss and change as the refusal to undertake the work of mourning. On this view, mourning is a process that moves the mourner from the recognition of loss to its gradual acceptance. Ryberg Ingerslev appeals to Jonathan Lear to show that this acceptance relies psychologically on a sense of continuity of the meanings and values, which the experience of loss undermines. One implication of this is that the belief in an afterlife, in which this continuity is affirmed, makes possible a re-engagement with the world of shared values despite the experience of loss. The experience of transience, according to Ryberg Ingerslev, is, in contrast, a sense that everything will be in the end lost irreversibly, which calls into question the affirmation of these values in the present. Therefore, Ryberg Ingerslev argues that the impulse to undertake the work of mourning, which implies the resolution of grief, and acceptance of loss is incompatible with the experience of transience. This tension, on Ryberg Ingerslev’s account, suggests that one way in which the afterlife can be understood is as a continued flow of shared time, which grounds the world of shared values.

The fourth paper, “Embryonic Afterlives? Soteriological Reflections on the Problem of Early Pregnancy Loss” by Amber Leigh Griffioen, examines the implications of pregnancy loss for Christian bioethics. Although the problem of the afterlife as it relates to pregnancy loss is usually considered to be, first and foremost, an existential and pastoral problem Griffioen focuses on the metaphysical ramifications of these debates. Specifically, Griffioen looks at the eschatological status of the unborn and especially of those individuals who die before developing a body that could be resurrected. This status presents considerable difficulties for Christian bioethics including the implications of pregnancy wastage for possible responses to the problem of evil, as well as the possibility of “weird heavens” — that is the problem with the picture of heaven as the place which hosts resurrected human individuals, which arises when we consider that since in the history of humankind significantly more unborn human beings have died than have been born, heaven will mostly be populated by individuals who have not led anything close to resembling a human life. To address these concerns Griffioen proposes an alternative approach to the afterlife mirrored by the idea of embryonic resorption and mystical union.

In the fifth paper, “Death Prevents Our Lives From Being Meaningful” Nicholas Waghorn considers the relationship between death, understood as permanent annihilation and the meaning of life. Waghorn argues against the ‘imperfection thesis’, which provides justification for believing that avoiding

death is unnecessary for life to have meaning by affirming that it is sufficient for one's life to be meaningful that one relates to only a non-maximal conceivable value. Waghorn undermines this claim and defends the "perfection thesis" on which avoiding death is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for having a meaningful life, at least in some respects.

The sixth paper by Mark Hocknull, "Belief, Doubt, and Faith in Life After Death," develops a metaphorical account of the belief in life after death. Hocknull argues that although there are strong reasons for doubting the literal truth of assertions concerning life after death, faith in life after death can nonetheless be considered rational and truth-seeking. Hocknull rejects the idea of an immaterial soul, which could persist after the biological death of the individual human being to whom it belongs, and, thus, ensure their survival. Instead Hocknull draws on Aristotle and affirms a conception of the self or soul as a form of life that belongs to a biological organism. Consequently, the fact that there is no afterlife, or that death destroys the self, is an a priori or even a grammatical truth. Nonetheless Hocknull argues that this need not undermine our *belief in* the afterlife. To support his claim, Hocknull follows H. H. Price and distinguishes between *belief in* as synonymous with propositional belief and a distinctive class of evaluative beliefs. Although the latter are not an entirely separate form of belief from propositional assent Hocknull suggests that they may be maintained despite the lack of such assent. This, Hocknull argues, is the case with regard to the afterlife, which we may literally deny while still maintaining a belief in the afterlife as a source of a more positive attitude to negative changes and setbacks which befall us. Consequently, if a belief has notable benefits even if literally untrue, Hocknull concludes, that it is rational to maintain that belief.

The seventh paper, "What Becomes of the Damned: Annihilationism Consistent with Nonexistent Objects" by R. A. J. Shields concerns the consequences of the annihilationist commitment to annihilated objects – in particular deceased persons. Shields understands annihilationism as the theological view that at least some persons (that is, unrepentant persons) cease to exist after enduring a finite punishment in hell. Shields formalises this view as the Twofold Annihilationist Commitment (TOC): for some unrepentant subject *S*, two contiguous states of affairs obtain: i) at time *t* *S* exists in hell, and ii) at any future time *t*+1 *S* no longer exists anywhere. Shields then analyses the compatibility of TOC with some of the main positions on offer in the realism/anti-realism debate about what exists and does not exist. Shields shows that annihilationism is compatible with realism and some anti-realisms about non-existent objects and inconsistent with others. In particular, Shields argues that annihilationism is consistent with a) realism about annihilated objects (i.e., claims about persons who no longer exist are not only truth-apt but true as well), b) prefix fictionalism, c) non-factualism.

In the eighth and final paper “Eschatology, the Elimination of Evil, and the Ontology of Time” Andrew Hollingsworth looks at the implications that the eschatological belief in the elimination of sin and evil in the afterlife has for the ontology of time. Hollingsworth argues that ontologies of time that affirm the concrete existence of past moments are incompatible with the belief that on Judgement Day God brings about the end of all sin and evil. This is because these ontologies of time, like the growing-block theory, eternalism, or the moving-spotlight theory, entail that past evils and sins would “still” exist (for God at least) and would not be truly eliminated. Hollingsworth goes on to consider the position put forward by Samuel Lebens and Tyron Goldschmidt according to which the existence of past moments is compatible with the elimination of evil on judgement day when we appeal to hypertime in our ontology. Hollingsworth shows this position to be unsatisfactory and argues that in order to preserve the elimination of evil, an ontology of time that denies the concrete existence of past moments is needed. To that effect, Hollingsworth concludes, only presentism offers the adequate ontology of time.