

There is no Reason to Assume I will exist after my Death.

Introduction

The statement assumes that there is a standard belief in a life after death. The main issue when considering this assumption originates from the debate surrounding the mind and body argument.

Life can be defined as a being having both a conscious and physical functioning. Death is the cessation of the physical body functioning, yet not necessarily the cessation of existence. Can existence be dependent on the physical body (materialism) or can one exist in a disembodied state after death due to the soul (dualism)? There is still the difficulty in defining the soul as, assuming the soul exist then it is still impossible to define it with precision. The 'concept' of the soul can be defined as what gives life to humans; it is the immaterial or spiritual part of an individual.

Richard Dawkins would agree with this statement and I will build the main argument using his ideas.

Dawkins is a materialist and this means that he doesn't believe in the existence of the soul. Therefore there is no chance in a life after death as there is nothing to exist after death, the mind dies with the physical body. Dawkins sees the concept of the soul as an illusion caused by ignorance, superstition and irrational perception. He says that human consciousness is a 'mysterious aspect of brain activity, which neither science or philosophy can understand', it is this consciousness that is mistaken as a soul. Dawkins connects this false belief of a soul to religion, stating that 'the universe turns due to genetic replication and has nothing to do with a divine being'.

Plato would have disagreed with Dawkins ideas. He not only believed in the concept of the soul and its existence but also that the soul is immortal. Plato was a dualist, this means that he believed that the body and soul were separate and that therefore the soul could survive the physical death of the body in a disembodied state.

Plato's theory was really a discussion on the nature of the soul rather than its existence. Plato assumes the souls existence from the start and so did not consider the question of a life after death at all. Plato said the phenomenon of deju-vu was proof of the existence of the soul, the experience of deju-vu being the soul remembering or recollecting a previous existence. He reasoned that the soul has no specific evil to destroy it and therefore must

be immortal, arguing that the immortality of the soul and the occurrence of deju-vu proved the existence of an afterlife.

Descartes is another dualist and would have argued against Dawkins ideas. Decartes identifies the soul with the person and with the mind; ‘ I am a mind, which is a soul’. His argument for life after death was based on his beliefs about the soul, similar beliefs to Plato.

In his ‘Discourse on the method’ (1637), Descartes argues:

“Our soul is of a nature entirely independent of the body, and consequently it is not bound to die with it. And since we cannot see any other causes which destroys the soul, we are naturally led to conclude that it is immortal.”

Like Plato’s theory, the immortality of the mind/soul for Decartes, comes from the idea that mind and body are distinct substances: ‘although the physical body will die and decay, the soul can continue to exist’. He further argues unlike Plato, that the soul exists due to his definition of corporeal and thinking substances, and their principal properties.

Dawkins dismisses the possibility of the existence of the soul as illusion. Instead being a level of consciousness mistakenly identified as a spiritual thing. Descartes argued for the soul’s existence and Plato provided some ‘proof’ supporting the dualist viewpoint.

Hick, another philosopher didn’t support Plato’s theory about an immortal soul as he is not a dualist but is a ‘materialist with a twist’. Believing that there is no separate mind and body but still focused on the idea of resurrection by a divine. This is an idea that again Dawkins completely dismissed as nonsense, due to the way he viewed religion and the existence of a God. Hick argued that:

“The concept of the soul or mind was in fact not a spiritual ‘ghost in the machine’ but the more flexible and sophisticated ways in which humans behave and have the capacity to behave”.

Hick therefore believing that there was no question of there being a ‘soul’ that is distinct from the body, or that can survive death in a disembodied state. He argued that there was the possibility of an ‘empirical meaning for the idea of life after death’. This is Hick’s ‘Replica Theory’, that although a human by nature is mortal and subject to annihilation at death, God by an act of supreme power, resurrects the body. Upon death, God resurrects an exact psychophysical ‘replica’ of the deceased in another space to allow humans to fulfil their potential and making life meaningful.

This resurrection in another space is the afterlife.

Although Hick's theory isn't the same as Plato's or Descartes', Dawkins would use the same argument against them. Dawkins stated that the only possible concept that could be considered an afterlife is the idea that an individual can exist after death due to genetics. By the way of evolution, as we are 'all but self producing robots', your existence lives on through your children as our genes are passed on to the next generation. This is not really a form of existence as I have previously defined it, and therefore depends on your definition of existence.

A further argument specifically against Hick's theory of resurrection is the idea put forward by Paul Badham. Even if some one is resurrected by a divine being after death they cannot be exactly the same person, as resurrection is the recreation of the body not reanimation. Then you have the argument about clones, is the person that is resurrected in the afterlife the same person they were before death or are they a clone. This depends on how you definite a person, is someone the same after death if they have identical DNA and therefore looking and 'being the same' but also having the memories of before their death. Or to be the same does the resurrected being in the afterlife in fact have to be the same body and then how come bones are found in the ground when Hick says a divine has resurrected them in 'another space'.

Further support for assuming an afterlife exists, comes from the evidence of near death experiences, talking to the dead, regression and the phenomenon of ghost or spirit sightings.

This form of evidence is common but often viewed in a sceptical sense due to its dubious nature.

Seeing ghosts or spirits may be considered by some as proof of an afterlife, but these are often dismissed as a trick of the mind, away of coping with loss or people looking for 'sights'. Often also people who believe in ghosts are those who have actually seen them.

Mediums who claim to be able to talk to the dead can be very convincing, but only through the desperation of people who has lost someone. It seems easy to dismiss mediums as charlatans preying on people's grief with the illusion of talking to the dead. And at the very least mediums are people who believe in what they do but have no real ability.

Regression is hypnotism to experience 'previous lives'. This can also be convince as people who undergo hypnosis can seem to recover startling memories, yet I think I would dismiss this as being due to suggestive hypnotism by the hypnotist.

A near death experience is when you are clinically dead and then you come back to life. It is commonly believed that during this experience you are conscious of everything around you. People who have experience this phenomenon claim many things, these include sensations of happiness and peace, seeing bright lights, feeling no sense of time passing and finally seeing deceased relatives and a 'Godly figure'. There are though, also reports of hellish realms and unbearable feelings of fear. These experiences can be interpreted not only as experiences of an afterlife, but experience of the realms, heaven and hell.

Near death experiences can be considered reliable evidence as patients make true claims about things that occurred around them while they were clinically dead, and also the claim to have communicated with a relative that had just died and the patient hadn't known of the death.

Richard Swinburne argues for the reliability of near death experiences, as he states how can we call someone a liar when it is his or her experience? The only thing we can question here is their interpretation of the experience, not the actual experience itself. Near death experiences seem to be the strongest actual evidence of life after death as it is not easy to dismiss them, yet they could be hallucinations occurring before the body is completely 'dead'. It is however commented that how can so many people have the same experience of a supposed afterlife? I would dismiss this question by saying everyone has a concept of heaven and hell or what else might happen after death, could it not be possible that a near death experience is a mind creating a hallucination from these concepts as a final thought?