

Philosophy 1100 – Introduction to Ethics

Lecture 3 – Survival of Death?

Question 1

How important is it to you whether humans survive death?

Do you agree or disagree with the following view?

“Given a choice between (1) a world where God exists, but death is the final end of human existence, and (2) a world where God does not exist, but humans live forever in a reasonably happy state, I would prefer that the first alternative be true.”

- A. I strongly agree with that statement.
- B. I’m inclined to agree with that statement.
- C. I am uncertain about this, or I want to pass on this question.
- D. I’m inclined to disagree with that statement.
- E. I strongly disagree with that statement.

Question 2

What is your view on the following statement:

“At least at some point in the future, I will continue to exist as a person after the death of my body.”

- A. I am very confident that that is true.
- B. I think it is likely that it is true.
- C. I am uncertain about this, or I want to pass on this question.
- D. I think it is unlikely that that is true.
- E. I think it is very unlikely that that is true.

Question 3

Which of the following statements is closest to your view concerning the nature of human beings?

- A. Every human being possesses an immaterial mind that survives the death of his or her body.
- B. Though the human mind also perishes with the destruction of a person’s body, humans have immaterial souls that survive the destruction of their bodies.

C. Human beings are composed of the fundamental particles of physics, and things made up of those particles – such as atoms, molecules, and cells – and nothing more.

D. I am uncertain about the ultimate nature of human beings.

E. My view is different from any of the above views.

Question 4

Which of the following statements is closest to your view concerning what you think will happen to people after they die?

A. Humans will live forever as immaterial, disembodied minds.

B. People have immaterial minds and either God will gather together the parts of their bodies at some future time, and reunite their minds and their bodies, or else God will provide people with new bodies, and they will then live forever.

C. Though humans do not have immaterial minds, at least some of them will ultimately survive death, because God will gather together the parts of their bodies at some future time, so that they will be resurrected, and live again.

D. Humans have immaterial minds, and when they die they are reincarnated into another body, or another form of life.

E. Death is the final and ultimate end of a human person's existence.

Discussion with your Classmates

Talk with your neighboring students about some of the following things:

(1) Do their views differ from yours on whether humans have immaterial minds, or whether humans are composed of the stuff of physics, and nothing more?

(2) Can you offer a reason for thinking that your view is probably right? Can they offer reasons for thinking that their views are probably right?

(3) What about views on survival of death? Do you have the same view, or a different view?

(4) Can you offer a reason for your view? Can other students offer reasons for their views?

Class Discussion 1: Do humans survive death?

1. What reasons or arguments might be offered for thinking that humans ultimately **do** survive the death of the body?

2. What reasons or arguments might be offered for thinking that humans **do not** survive the death of the body?

Class Discussion 2: What are humans composed of?

The place to begin this discussion is by asking what the main alternatives are.

So, what are the main possibilities here?

1. The Nature of Human Beings

The Main Options

Option 1 - Physicalism/Materialism: This is the view that humans involve nothing over and above the entities that enter into theories in physics – such as electrons, protons, neutrons, quarks, photons, and so on – those things **and nothing more**. This is to say, moreover, not only that they are **composed** out of those entities, but also that any properties they have are reducible to the properties, relations, and entities of physics.

Option 2 – Property Dualism: This is the view that while human beings do not involve any type of entity or substance other than those of physics, the conscious experiences they have involve properties that are not reducible to the stuff, properties, and relations of physics. But those extra properties totally depend upon the physical body, and cannot survive its destruction.

Option 3 – Substance Dualism: This is the view that humans are **composed** out of the entities that enter into theories in physics, **together with an immaterial mind** – **an entity that can survive the destruction of the body** .

Option 4 – An Immaterial Soul that Is Not the Mind: This is the view that humans are **composed** out of the entities that enter into theories in physics, **together with an immaterial soul**, where this is understood, not as being the mind, nor as involving any mental states such as experiences, or thoughts, or beliefs, or memories, or desires, etc., but simply as **an immaterial substance about which one can say nothing more**.

2. The Nature of Humans and the Prospects for Surviving Death

1. If humans are composed of purely physical entities, then it would seem that the only way a human could survive death is by there being a very powerful person – such as God – who intervened in some way.

One possibility here is that God will put the parts of a human back together, and so resurrect the person.

Another possibility, suggested by the philosopher Peter Van Inwagen, is that God will snatch the person's body away just before the person dies.

Question 5

If you have an immaterial soul that survives the destruction of your body, how important to you is it that your soul contains your **memories**?

A. That's very important to me.

- B. That's quite important to me.
- C. It would be good if that's true, but it's not that important.
- D. If I have an immaterial soul, it doesn't really matter at all to me whether it contains my memories.
- E. Either I have no opinion on this matter, or I would prefer to pass.

Question 6

If you have an immaterial soul that survives the destruction of your body, how important to you is it that your soul incorporates your **personality traits**?

- A. That's very important to me.
- B. That's quite important to me.
- C. It would be good if that's true, but it's not that important.
- D. If I have an immaterial soul, it doesn't really matter at all to me whether it incorporates my personality traits.
- E. Either I have no opinion on this matter, or I would prefer to pass.

Question 7

If you have an immaterial soul that survives the destruction of your body, how important to you is it that your soul incorporates your **fundamental beliefs**?

- A. That's very important to me.
- B. That's quite important to me.
- C. It would be good if that's true, but it's not that important.
- D. If I have an immaterial soul, it doesn't really matter at all to me whether it incorporates my fundamental beliefs.
- E. Either I have no opinion on this matter, or I would prefer to pass.

Question 8

If you have an immaterial soul that survives the destruction of your body, how important to you is it that your soul incorporates your **basic moral beliefs and values**?

- A. That's very important to me.
- B. That's quite important to me.
- C. It would be good if that's true, but it's not that important.
- D. If I have an immaterial soul, it doesn't really matter at all to me whether it incorporates my basic moral beliefs and values.
- E. Either I have no opinion on this matter, or I would prefer to pass.

Question 9

If you have an immaterial soul that survives the destruction of your body, how important to you is it that your soul incorporates your **basic preferences**, your **basic likes and dislikes**?

- A. That's very important to me.
- B. That's quite important to me.
- C. It would be good if that's true, but it's not that important.
- D. If I have an immaterial soul, it doesn't really matter at all to me whether it incorporates my basic preferences, my basic likes and dislikes.
- E. Either I have no opinion on this matter, or I would prefer to pass.

Question 10

If you have an immaterial soul that survives the destruction of your body, how valuable to you would that be if your soul did not incorporate **any** of the following things: your **memories**, your **personality traits**, your **fundamental beliefs**, your **basic moral beliefs and values**, your **basic likes and dislikes**?

- A. That would still be very valuable.
- B. That would still be quite valuable.
- C. It would be still be good if that were true, but it's not all that valuable.
- D. If I have an immaterial soul, but one that does not incorporate any of my memories, my personality traits, my fundamental beliefs, my basic moral beliefs and values, my basic likes and dislike, survival in that form would be of no value to me.
- E. Either I have no opinion on this matter, or I would prefer to pass.

Question 11

Would you say that **you** would be surviving death **as a person** if you had an immaterial soul that would survive the destruction of your body, but a soul that did not incorporate **any** of the following things: your **memories**, your **personality traits**, your **fundamental beliefs**, your **basic moral beliefs and values**, your **basic likes and dislikes**?

- A. I would definitely say that I would be surviving death as a person in that case.
- B. I'm inclined to say that I would be surviving death as a person in that case.
- C. Either I have no opinion on this matter, or I would prefer to pass.
- D. I'm inclined to say that I would not be surviving death as a person in that case.
- E. I definitely wouldn't be surviving death as a person in that case.

2. The Nature of Humans and the Prospects for Surviving Death

2. If the term "soul" here refers, not to something that is the mind - or at least part of the mind - but just an immaterial entity about which one knows nothing more, how will the survival of a soul, **thus understood**, provide grounds for holding that human **persons** survive death?

If, after you die, there is nothing that has your memories, or your beliefs, or your attitudes and preferences, or your feelings and emotions, or your personality traits, have **you** survived death?

3. If humans are to survive death because they are composed of a physical body together with an immaterial entity, then that immaterial thing must involve states - for example, memories, or personality traits, or basic beliefs, preferences, and attitudes - that can be a **basis for personal identity**, that make one the unique person one is.

3. Is It Likely that Humans Have Immaterial Minds?

1. How does one investigate a question scientifically? Scientific method involves the following:

(1) The formulation of **competing hypotheses**;

(2) The attempt to derive **experimentally testable predictions** from those hypotheses, often together with auxiliary hypotheses that one has reason to believe are true;

(3) The attempt to find cases where the competing hypotheses will give rise to **predictions that are mutually inconsistent**, so that a **crucial experiment** can be performed;

(4) The **experimental testing** of those predictions;

(5) The investigation of the **explanatory power** of the competing hypotheses.

2. Consider, then, investigating scientifically competing hypotheses about the nature of human beings:

(1) Does the hypothesis that humans are made up of purely physical entities, so that the human mind is nothing more than the human brain, lead to different predictions than the competing hypothesis that humans are made up of a physical body together with an immaterial mind that is both the basis of all mental abilities and the place where all mental states are stored?

(2) Will those two hypotheses lead to different predictions, for example, about what will happen when the brain is damaged, or when it is damaged in different ways?

(3) Some relevant facts:

(a) Different mental and psychological powers are impaired or destroyed by **damage to different areas of the brain**: External assaults on the brain, such as

gunshot wounds; internal events, such as strokes and brain tumors; the effects of operations to remove parts of the brain.

(b) **Drugs** can affect one's mental states, and some drugs have the ability to produce **complete unconsciousness**.

(c) Things such as **Alzheimer's disease** have massive effects upon people, including the destruction of memories, and the progressive impairment of mental and psychological abilities, including the ability to think.

(d) There are relevant facts about **the development by human beings of mental and psychological abilities**, including the correlations between those changes and the growth of different areas of the brain, and the increasing complexity of neuronal circuitry in relevant regions of the brain.

(e) There are relations between, on the one hand, the differences in the brain structures present in humans and **various non-human animals**, and, on the other hand, differences in psychological abilities between humans and non-human animals, and between different non-human animals.

(4) The basic point is that all of these facts are **precisely the sorts of things that are to be expected** if the mind is the brain, if mental and psychological capacities exist only because of complex neural structures, and if memories, personality traits, etc., are all stored in the brain. By contrast, such facts would be **surprising and unexplained** if, on the contrary, the human mind were an immaterial entity that was the basis of mental capacities and powers, and the place where all mental states, including memories, were stored.

Question 12

Do you agree or disagree with the following view?

“While scientific theories are usually based upon the evidence, some theories – such as the theory of evolution – are accepted even though they are not well supported, simply because of their anti-religious implications.”

- A. I strongly agree with that statement.
- B. I'm inclined to agree with that statement.
- C. I am uncertain about this, or I want to pass on this question.
- D. I'm inclined to disagree with that statement.
- E. I strongly disagree with that statement.

4. Religion, Biology, and Psychology

1. The teaching of the theory of evolution in the public schools is a matter of great controversy, at least in the United States, at present. Many, many Americans believe either that the theory of evolution should not be taught at all, or that some form of creationism (including so-called intelligent design theory) should also be taught.

2. This controversy extends to biology departments in universities, though it is much more difficult to affect the content of biology courses at the university level than it is at the elementary or secondary school level.

3. Psychology is, if anything, even more on a collision course with many religions than biology is. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, teaches that humans have immaterial minds, but one would be very hard-pressed to find that idea taken seriously at any top non-Catholic university. So why haven't psychology departments been under attack?

4. Why is the view that humans have immaterial minds not taken seriously by psychology departments in top non-Catholic universities? Is it because the people who go into psychology start out with an anti-religious bias? Or is it because the scientific evidence strongly supports the view that all mental capacities are based upon complex neural circuitry in the brain?

5. Physics and Geology

Conflict between religious views and science is not restricted to biology and psychology. Another area of serious conflict, for example, concerns the age of the earth, and there it is a number of areas of science, including geology and most importantly **physics**, that are inconsistent with certain religious views.

6. What Is One's Attitude to Science?

It is important to face up to the extent to which various religious views conflict with scientific theories in various scientific areas. Those who argue for equal consideration of the theory of evolution and of creationist views needs to say forthrightly whether they make precisely parallel claims when it comes, for example, to the findings of geology and physics regarding the age of the Earth. (In Kansas, there was a forthright attempt to ban the teaching of scientific information bearing upon the age of the Earth.)

7. Psychology and the Question of an Immaterial Mind

1. It is psychology, however, that is, I think, by far the most important science in this connection.

2. The reason is that, on the one hand, so many of the world's religions are firmly committed to the view that humans beings have immaterial minds, whereas psychology has almost universally concluded that all mental states and all psychological capacities are states and capacities of something physical – the human brain.