

Is There Evidence for Life After Death?

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Philosophical naturalists believe that only material things exist. One implication of this belief is that immaterial things like the human soul are not real. On this view, humans are merely bodies and brains. Since these stop functioning at death, we absolutely cease to exist when we die. Though naturalists reject belief in nonphysical realities without even examining the evidence, there are actually some convincing reasons to believe that we have an immaterial aspect to our being, enabling us to continue our existence even after physical death. Here are three lines of evidence.

First, from a legal perspective, if humans are merely material a person cannot be held accountable this year for a crime he committed last year. Why not? Because physical identity changes over time. We are not the *same* people today that we were yesterday because every day our bodies shed and replace millions of microscopic particles. In fact, every seven years almost every part of our material anatomy changes. Therefore, if the naturalist is correct to say that humans are only a collection of matter, the person who previously committed a crime no longer exists and thus cannot be charged. Thankfully, no criminal could win his freedom based on that kind of argument because legally and intuitively we recognize a *sameness of soul* that establishes personal identity over time. In other words, our legal system affirms the reality of the immaterial soul.

Second, freedom of the will presupposes that we are more than material robots. If I am merely material, my choices are just a function of factors like genetic makeup and brain chemistry. Therefore, my decisions are not free; they are fatalistically determined by material events. The implications are profound. In a worldview that embraces fatalistic determinism, I cannot be held morally accountable for my actions since reward and punishment make sense only if I have freedom of the will. In a solely material world, reason and choice are just conditioned reflexes. Moreover, even the concept of love is rendered meaningless. Rather than being an act of the will, love is relegated to a robotic procedure that is fatalistically determined by physical processes. The reality of human freedom proves that humans have immaterial souls that are not enslaved to material forces like biology, chemistry, and physics.

Third, the most powerful argument for life after death flows from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some of the best minds in ancient and modern times have demonstrated beyond doubt that Christ's physical trauma was fatal; that the empty tomb is one of the best-attested facts of ancient history; that on several occasions people experienced tangible post-resurrection appearances of Christ; and that within months of the resurrection, not just one person, but an entire community of at least ten thousand Jews experienced such an incredible transformation that they willingly gave up sociological and theological traditions that had given them their national identity. Through his resurrection, therefore, Christ provided compelling evidence for life after death.