LIFE AFTER DEATH: AN IDLE WISH OR A REASONABLE HOPE?

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Abstract:

I argue that life after death (understood as personal survival of one's death) is an appropriate object of one's hope, despite the fact that it may not be an appropriate object of one's belief. That is, the hope for life after death is a reasonable hope. Whereas the belief that there is a life after death may not be a justified belief.

I begin by discussing and clarifying the phenomenon of hoping and developing a logical analysis of the concept of hope. Hoping is then distinguished from both wishing and believing. Next I discuss what must obtain before we consider a hope to be a reasonable one or to be justified. Finally I demonstrate that at least one form of life after death meets the conditions for justified hope.
Life After Death: An Idle Wish or a Reasonable Hope?

Religious beliefs, including the doctrine of life after death, are, according to Sigmund Freud, "fulfilments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind. The secret of their strength lies in the strength of those wishes." Among professional philosophers as well as psychologists today, the belief that there is a life after death is not widely held. Even the hope for a life after death has been given up. Perhaps the reason is that these "oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind" have been transcended or outgrown. We have come of age. Or perhaps these wishes or desires have been repressed. One reason for their repression could be that the purported evidence appears not to support the thesis of life after death. If our beliefs ought to be apportioned to the evidence -- i.e., if belief or assent ought to wait on the evidence -- it follows (given that there is, in fact, a paucity of supporting evidence) that the evidence for life after death is insufficient to warrant such belief. Since the educated person aims to keep his beliefs in line with the evidence, it may appear that besides giving up the belief that there is a life after death one also must give up the hope for a life after death.

I will argue that life after death (understood as personal survival of one's death) -- which is hoped for by many ordinary folk -- is an appropriate object of one's hope, despite the fact that it may not be an appropriate object of one's belief. That is, the hope for life after death is a reasonable hope. Whereas the belief that there is a life after death may not be a justified belief. I will begin by clarifying the concept of hope and distinguishing hoping from both wishing and believing. Then I will discuss what must obtain before we would consider a hope to be a reasonable one or to be justified. Finally I will argue that at least one form of life after death meets the conditions for justified hope.

I
Hoping that p (where p is any proposition or event) falls

between wishing that p and believing that p. One can wish that he had not taken a particular job or that he had chosen a different profession. But one logically cannot hope counter-factually. A person can consistently say, "I wish to marry a prince. But I know that it is not possible." However, the following would be inconsistent: "I hope to marry a prince. But I know that it is not possible." Hoping has a possibility condition that wishing does not have.

If hoping and wishing are both analyzed in terms of desire, wishing covers a much larger range than hoping. One can wish for things that he would not desire on balance. Yet one does not hope for such things. Consider the case of a person who, for reasons of health, has quit smoking. The person in this situation desires both to smoke and not to smoke. That is, on the one hand, he desires not to take up the habit again, and, on the other hand, he often strongly desires to have a cigarette. In such a case, it could be said of the man that he hopes that he will refrain from smoking, i.e., that his desire to kick the habit will overcome his desire to have a cigarette. It would not be said of such a man who wishes to smoke a cigarette that he hopes that he will smoke one. What is hoped for, in this case, is the alternative that is desired on balance.

A few rough comparisons and contrasts have been made between wishing and hoping. Now let us contrast hoping with believing. We would not say that a person believes that p, where p is in the future, if he does not expect that p but merely thinks that p is possible. For example, if Jones believes that he will win a bet, he expects to win. That is, he anticipates certain experiences. If subsequently he loses the bet, he will be surprised.

In contrast, a person could hope that p but not expect that p. Consider the following case: After visiting a woman whose husband has what has been diagnosed by his physicians as terminal cancer one might say, "She hopes against hope that her husband will recover." Less colorfully what is being asserted is that, although she realizes that, so to speak, the odds are very much against her, she continues to hope that her husband will recover. She hopes in the face of overwhelming odds. Perhaps such behavior is irrational (the notion of reasonable hopes is to be discussed later), but it is rather common behavior -- and is correctly called hope.

The woman in the example very likely does not expect her husband's recovery. She desires his recovery and considers it in the realm of possibility. She will very likely be looking for signs of his recovery, but she need not thereby
be shutting her eyes to clear indications that her husband's condition is worsening. If one were so cruel as to ask her if she expected her husband to recover, her response could well be: "No, I guess that I don't expect it, but I do hope for it." If subsequently her husband does not recover, she will be disappointed but may not be surprised. Expectation, although a necessary condition of believing, is not a necessary condition of hoping.

There is a common use of "believe" in which it indicates a retreat from knowledge or certainty. For example, "I guess I don't know that p after all, but I believe it." However, on the broader use of "believe" under discussion here, "S believes that p" is not only compatible with, but is an element of, the analysis of "S is certain that p" or "S knows that p." In contrast, hope that p is incompatible with certainty that p. In a case in which p is certain, one has clearly gone beyond hope. As we saw earlier in discussing hoping and wishing, neither can p be an object of hope if not-p is certain (e.g., the counter-factual examples of wishing). So if either p or not-p is certain for S, p cannot be an object of hope for S.

Desire -- as we have seen -- is a logical constituent of hopes but it is not a logical constituent of beliefs. I may believe that a civil war is at hand. But nothing concerning my attraction to, or aversion from, such a war follows directly from that belief. Belief that p and desire that p are logically independent. (Of course, it may be that many people have a propensity to believe that p more quickly if they desire that p than if they do not. But that is a psychological rather than a logical matter.) If I hope that a civil war is at hand, then one can conclude directly from this that I desire such a war. For desire that p is a necessary condition for hope that p.

On the basis of the above discussion, we have the following set of necessary conditions for "S hopes that p":

a) "S desires that p."

b) "It is not the case that (p is not preferred by S on balance)."

c) "Neither p nor not-p is certain for S."

These conditions, although necessary, are not jointly sufficient. A person, for example, can -- and people as a matter of fact do -- give up hope even when what was hoped for is desired on balance and before it becomes certain for them that what was hoped for will not take place or turn out to be false. In cases of giving up hope, one does not simply or necessarily assess the situation as impossible. A person
may give up hope that a lost relative of his will return, although he is by no means certain that the relative will not return. A person may give up hope for liberation from a concentration camp, although it is not entirely unreasonable to expect that his oppressor will be vanquished by forces sympathetic to his cause. A person may give up hope that there is a life after death, although he is not certain that there is no life after death and he would like there to be a life after death. Giving up hope, in cases such as these, is a decision that the person makes.

I doubt that a set of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for "S hopes that p" can be found. The reason for this is that not only is the notion of "hope" very broad but its borders are vague as well. There is no clear criterion for determining, in every case, whether conceivable borderline cases are cases of hoping or something else such as wishing or entertaining or believing or imagining. It would appear then that, for any set of conditions one could suggest as a jointly sufficient set for "S hopes that p," counter examples could very likely be constructed. There is little reason, then, to try to obtain such a set. For -- not only would it be a task likely to end in frustration, given the breadth of application and vague borders of "hope" -- it is not necessary for present purposes that a set of jointly sufficient conditions be established. It is sufficient that we are aware of the necessary conditions which have been established.

II

Many philosophers have been concerned with what is required for a person's belief that p to be justified. John Locke, for example, suggests a common sense view of the justification of belief. "S is justified in believing that p" if and only if "S's assent to p is equal to the evidence that p and p coheres with S's other beliefs." By "the evidence" is meant phenomena generally accepted as evidence which it could reasonably be expected that a person such as S in S's situation would have.2 One's assent -- the strength of his belief -- must, on Locke's view, follow the strength of his evidence. One's belief that p must wait on the evidence for p.

On this Lockean criterion of justified belief the only sorts of criticisms which are appropriately made of non-evaluative, factual beliefs and the only sorts of grounds appropriate for supporting these beliefs are evidential ones and, secondarily, questions of coherence with other beliefs.

already held. Since this rather strong criterion of justified belief has rather wide spread acceptance and initial plausibility, and since it would be beyond the scope of this essay to argue for any particular criterion of justified belief, I will simply use it as a model with which to compare and contrast a criterion of justified hope.

The notion of justified hope probably does not have a basis in ordinary discourse. However, in ordinary discourse, we do see fit to criticize, or object to, a person's holding certain hopes. We think of a person's hope as either moral or immoral. Hopes are also criticized as being foolish or silly or unwarranted.

In this essay I want to use the notion of justified hope as an umbrella term. If a hope is justified, a hope is unobjectionable -- that is, it can meet objections which are appropriately raised against it. If a hope can meet the criticisms that can appropriately be made against it, it is -- according to the present use of the expression -- a justified and/or justifiable hope.

Consider the following two sentences. What responses would likely be forthcoming?

1. I believe that the President will be assassinated when he comes to the campus to defend his policies.
2. I hope that the President will be assassinated when he comes to the campus to defend his policies.

One's reaction to belief-statements is quite different from that of hope-statements. In regard to belief-statements one wants to know what evidence the speaker has to back up his claim. "Have you heard of threats on the President's life?" "Have you heard of a radical group conspiring to commit the murder?" "Has a saboteur infiltrated the secret service?" In regard to hope-statements one is likely to respond by asking what (moral) right the speaker has for hoping such a thing. "You ought not hope that the leader of our country, no matter how much you disagree with his policy, be assassinated. His policy must be defeated with the ballot not the bullet."

To hope that p, where p is a non-evaluative proposition such as "The President will be assassinated when he comes to the campus" is to place an evaluation on p. But to believe that p is not. So -- given the Lockean criterion -- whereas in the case of justified belief that p assent to p must be equal to (or at least not greater than) the evidence for p, in the case of justified hope that p, commitment to p is not a function only of the evidence for p. So it would
seem reasonable to maintain that commitment to p need not be equal to the evidence for p. In hoping that p, besides an assessment of the evidence for p one must take account of the strength of one's desire that p and the moral appraisal of that desire. The notion of justified hope is more complicated than the notion of justified belief.

If S hopes that p, as we have seen, the hope that p is subject to moral appraisal. So a necessary consideration in determining whether S's hope that p is justified is whether it is morally acceptable. The reason a moral evaluation comes in here is that desires -- an element of hopes -- are subject to moral scrutiny.

Besides taking into account the moral appraisal of the desire that p, one must consider whether S's desire that p really is compatible with most of S's other desires. We might call this the pragmatic test. If S hopes for p, he does not, on balance, prefer some other alternative (cf. condition (b) above). However, outside observers may feel that his priorities are mixed up and that he ought to prefer another alternative. That is, that he would, in fact, be better off -- live a higher quality life -- pursuing some of his other desires which must be placed in abeyance if he pursues p or makes the hope that p guidance for his life.

If one is to be justified in hoping that p, he must also consider whether there are good grounds for affirming the possibility that p. We might call this the possibility test. In hoping that p, one believes that p is possible. At minimum such possibility should be demonstrable. If there is positive evidence for p, that is better.

The belief that p is possible in turn presupposes other beliefs. Any belief which is presupposed by one's hope must itself meet the conditions for justified belief. I will call this the background beliefs test.

In hoping that p all that one needs to believe about p is that p is logically and/or nomologically possible. Since one is committed to less with regard to p in hoping than in believing, the evidence required with regard to p is in general much less in hoping that p than would be required in believing that p. Before one would have adequate ground for judging a hope that S has to be foolish, he would have to take into account the desires and moral commitments of the person who hopes as well as the evidence for and against the truth of p or the occurrence of p. The evidential consideration by itself clearly is insufficient.

Assuming that one's hope can meet the four tests -- the moral, pragmatic, possibility, and background beliefs tests --,
the strength of S's desire that p and the strength of the evidence that p combine to determine the appropriate strength of S's hope that p. It may be appropriate to strongly hope for p even when the evidence for p is quite small as long as the desire for p is very great. For example, one may be justified in strongly hoping for the recovery of one's young daughter -- given a parent's strong desire for the recovery -- even though the doctor's prognosis does not offer very good odds. Or consider another example. An Israeli woman whose husband was taken prisoner on the Syrian front in the recent Middle East war -- given the politics of war --, had no way of determining whether he was alive or dead, whether he would ever return. Yet because of her love for him, because of her desire to be reunited with him, because of her commitment to him, we would say that she is justified in strongly hoping that he will return, i.e., in living in such a way as to keep the door open to this desired possibility. We may even feel -- given her strong desire and the moral commitment involved -- that it would be wrong for her to give up hope.

III

Suppose that it be conceded that the belief that there is life after death cannot be justified. Can the hope for life death be justified? Does it satisfy the test for justified hopes established in the previous section?

Most often people who are concerned about life after death speak of believing in life after death rather than saying that they believe that there is life after death. This linguistic observation may be of no philosophical interest. People also speak of believing in the Loch Ness monster or they speak of an early scientist's belief in ether or phlogiston or celestial spheres. "Belief in" in these expressions simply means belief that the entity exists. If we take these cases of belief in as our model, belief in life after death is synonymous with belief that there is a life after death.

However, there are other cases of "belief in" -- several examples of which will be looked at below -- which must be analyzed quite differently. If belief in life after death is to be analyzed parallel to these cases, belief in life after death clearly is not synonymous with belief that there is a life after death. In fact, belief that there is a life after death is not even an element of the analysis. With these cases, the linguistic distinction appears to reflect a deeper philosophical distinction. Consider the following:

i) "S believes in a strong world government."
ii) "S believes in a united Germany."
In these cases S does not believe that (i) there is a strong world government or that (ii) there is a united Germany. If we were to give an analysis of these cases of "beliefs in" in terms of "beliefs that," we would have an analysis such as this:

A. S believes that the establishment of a strong world government is possible.
B. S believes that a strong world government would be good at providing governmental services.
C. S believes that the establishment of such an institution would be a good thing.

The use of "belief in p" analyzed here is not far different from "hope that p" but is quite different from "belief that p." Hence it is not at all obvious that one really is re-treating at all when one concedes that belief that there is a life after death is not justified but hope for a life after death is. People who believe in life after death need not be committed to the belief that there is, or will be, a life after death. They must be committed to its possibility. It is not clear whether people who have believed in life after death usually also have believed that there is, or will be, a life after death.

There are no doubt many reasons why some people have believed in, or do believe in, life after death. Among them are the following: (i) Often it is a part of one's early religious training which is never shaken. (ii) In some cases it is a doctrine which is inferred from other religious doctrines or beliefs (e.g., God's goodness and power). (iii) Some people have had para-normal experiences which they feel can best be explained by appealing to the doctrine of life after death. For example, a medium tells someone things that "only the dead can have known." (iv) In the face of the death of a loved one, some people are unable or unwilling to face the thought of never seeing the departed loved one again. Antoine says in Gabriel Marcel's play, Le Mort de Demain, "To love somebody is to say to him, 'You will not die.'" If there were a life after death (in the form of personal survival of one's death) it would be possible that the loved one would be seen again. (v) In the face of one's own inevitable death there may be a reluctance to accept total annihilation or one's own permanent destruction. Or one may have a morbid fear of permanent loss of consciousness. Belief in life after death could calm such fears. (vi) If all ends in death, life has appeared to certain people (e.g., Leo Tolstoy) to have no meaning and not to be worth living. So if life is to be worth living, it has been argued, there must be life after death. (vii) Only if there is a life after death (in the form of personal survival of one's death) is it possible that the world is a moral world -- in the sense
that it is a place (1) in which (as Kant said) an individual's happiness can be commensurate with his virtue and (2) in which justice, love, and beauty can be victorious over injustice, cruelty, and ugliness. So if we perceive the world as a moral world, we are committed to a belief in life after death.

In the above partial list of reasons why some people have believed in, or do believe in, life after death, there are three types of reasons:

a) reasons as explanations of the origin of the belief (e.g., (i)).
b) reasons as ground for the truth of the claim (e.g., (iii)).
c) reasons as motivation for belief (e.g., (iv)).

Reasons of type (a) are primarily the concern of the psychologist or sociologist of religion. Whatever reasons of type (a) are found would be interesting but would not have any direct bearing on what reasons of type (b) or type (c) could be given.

For purposes of the argument in this essay, I want to concede that reasons of type (b) which have been given and presently can be given for the doctrine of life after death are inadequate. That is, the reasons given do not provide adequate ground for the truth of the claim that there is life after death.

I want to look at some of the above reasons for belief in life after death -- in particular (vi) and (vii) -- as reasons of type (c). I want to examine the insights behind arguments (vi) and (vii) outlined above to see whether they provide one with good reason to desire life after death. That is, is life after death of the sort envisaged by spokesmen for the arguments sketched in (vi) and (vii) something one would want, if one were thinking clearly and making the proper distinctions? If the question can be answered affirmatively, we will have partially satisfied the test for justified hope for life after death.

Let us turn first to (vi), the question of the relation between the finality of death and the possibility of life's meaning. It would be reasonable to assume without argument that everyone desires to have a meaningful or worthwhile life. Hence, if it were correctly determined that one's own life has no meaning if death ends all, this would provide one with good reason to desire life after death.

What does it mean for someone's life to have meaning? Per-
haps what is meant is that one has intrinsically worthwhile or valuable experiences -- e.g., performs moral actions, experiences pleasure, masters an art. However, there are people -- as, for example, Leo Tolstoy as reported in A Confession\(^3\) -- who meet these conditions yet find their lives to be meaningless. Now one may want to argue that such people simply are confused and have meaningful lives after all. But the argument would not be convincing, for, although it may be reasonable to argue that someone who thinks he has a meaningful life does not, it appears very odd to argue that someone who claims with sincerity not to have a meaningful life does. The reason for this is that believing that one's life is meaningful (I should think) is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for having a meaningful life.

So what more than having intrinsically valuable experiences is required? To answer this let's consider an analogy. Suppose a person attends a play. He is perplexed by it. He wants to know its meaning. What is he asking for? It would seem that he wants to discover the order or "logic" of the drama. What ties it together? A series of funny lines does not make a meaningful or (aesthetically) good comedy. Similarly a series of intrinsically valuable experiences does not make a meaningful or worthwhile life -- contrary to what Antony Flew, Kurt Baier and others appear to be arguing in recent articles.\(^4\)

There must be some commitment or purpose which brings unity or focus to one's life. One's life needs some unifying direction. Aristotle saw this as one of the necessary conditions of maturity. Both Søren Kierkegaard and Paul Tillich stressed the importance of a centered life -- a life in which one "wills one thing" or in which one has an "ultimate concern."

The question then becomes what is worthy of one's ultimate concern. What is of sufficient value to become the focal point of one's activity? Each person must develop a self-concept and commit himself to something that he takes to be worthy of such commitment. Just as many different themes would be significant enough as the focal point of a good


drama -- yet not every theme would be -- so too many different concerns may be of sufficient value to be that upon which one centers his life. It would seem that different concerns would be right for different people depending upon each person's ability and disposition.

Finding one's own concern and pursuing it is what is meant by self-fulfillment. Seeing that the pursuit of one's goals is in some sense a fulfillment of oneself is what is required for one's life to be meaningful. If one's life is to be meaningful then, the achievement of the self-fulfillment to which one is committed must be seen as possible.

It is the requirement that one's self-fulfillment be seen as possible that brings the question of meaning of one's life into a confrontation with the fact of death. It seems to me that the "arrest of life" of which Tolstoy speaks arises when there no longer appears to be the possibility of genuine self-fulfillment. As Teilhard de Chardin says: "An animal may rush headlong down a blind alley or towards a precipice. Man will never take a step in a direction he knows to be blocked. There lies precisely the ill that causes our disquiet." The road ahead must be seen to be open. If, as in Tolstoy's case, one perceives that death blocks one's road to fulfillment, one cannot go on. Teilhard continues:

Hence this remarkable situation -- that our mind, by the very fact of being able to discern infinite horizons ahead, is only able to move by the hope of achieving, through something of itself, a supreme consummation -- without which it would rightly feel itself to be stunted, frustrated and cheated. By the nature of the work, and correlatively by the requirement of the worker, a total death, an unscalable wall, on which consciousness would crash and then for ever disappear, are thus 'incompassible' with the mechanism of conscious activity (since it would immediately break its mainspring).

Unless one's sense of self and one's potential are very limited or one is uncommonly blessed with favorable conditions and knows it, death blocks one's path to genuine fulfillment. It is a thief coming unexpectedly in the night. At the time of one's death, self-fulfillment has not been


6 The Phenomenon of Man, p.231.
attained. Much of one's potential remains untapped. If
death is the final curtain, then for all such people death
destroys the possibility of a truly meaningful life. Therefore,
for such persons, it would be reasonable to desire
life after death in the form of personal survival of death.

Obviously not just any form of extended life will serve
the purpose of providing meaning to one's life. The argu-
ment I am giving presupposes a conception of life after death
in which conditions would be optimal for continued self-
development. The various traditional religious conceptions
can assist one in speculating about what such a life would
be like. H.H. Price's discussion entitled "Survival and
the Idea of "Another World" is also helpful. However, it
is not necessary for our purposes to work out what such an
after life would be like. The argument does not commit us
to any specific details about an after life.

Let us suppose then that life after death of the approp-
riate sort is desirable for at least certain people. If
we know that life after death is not possible, then --
although desirable in these cases -- it would still not be
an appropriate object of hope. But I know of no convincing
demonstration of the impossibility of personal survival of
death. Such a demonstration would consist of either a proof
of the logical inconsistency of the notion of personal sur-
vival of death or a proof of the incompatibility of modern
scientific understanding of human death and the thesis of
personal survival of death.

As previously mentioned, H.H. Price has speculated about
what after-death experiences would be like. There may not
be any such experiences, but he presents a possible "other
world" which one would be hard pressed to show is logically
inconsistent. It is all readily imaginable.

Modern scientific views of the self and a scientific
understanding of death no doubt weaken the plausibility of
certain traditional arguments for the truth of the proposition:
"There is a life after death." But can it be demonstrated
that the hypothesis of life after death is incompatible with
a modern scientific understanding? William James' response
to this question in 1893 is still appropriate today. Suppose
that psycho-physiology establishes that "thought is a function

7Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, vol.I,
pt.182 (January, 1953), 1-25.
of the brain."8 If it is felt that affirming this scientific doctrine compels one to deny the possibility of life after death, one must look more closely at what "function" means. If "function" here must mean productive function -- as in "Steam is a function of the tea-kettle," or "Light is a function of the electric circuit" -- then decay of the brain would entail the end of thought and hence, it would seem, the impossibility of personal survival of bodily death. However, it may be that we should understand "function" as used here as a releasing or permissive function or as a transmissive function. The trigger of a crossbow has a releasing function. A colored glass, a prism, a reflecting lense have transmissive functions. If the brain is seen as performing a transmissive function, it does not at all follow from the claim that "thought is a function of the brain" that destruction of the brain results in destruction of the thought.9 James goes on to argue that it is equally as plausible -- if not more so -- to see the function as a transmissive function as to see it as a productive function.10

However, one could even suppose that thought is destroyed by the decay of the brain and it would still not follow that life after death is impossible. Perhaps -- as is maintained in certain Jewish and Christian theologies -- people die but are later resurrected and given new "spiritual bodies." I doubt that the notion of resurrection is inconsistent.11 Certainly it is imaginable. If consistent, it is not a possibility that science can deny. Science can (correctly) say that there is no evidence for it. But that is a far weaker claim.

The complex and interesting issues raised in the last several paragraphs have been widely discussed. My very brief discussion adds nothing new. It merely points to the relevant considerations for maintaining, and a few reasons why one might maintain, that life after death in the form of personal survival of one's death is possible.

11Peter Geach in God and the Soul (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) maintains not only that resurrection is a consistent notion but he goes on to say that "unless a man comes to life again by resurrection, he does not live again after death. At best some mental remnant of him would survive death..." (p.28)
Before actually applying the test for justified hope to the hope for life after death, I want to look briefly at one other reason stated above (namely, (vii), the desire for a moral world) for why people believe in life after death. If it were a matter of choice, a moral person would choose a world in which justice, love, and beauty prevail in the end over injustice, hatred, and ugliness. Of course, we are not called upon to make such a choice. Instead we find ourselves thrown into a world in which often the wicked prosper and are awarded longevity while the righteous suffer throughout life and die early and ignominious deaths. Given this distressing empirical fact concerning our life on earth, it is clear that if individuals' happiness is to be commensurate with their virtue, if justice ultimately is to win out, all human life does not end at the grave.

If we take as axiomatic the Kantian maxim that each human being is to be valued as an end (i.e., as having intrinsic worth and the right to strive for his own fulfillment) and not as a means only, then we desire the possibility of fulfillment for all human beings. However, for the vast majority of mankind -- which includes the Auschwitz victims, napalmed babies, the starving millions in East Africa -- life is brutish, repressive, and short. Only a relatively few (e.g., some members of the wealthy leisure class, the specially gifted, the educated elite, the lucky) achieve a status in which it is possible to control one's own life and not be merely a means to someone else's ends. Only if there were life after death in the form of personal survival of one's death, would the possibility exist that all persons reach a position in which they have the opportunity to strive for their own genuine fulfillment.

One can certainly wish that the world were more amenable to the needs and aspirations of mankind. One can wish but not hope counter-factually. But given these facts about the human condition and the limits of our knowledge, one can hope that the reality is greater than the appearance, that the visible world is enveloped in an unseen world. For then it is possible that for each individual justice can win out over injustice, love over hate, the forces of life and fulfillment over the forces of death and destruction.

I have been discussing only one form of life after death and just a few selected reasons for belief in life after death. Considering the form of life after death discussed as well as the reasons given for belief in life after death, let us see whether the hope for life after death meets the requirements of justified hope.

Given the reasons for hope for life after death cited above, the moral test certainly is satisfied. The desire for a moral
world, for example, is clearly a proper desire. This is not to say, of course, that it would not be possible for someone to desire life after death for morally unworthy reasons—e.g., a desire to see non-believers suffer. But it is saying that one's desire need not be ignoble or even selfish.

The desire for a meaningful life, for the possibility of ultimate self-fulfillment will clearly be compatible with most of a person's other desires. In fact, it is the way in which these desires are brought together into a unified whole. As has been argued, life after death of the appropriate sort is a possible means by which such meaning and fulfillment could be actualized. Hence, the hope for life after death meets the pragmatic test.

I have already indicated that there is at least a strong presumption in favor of the hope for life after death meeting the possibility test. If the arguments I have offered in the essay are correct, then the background beliefs test is also satisfied.

Even so, if there is little at stake and the possibility of life after death seems very remote, the desire for life after death remains no more than an idle wish. However, if much is at stake—and I believe that the arguments presented above have demonstrated that much is at stake—then, despite the fact that life after death remains merely a possibility and not a probability, the desire for life after death is a reasonable hope.

The strength of the desire coupled with the strength of the favorable evidence determine the appropriate strength of the hope. So even if the favorable evidence is not strong (as we have conceded in the case for life after death), if the strength of the desire is justifiably strong, it is reasonable for one's hope to be quite strong (i.e., the combined strength of the evidence and the desire).

I have presented a test for justified hopes and have offered some reasons for believing that the hope for life after death can meet these tests. Much more could and should be said concerning whether the hope for life after death meets these tests than space allows. It seems to me, however, that these initial reflections point to an affirmative answer: the hope for life after death is justifiable. Hence, I conclude that it is a reasonable hope and not merely an idle wish. One is justified in keeping the door open to the desired possibility of life after death despite the lack of any firm evidence for it.

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