

Chapter V: "Eschatological Apologetics"

§23: "The Immortality of the Soul"

by

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The doctrine underlies all the religions of the world. It has been held by the deepest thinkers and has been supported by various proofs, but only the Christian religion presents the valid arguments from Revelation.

1. Proofs for Immortality

A. *The historical argument.*

From the world's earliest morning the thought of man linked life to a longer chain of time than between the cradle and the grave. The investigations as to the origin of the belief have been many, but it was evidently implanted in man as an original instinct by the Creator. Contrary to all negative opinions by superficial research, the best scientific result inclines strongly to the view that all tribes and nations in some form or another held and hold a belief in a hereafter with different conditions. The Egyptians testify to the fact in their monuments and papyri. On one is written: "His soul is living eternally." Homer taught that there is a future life. Socrates reasons most beautifully concerning the state of the immortal life. Plato in his "Phaedon" demonstrates the doctrine of immortality with the profoundest arguments. Pindar in his second Ode, Cicero in his Orations, Virgil in his "Aeneid," and other great men in all ages defend the doctrine.

B. *The indestructibility of matter as a proof.*

We can change the form of matter, but we cannot destroy it. Annihilation is absolutely unthinkable and unscientific. What we call destruction and death does not involve extinction but only change. If the soul exists, being superior to matter, it is unreasonable to believe that the soul should cease to exist. The decomposition of the body does not impair essence; the former is only possible where there is a complex. The spirit of man is not complex, but a simple essence. No instrument can divide the spirit. Death can take away the earthly house of the soul, but the soul or personality survives whatever may be the experience. This leads to the following proof.

C. *The metaphysical proof, based on the simplicity and immateriality of the soul.*

The evidence for the existence of mind is clearer than the proofs for the existence of matter. We believe that matter exists because it makes certain impressions upon our senses. But we know the existence of mind by our consciousness of, or reflection on, what passes within us. To know that we are and that we think implies a knowledge of the soul's existence. But the existence of matter we only know by the operation of mind. The indwelling spirit must, therefore, exist more fully than the material body. Our body changes, but the soul is unchanged. The simplicity of the soul and its independence of matter prove its immortality.

D. The teleological proof from the inadequacy of the present life, which, without immortality, would be a beginning without end or purpose.

Man's restless spirit is a proof of immortality. Expectation and not satisfaction is all that man finds in the world. Man is God's noblest creation, and still this life would be misery, if there was no life hereafter. And man has immortal longings, but man never reaches a conclusion here. The philosophy of mind shows that it was made, not for a day, but for eternity. The attributes of the soul do not reach their full development in this life. The end of man's creation would not be realized, if man was not immortal.

There is no such thing as failure in nature. Everything in nature serves some purpose. And as man is a complex being and belongs to two worlds, he must live hereafter.

E. The moral argument.

In this life virtues do not receive their full reward and vices the punishment deserved. Therefore, there must be an existence hereafter, where everything will be set right.

F. The argument of love.

Our continued love for the dead is a proof of our immortality. Love is indestructible, and we are bound by deathless love to our friends who have crossed the river. We feel instinctively that the dead are not lost, but that they exist in other spheres. No human being follows the body of a loved one to the grave but he believes that the departed still lives somewhere. The departed relative or friend is as to him living, not only in past memories, but also beyond, and our thoughts go constantly to the spiritual abode. The hope is strong to see the loved ones again in the other world.

G. The individual instinctive proof of immortality.

We have before considered the universal belief in immortality, but we must also weigh this argument from a more individual viewpoint to make it more convincing. The hope of a continuous existence beyond is one of the most ineradicable of all instincts and the profoundest of all intuitions.

The law of instinct is clearly apparent in the animal world, and the animal uses it, although unconsciously. Man also possesses the instinctive endowment, but educated man rarely takes notice of it and suffers for his neglect. But we will not discuss our instinctive faculties. In this connection we only call attention to our religious instinct and emphasize our instinct of immortal existence.

A clear and continuous instinct never deceives. This instinct is not a result of education, but is implanted in our nature by God. Just as we cannot get rid of the idea of God and the voice of conscience, just as little can we remove the instinct of immortality, which proves that this instinct is true. Besides, we have a self-conscious desire to life forever. We cannot earnestly and continuously desire or wish for something that does not exist.

Man evidently possesses a psychical mind which is the real personality. The physical mind, or brain, may imagine many things, but the psychical mind never errs. Many young students who superficially study natural sciences are influenced by materialistic biologists, physiologists and psychologists to believe the view that the soul cannot be separated from the body or brain. There are many phenomena resulting from accidents, loss of memory and unconscious states which seemingly favor the belief that the brain and soul are identical, but the accidental broken condition of the brain does not necessarily prove that the soul or person is unconscious. If a machine breaks, the operator himself is not affected. The brain is only the machine which the real personality uses. At death the soul temporarily is deprived of the bodily organ, but the psychical mind has then full sway.

The modern research of psychical societies may later lead to some tangible results, but it is, anyway, certain that the natural instinct of immortality is a proof that cannot be ignored. There are many prominent scientists who hold that modern science cannot offer any decisive arguments against the doctrine of immortality. We call the student's attention to the lecture of Prof. William James, "Human Immortality," in which he discusses the theory of the brain as a transmissive organ. In answering his critics he says in the Preface of the second edition: "The plain truth is that one may conceive the mental world behind the veil in as individualistic a form as one pleases, without any detriment to the general scheme by which the brain is represented as a transmissive organ. — The reader would be in accord with everything that the text of my lecture intended to say, were he to assert that every memory and affection of his present life is to be preserved, and that he shall never in *sæcula sæculorum* cease to be able to say to himself: I am the same personal being who in old times upon the earth had those experiences."

H. *The theological proof.*

When we are assured of the existence of God and recognize His attributes, it is self-evident that man must be immortal. God created man in His own image, man was the climax of creation, and the universe was prepared for man. The love of God, therefore, implies that

man was not created to live a few years on earth and then cease to exist. Then humanity would be in a worse condition than the irrational animals, because the animals have no self-consciousness and no idea of a future life. The wisdom and justice of God prove the same fact as the love and goodness of God.

I. *The soteriological proof.*

God would never have sent His Son to save fallen man, if man had been created only for an earthly existence. Christ died in order that man by faith in Him should attain a blessed eternal life. It is not necessary to develop this argument.

J. *The eschatological argument.*

The history of the world would have no meaning if man was not immortal. Neither could there be a real history if humanity vanished like the animal world. We cannot entertain the thought that the makers of history have no history beyond. If all the great men and women of the past pass in review before us, we cannot endure the idea that they exist no more. And when we look upon our beloved living, there will be no future reunion. The creation of rational beings would have no meaning if there was no immortal life and a consummation setting things right.

K. *The Biblical, absolute proof.*

The absolute proof we find in the Scriptures. If the Bible is not the word of God, then everything is a blank, and life is a mockery. The ethnic religious books furnish no satisfactory hope. It is only a philosophical speculation which they offer sorrowing souls. The ethnic religions picture a heaven of happiness which is questionable, and there is no agreement. But the Bible has been proved to be the sure Word of God. The textbook of the Christian religion is the Bible, and, therefore, Christianity presents the absolute proof of immortality. It is not necessary to quote the passages in the Bible. They are familiar to every Bible reader.

**2. The Christian Conception of Immortality is the Only Satisfactory One
and Constitutes an Important Evidence for the
Superiority of Christianity and its Divine Origin**

The mere continued existence of the soul is not what the heart craves for. To many, Nirvana would be better than an existence without real content and without activity. Hence the non-Christian fancy has adorned the life hereafter with ever new colors of earthly happiness. Mythology pictures a heaven of earthly pleasures. Christianity presents a future life of blessedness and happiness as a consequence. The center of the hope is the vision of God and the fellowship of the blessed. Its ideal is the kingdom of God

and its blessed activity. No other religion presents such a doctrine of immortality, and the very conception proves that the doctrine is not of human, but of divine origin.

Chapter V, §23 from *Apologetics or a System of Christian Evidence* by Conrad Emil Lindberg (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1917). **Note:** The text has not been modified except that long paragraphs have been divided.