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Living Well in Light of Death | N.T. Wright & Shelly Kagan

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The Veritas Forum

This program was recorded at a Veritas Forum event on Yale in 2014. The original title was, "Living Well in the Light of Death" and featured N.T. Wright, Bible Scholar and former Bishop, and Shelly Kagan, Professor of Philosophy. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate, review, and subscribe. And, if you're interested in more content from Veritas, check out our Beyond the Forum podcast. Visit veritas.org to learn more about the mission of the Veritas Forum and find more resources to explore the ideas that shape our lives.

Transcript

This is the Veritas Foreign Podcast, a place for generous dialogue about the ideas that shape our lives. For a start, the phrase the afterlife, I think, is systematically misleading, because if you believe in resurrection, like classical ancient Judaism did, the rabbis, for instance, like some Muslims do, and like classical Christianity does, then it isn't the afterlife that matters. What matters is the after-after life, and since that's going to be deeply puzzling to many people, let me just take half a minute and explain it.

This is your host Carly Regal. Today, I'm sharing with you a conversation at a Veritas Forum event at Yale in November 2014. The speakers you will hear from are N.T. Wright of Oxford and Shelley Kagan of Yale, as they discuss their views on life, death, and what, if anything, comes after.

You can learn more about the Veritas Forum and talks like these by visiting veritas.org. I hope you enjoy their conversation. To frame our conversation tonight, I'd like to start by asking both of our presenters to take a couple of minutes to summarize their core beliefs and how they came to hold them. Three minutes or less.

So, Professor Wright, what do you most fundamentally believe and why? Silence would be a good way to start, actually. Belief is such a huge thing. When I say I believe in God, which I do, I know that the word God means different things to different people, and I believe in the God who I see revealed in Jesus and who I know is present powerfully in

the personal presence that Christians call the Holy Spirit.

So, that's a very traditional Christian thing to say, but I think the more I look at Jesus, the more I discover about who God actually is. So, it isn't a matter of first believing in God and then adding Jesus or the Spirit onto that. It's a matter of constantly being challenged by this amazing person called Jesus, and all that he was, all that he did, and what happened to him, particularly his death and resurrection.

And that forms the center really of everything else to me. It colors everything I believe about life, about who I am, about what it means to be part of a family, what it means to be a teacher, what it means to be a citizen of a country, what it means to think about world issues. It's the center of all that I've tried to do.

So, that's probably pretty basic. Minish and a half, was that? Something like that. You've got it.

Professor Kagan, same question for you. Ok, now I'll take longer since you do. Yeah, I happily give you my extra minute.

So, I'm not generally in the habit of trying to boil down my deepest beliefs into a handful of remarks either. And I found myself a little taken back at the request to do it. So, here's my best attempt, but I'm not confident that it wouldn't come out different if you would ask me again a week from now.

So, here's where I want to start. When I look at the universe, it seems to me that it's a place of breathtaking beauty, and awe-inspiring complexity, and this can, as a result, be a source of deep, pervasive joy, pleasure, satisfaction. But it also seems to me, sadly enough, that the universe is utterly, utterly indifferent to us.

Not just to humans, but to other sentient creatures at all. It just doesn't care about how it crushes us. It doesn't care about the suffering misery that it causes us.

It doesn't care about the fact that it cuts us down and tramples on our dreams. More horrifyingly still, it's not just nature that often has this attitude. We have this attitude to one another.

Other humans are indifferent to the suffering of our fellow humans, or even worse, contribute in a malicious, vindictive, sadistic fashion to compounding the misery. Given all of this, what can we do? Well, we can try to fight back. We can try to replace ignorance with knowledge, intolerance with tolerance, subjugation with justice.

We can try to create lives for ourselves that have pleasure and joy and love and knowledge and accomplishment, and we can try to help other people attain these things as well. An image that doesn't often come to mind, but sometimes comes to mind when I think about questions like this, is I view the universe as a very dark and bleak place, but

it's not all dark. The darkness is not immutable.

We can, if we gain love, then that creates a speck of light. If we gain some insight, that's a speck of light. If we join with another, maybe that makes the speck grows into an island, and if we form a community, then with luck, the speck becomes a continent.

It's not a particularly optimistic picture because we're not going to ever overcome the darkness, but we can push back. And so what we should do with our life is to try to make things better. So you've brought up dark and bleak, which relates to our theme tonight.

So let's jump right in and talk about death. Professor Wright will start with you in your 2008 book called Surprised by Hope. You argued that we should, and I quote you here, tell the truth about the real and savage break, the horrible denial of the goodness of human life that every death involves.

What is this truth about death as you understand it, and why is it important to talk about it? Yeah, that paragraph, I think, was trying to push back against a very common, and sometimes would be Christian practice in the Western world at least, which is to say that death really doesn't matter, that because we're Christians we have a hope that's about something else, so that really death is just turning around the corner. There's a famous quote from an English clergyman preaching a sermon a little over 100 years ago, which goes, "Death is nothing at all," and goes on, "I've only slipped into the next room, just think of me and speak to me as you always did." What people don't always realize is that the same sermon went on with something just like the quote that you said, that actually we have to balance that sense that somebody has just slipped away peacefully with this horrible wrenching loss. The last time that I suffered a major bereavement, which was when my father died three years ago, I went through what I know everyone goes through, which is that you do the whole thing, you have the funeral, you think it's terrible, and you go back home and you want to call up the person who's just died to chat to them about it, and it's silly things like that, but then really you realize this is final, this is, they've gone, that's it.

And we have to face that, and Christians have not always been good at facing that, because we've tried to say, well, because we believe in hope, we shouldn't grieve even, and that's absolutely devastating, psychologically devastating, partially devastating, that of course grief is the shadow side of love, and when you love someone and they're gone, you grieve, and if you bottle that up, it'll be bad for you in all sorts of ways. But of course the big difference is that within the Jewish hope, as expressed in some strands of Jewish belief in the first century, particularly the group called the Pharisees held this belief, they believed that creation is the work of a good God, and that though it has gone radically wrong, this good God is going to sort it out, not by abolishing the space-time universe and physicality, but by recreating it, and so that was a Jewish hope, which focused particularly on times of persecution when people were being killed, because they had

heared to the Jewish faith two centuries before Jesus, this was going on, and so people who believed that God would sort this mess out said, well, actually, when God sorts this mess out, the people who have died in the struggle in the meantime, he will raise them to new life as well, and there are things in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures which pointed in that direction, and then it's in that context that the early church believed that after Jesus had been crucified, put to death violently, that he was raised to a new kind of bodily life, and so that inevitably colors everything else we think about death, but it doesn't take away the shock and the fact and the horror of death, it doesn't mitigate the awfulness of dire illnesses, of terrible accidents, of terrorist atrocities, et cetera, they are just as dire as they were, it doesn't mean, oh yes, that doesn't matter, it means there is a hope, but to get to that hope you have to go through this extraordinary valley of shadow. Can I, I know this is already breaking the rules, but can I jump in because I already find myself puzzled by something? I understand that if you, the loss is still a loss, but why isn't it overwhelmingly softened? If I thought to myself, all right, I can't see my wife for a week, that would be bad, right? But if I thought, all right, but then after a week I'll be able to see her again, that's not remotely of a piece with, I can't see her forever.

That's absolutely right, but I think there's been two, that is right, I mean, I'll go back to my father's funeral because that's recent and quite vivid memory for me, and I was actually taking the service, which is quite a powerful thing to do for your own father, and to commit him into the hands of God, and my father was a believing Christian, and so we were praying for him and with him and thanking God for his life in the sure and certain hope that one day we would be together again, but that doesn't mean that every other day when I would phone him up or when I would look forward to going to see him, that there isn't a sense of aching loss, and it doesn't take that away. Yes, it, I'm not sure that I would say it softens it, maybe it does soften it, but as a pastor I would say, if I said to somebody, never mind, you'll see them again one day, I would feel I was actually being a bit cruel, I would be discouraging them from engaging with the real process of coming to terms with loss, which may go on for decades, you have to learn to live your life without that person, and that can go on and on and on, one of my close friends where I work now, he's a bit younger than me, he lost his wife a few years ago to cancer, and here he is in his mid-50s, and his life is just radically altered, and though he believes in resurrection, that both does and doesn't soften it, and I think it's important to say both of those things. So Professor Kagan, you've also written a book on death, 2008, it was published, I won't quote you, but I'll just ask you to maybe summarize what your beliefs are about death as you laid them out in the book and with your course.

Well, the basic idea that I believe is that death is what it appears to be, namely, the end. I think that people are just physical objects, we'll be talking about this later in the evening I know, but I think that I'm just this lump of flesh and blood and bone and muscle that works, the parts work together like a machine, it allows me to sit here and think about these questions and to talk with all of you, and at a certain point that

machine is going to break, and that will be it, I will cease to exist. I think that has implications about how we should live, but as far as the question of the nature of death itself goes, that's pretty much the entire story.

Can I break rules as well and just ask you? Break away. Does this mean you're basically on all falls with ancient epicureanism, which more or less taught that, that we are simply random atoms that have gone ping and bounced off one another, and that at our death these atoms just dissolve and that kind of thing. Exactly, I mean, as a piece of metaphysics, it's a bit simple, but as a piece of vivid metaphor, I think it's right on the money, there's just atoms in the void bouncing against one another, and sometimes they come together and make moderately interesting things like this bottle, sometimes they make more interesting things like that iPad, and sometimes they make remarkably interesting things like all of us.

Fair enough, that is an ancient and noble worldview which gets reparestinated fairly regularly. I think actually is deep in modern western culture. I think the Enlightenment had a lot to do with the retrieval of epicureanism, and I think in a sense, it's one of the things I try to teach my students, that in the ancient world, stoicism was actually the dominant view, that is that if there is a divinity, it's all roundness and inness and everywhere, etc., but the epicurean view, which is that if there are gods, they're so far away that they might as well be non-existent, and the world does its own thing, and the atoms collapse, etc., I think that's much more where people are today, and one of the odd things about trying to express Christian faith is that Christianity grew up in a world which tended to be either pagan or pantheistic, not epicurean, and we're expressing it in a world that you just described now today, and so it's a different sort of debate from what people had 2000 years ago.

Just to continue to disregard the rules for a moment longer. [laughter] So I'm curious about the sociological claim you just made. I'm not a sociologist, I don't have any empirical evidence on this, but I would have conjectured that the kind of pretty much unqualified materialistic worldview that I just put forward, that it's just matter bouncing around in space where just physical objects use like this, so sometimes called physicalism, I wouldn't have thought that was the dominant worldview of our culture.

One regularly reads in the newspaper about surveys where this many percentage of the American public believe in the afterlife, this many believe in angels, this many believe in souls. [laughter] Okay, so I'm going to interrupt at this point. Okay.

There is an answer for this, but we'll come back to you. I'll give you 30 seconds. Yes, okay, just to say this is a major difference between America and Europe for a start.

That far more people in America both say they believe in God and seem to be doing something about it, than certainly in my country and in most of the rest of Europe. Anyway. So I think this segues nicely into where we're hoping to go with this

conversation, which is what this picture of the afterlife might be.

You've just brought up that many Americans believe this. What is your vision, Professor Wright, of what the afterlife is it, you know, playing harps on clouds or where are we going? First of all, the phrase "the afterlife" I think is systematically misleading because if you believe in resurrection, like classical ancient Judaism did, the rabbis for instance, like some Muslims do and like classical Christianity does, then it isn't the afterlife that matters. What matters is the after afterlife and since that's going to be deeply puzzling to many people, let me just take half a minute and explain it, that if you believe in resurrection, one of the classic ways in which that's expressed is in terms of a two-stage post-mortem process.

The first stage is much harder to describe because after the dissolution of the body, believing that there is any kind of continuity is systematically difficult and all generations have found that. That's not just a modern problem. But then if you believe that there is a creator God who is going to remake the world to make the whole cosmos over again out of the present one, not scrap this one and do a new one, then what matters is the new life within that world.

So that you have the new creation with resurrection so that human beings will be within that new creation, which is a revalidation of the goodness of the created order and the goodness of the material order. And so that that's the picture which matters. And then if you take the pictures in the New Testament of how that works, these are only signposts.

They're not video camera advanced shots of what you will see when you get there sort of thing. But there are several signposts pointing forward, which use metaphorical language to be sure, but in the book of Revelation it's like a great wedding. In the letter to the Romans it's like creation giving birth to the new creation.

And in one of the other places in the New Testament it's like a great battle in which all the forces of chaos and evil are finally defeated. And these images are ways of saying there is a new something which the God who we see in Jesus is going to do and we will be part of it. We will be sharing in that new world so it will be like the present one only more so than we will be like ourselves only much more so, much more vividly alive than we could ever have imagined.

The difficulty there, and it is a real difficulty, is giving a coherent account of what happens in between. And again the Bible gives us various hints about that, but they're all picture language. And you can use the language of soul if you like to do that job, that there's continuity of soul.

The New Testament actually doesn't do that. It talks just about you being with Christ and then finally being raised from the dead. John Pokinghorn, the Cambridge physicist who's also a theologian, said basically God is going to download our software onto his

hardware until he gives us new hardware to run the software again.

And that is as much an image taken from the world of the iPad, etc. As any of the other language in the Bible would be, but it does say something about that two stage post-mortem reality ending with a new creation. And one of the sad things to me is that a great many Western Christians just have never even heard that.

It's not that they don't believe it, they've never even heard that that is what the Bible teaches. The Eastern Orthodox Christians, they never lost this. This was a real problem with the split of Eastern West Christianity.

Can I ask a question about that view before we move on to some of my own thoughts? So is it literally bodily resurrection that you're hoping for as the source of, not the intermediate period, but the afterlife after the afterlife? Is it the putting back together of the carbon atoms that make up, or is it, as you said when quoting the more recent metaphor, is it going to be totally new hardware? This is a question which as old as the rabbis and indeed as old as the early Christians. And when we take the best model we've got, which obviously has other problems, but the best model we've got is the body of Jesus himself, that at the end of the process with Jesus there was an empty tube. And actually it's very hard to explain the rise of early Christianity unless there was an empty tube and a new body, but it's a transformed body.

And very early on some of the Christians wrestled with this because for instance in the middle of the second century in southern France, some of the Christians in Lyon were attacked by the pagan mob and they said what we're going to do is we're going to burn your bodies to ashes. We're going to sprinkle the ashes into the river Rome, it'll go down into the Mediterranean and then we'll see what will become of your resurrection. And immediately after that a new bishop came to take the place of the one who had been martyred.

His name was Araneus, one of the greatest theologians of God's purposes of new creation. And he went on teaching that and part of the deal that he and many others articulated was that it isn't a problem for God to bring bodies back together again because, apart from anything else, as you know, the atoms and molecules which make up my body and your body, are in a constant process of flux. They change basically every seven years.

I think it's a little over seven years since I was last here in Yale and that means that I am physically not in any respect, the same person that came last time. And one way of putting this, we have continuity of form but discontinuity of matter. Paul says in 1 Corinthians that God will give us a new body.

And my way of seeing this is if God wants to use the existing stuff, whatever bones are left in my coffin or whatever, that's fine. God is perfectly capable of doing that. If he's

the creator that's not a problem.

But if, you know, we were talking over supper about this, somebody asked the theologian, "Totullion, supposing a cannibal eats a Christian and then the cannibal converts, then in the resurrection, who's going to get which bits?" And Totullion basically said, "Oh, don't ask silly questions." But interestingly, the theologian, origin, around the same time, early third century, gave the argument that I've just given that our bodies are in a state of flux and God will give us new bodies with such continuity as is appropriate. If I can just react again. So these issues are obviously very complicated merely from the conceptual point of view.

And to do justice to them would take far longer than we've got tonight. But I'm troubled by the claims of continuity, whether a software or hardware, so that if you upload my software, then there's a classic philosophical problem about then you could upload my software under two bits of hardware. And then there'd be two bodies running my program.

They can't both be me. And philosophically it's very difficult to see what would make one of them me and the other one not me. And of course, if we believed in the kind of soul that you're saying, maybe we shouldn't be positing this thing, and then further posited that was indivisible, then we'd have something to follow.

But if it's software following, then the multiplication or duplication problem, I think, is it's not clear that it's going to be you with the other end of the uploading process. Yes, I mean, that's a perfectly good question. How will you know it'll be you? And like several problems dealing with things in a world which we don't yet know, one either says we can't know that or we're not meant to know that at the moment or something.

So I hear it as a nice problem. It doesn't actually trouble me. And partly because I have a reasonably strong view of God being God, and that isn't a sort of cheap shot to say, therefore if God's God, all questions can be swept off the table.

But if God is the Creator, if God is the one we know in Jesus Christ, then actually he is the sort of God who would look after precisely that problem because in creation he really does seem to care about the specificity of things in general and of humans in particular. And the uniqueness of humans is something which seems to be strongly affirmed and will be reaffirmed. It's not clear to me why you didn't just sweep aside what you said you weren't going to use to sweep aside.

If you want to say it's me at the other end, then you're using a notion that we have, the notion of identity. This is not some notion that we don't use in daily life. We have the thought that this pen which I took out of my briefcase is the same pen that was in my briefcase.

An hour ago, or yesterday and so forth. And so we use the notion of identity and we can think about what conditions need to be met to have identity and what kinds of things don't seem adequate. You're entitled to say, "All bets are off, I don't know, he's smart, he's all powerful, he'll do it." But that doesn't give me any answer to the question, why should I believe it's actually going to be me? I agree and that's where I think one Christian account, perhaps not the only Christian account, but one Christian account of that continuity and then identity, would have to do with precisely things that happened during this life that the Christian faith has always talked about, a personal transformation which happens when somebody believes or which happens as the cause of that belief perhaps, but which then generates something which is a new sort of me already.

Interestingly, this isn't usually referred to as the soul, except in much later writings, I'm thinking about the New Testament, but it's something for which we don't have very good language, but it's a real me which God will then look after. And I fully accept that obviously, Paul Kinghorn's image about software and hardware was in a sense just a cheap and easy thing, and yes, it does generate those multiplicity problems, but it seems to me this real me thing. One of the things that fascinates me about this, in the last ten years I've become a grandfather four times over, and with grandchildren you have more of a chance than with your own children, actually stop and think, who are these little people? Because right from the beginning, their identity is so extraordinary, it's recognizable and yet different within the family, and so you have this sense of uniqueness which is very precious and exciting, and it seems to me if I as a mere human grandfather have that sense of precious, exciting individuation, then if there is a God, and if the God who made the world is the God we know in Jesus, then he's even more excited about that individuation as well and is longing to be able to bring it to a new sort of completion.

Speaking of new sort of completion, I'd like to give you the opportunity to respond to Professor Wright's description of immortality, and if you don't want to, we can move along. Well, there really wasn't, I don't think, yet a description of what immortality would be like. What we heard was gesturing in the direction of a metaphysics that might allow us to talk about the possibility of surviving the death of the body, and a hope brought on by one's confidence in faith, if one has it, in an all-powerful, all-loving God, to do that which metaphysically is beyond our kin, but if you trust in him, so be it.

Well, what do you believe? Well, I don't believe that's going to happen at all. As I said much earlier, I think that when my body dies, that will be it. I wouldn't want to rule out the possibility.

I mean, so indeed, I think bodily resurrection is at least a metaphysically live possibility as something that might preserve identity across even gaps, the middle period that you're worried about. It's not clear. I'll make things easier for you.

It's not clear that we have to have continuity to have me at the other end of the process. That's absolutely right. Though usually in the Christian tradition, there is some, albeit minimal, account of that continuity.

There's a passage in Revelation which talks about the souls under the altar who are saying, "How long do we have to wait?" And they're told, "Ligh down, go back to sleep. It'll be all right. There will be a morning." And that's obviously, like the rest of the book of Revelation, just one vivid image, one way of getting at something for which we don't have other good language.

So to give an analogy that I share sometimes with students in my Deaf class, if I take my watch, I don't want to have a watch, but if I had a watch and I took my watch to a jeweler to get it cleaned, he might disassemble it. And then a week later, reassemble the watch. And I'd be perfectly happy to say that that's my watch a week later, but I wouldn't want to say that I therefore had to commit myself to the existence of the watch in the interim period.

Anyway, this is just by way of, "I'm open to the possibility as a logical philosophically consistent notion of identity after life." But as it happens, I don't believe in it. I don't have the kind of faith that Tom is even seeing that there's a being who cares about me sufficiently powerful to do that for me. The evidence that I have available to me, as far as I can tell, maybe later we'll get into the question about evidence for faith.

But the evidence that I have suggests that, nope, just to walk, if I were to take my computer and hit a hammer to it, it would be broken, and that would be the end. When cancer or whatever it is, riddles my body, that will be the end. And so, for me, there is no image of an afterlife that other than just its absence.

As it happens, I don't, this is going in a rather different direction, although I'm disappointed that I will die as soon as I take it that I will die. That is, you know, a muckule, I have another 30 years, right? Maybe a bit more, 40 years, but I'm not going to have another 100 years, not going to have another 200 years. I'd probably happily have another 200 years or more if I could do it in good health and have enough resources to pay the bills.

On the other hand, if you were to offer me immortality, I wouldn't want it. I cannot myself conjure up an image of what life could be like that would be attractive for all eternity. That's a great point, and I think if one imagines immortality as simply going on and on and on in something pretty much like the present life, even if you were guaranteed good health and enough resources and so on, that would sort of rigidly be odd.

And I think there is something in all of us which knows, just as you kind of know at the end of a long day, that however much you like reading this book or listening to this

music or whatever it is, actually a pretty smart thing to lie down and go to sleep. So I think a lot of people, when they come to the end of the natural end of their life, I'm not talking obviously about sudden illness or car crashes or whatever, they know that it is appropriate, but it's now time to go to sleep. And there's no shame in that.

There's deep sorrow, of course, for people grieving. I just wanted to go back to the watch for a minute because that's an interesting example, and of course the famous old line about grandfather's old axe that in the last 20 years has had two new handles and three new blades. And is it the same axe, even though every single part has been replaced? And so I fully understand there is that question of continuity.

But I think when you were talking about, if I believe in a big powerful God who can do this, one of the really strange things about the Christian faith is that though the being we call God is in some sense or other omnipotent, the nature of power itself has been redefined around Jesus. In the New Testament power is not about sending in the tanks and blasting everything out of the way. It's about love and about self-giving love and about the love we see when Jesus dies on the cross.

And the whole New Testament really is about rethinking what we mean by power and rethinking what we mean by God's power. And that's why if we simply have a big strong God who can do whatever he likes, then okay, that metaphysically does sort of sweep other options off the board or give one carte blanche to invent all sorts of things. But if you have power redefined as the power of self-giving creative love, healing love, then it seems to me that gives you more of a way in to talk about a real hope, a real future.

I don't actually see it, it won't surprise you to hear. I mean, I like love, right? I mentioned love in my opening remarks as something that I think is important. But adding the word love doesn't make the mystery go away.

It may give you a reason to be more hopeful. God loves us and so, given that I believe in God's omniscience, omnipotence, if he cares for us, if there's a way he will do it. But that doesn't make it any clearer what it is that needs to be done to allow identity to continue across these kinds of gaps.

And to say God loves us, just adds another word, doesn't clear up the mystery. But what I really want to hear about though is what's your image of immortality? What can you say about what kind of life you hope for, what kind of existence you hope for that would really be desirable forever? Yeah, I wouldn't use the word immortality as the main descriptor for that future life because I do think that so many people when they use it, use it in a sense which borrows particularly from Plato, the idea of an immortal soul which existed before time existed before I was conceived and will go on existing whether I want it to or not. I don't believe in that and the New Testament doesn't actually teach that to many people's surprise, but what we are promised in the New Testament is immortality as a gift, but it's an immortal physicality.

People find that very difficult because when people talk about immortality, usually they mean a disembodied immortality, the soul or whatever. And so in arguing for new creation and resurrection, I'm talking about a life beyond death which will be a new life that death can't touch. Now, so that gets us onto the stage as it were.

What will that be like? We don't have any great descriptions of it except that in Jesus himself, what we see is this strange, in biblical language, coming together of heaven and earth. And this is something which I think it's a deeply Jewish worldview that over against the Stoics who collapse heaven and earth together straight away as it were and say that's where we are all the time. And over against the Epicureans who push them as far apart as they can so that then the world and the atoms do their own thing here and if there's a heaven, it's a long way away.

In the Jewish and biblical worldview which comes through into the Christian worldview, heaven and earth kind of mysteriously overlap. And they overlap can be seen in certain key moments, in certain memories, in certain hopes, in certain texts, and then supremely the Christians say in Jesus himself. And this generates a different kind of metaphysic, it seems to me, where God's space and our space really do come together in Jesus.

And that's what then generates a new sort of life which in the gospels, in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the books about Jesus and the New Testament. We see all sorts of new possibilities. We see life being given a whole new color, a whole new shape, a whole new dimension.

And those are seen as pointers to the new creation, how it will be. And if we stop and think, do I just want to go on and on and on doing the same things over and over again to all eternity, then, yeah, that can seem pretty boring. The English novelist Julian Barnes wrote a book, The History of the World in 10 and a Half Chapter.

I love that. It's a great book. And at the end he has this character who goes to a sort of vaguely heavenly place and he gets bored and eventually asks to go back.

Including, I think, playing golf a few times and the first time he gets one hole in one and the second time he gets two holes in one. And by the end of the week he's going around the golf course in 18 strokes and he's bored, as you would be. I wouldn't mind doing it just once, but so that it seems to me ignores what we know if you take Jesus seriously.

What we know about God is Creator and Recreator. That there are infinite possibilities, just as there are infinite things going on in God's world in terms of the vastness of space, the tiny flowers, etc. So God is into all that infinite beauty, power, delight.

And the role of humans in that is not simply to be spectators, but to be participants, to be co-creators. It seems to me that the answer you've given boiled down to its essence

says, there's a set of experiences and goods that we're familiar with in this life and having those forever, that would be dreadful. So you don't want that.

And then when I ask you, "Okay, what will it be like?" You tell me, "Well, there'll be new color, new sounds, new whatever it is." And that's just metaphor, which means, taken literally, your answer just boils down to, there'll be something I have no idea what it's like. I cannot begin to describe it, but I promise you it'll be worth wanting forever. Now, if you believe that because you think that your New Testament tells you that, so be it.

But you can understand why I sitting here being told, "Yes, there's something worth having forever. I have no idea what it's like. This doesn't give me any reassurances." No, I can see that.

If you take, again, I'll come back to it. If you take Jesus out of the picture, most of this, if not all of this, is going to fall apart. Put Jesus in the picture, but then we're just back to what we had earlier, namely, I ask you, "How are we going to have life after death?" And you said, "I don't know, but God can do it." I ask you, "Why is this life eternal life going to be worth having?" And you say, "I don't know, but Jesus is going to make it so." A slight oversimplification, I think.

That's actually a British understatement. We do that. The thing that makes it worth while is love.

And love isn't just a word which is tossed into the mix as another vague metaphor. It's actually an extremely powerful word, like the word forgiveness is an extremely powerful word. Forgiveness isn't just, "Okay, back to square one." And forgiveness generates new possibilities.

It opens up new ways of looking at the world, at your neighbor, to yourself, at God. And so when I say that I don't have an advanced photograph or video camera of what it's actually going to be like, I'm not just waving my arms around and saying, "It'll be nice, trust me, or trust God or something." And saying, "Because in Jesus we discover a kind of depth of love which seems to grasp us and hold us and direct us and assure us, then that gives us a platform." Now, okay, you might say, "That's very nice if you've got it, but if you haven't, you haven't." Except that Jesus actually is a real person who is right there in the middle of history. And then it's not the historicity of Jesus that I'm worried about.

It's the way you put it on love, because now it seems to me you want to have it two different ways. You want to say, "All right, this is something we're familiar with. The reason you're not just hand waving is because we've got an experience of love as something that creates new possibilities, new invites us forward, makes us want to continue." But of course, earlier you said, "Well, if we had more of the same that we're familiar with here on Earth, that really would get dreadful and would get boring." And so what you're saying is it's going to be like love in that we know that it's worth having, but

it's not going to be like love because it isn't something that would ever grow tiring after 1 million, billion, trillion, billion, gazillion years.

I didn't say that about love, you see. One of the interesting points there, again, sorry to quote the New Testament, it happened to my sort of field, is that love is supposedly, according to Paul, one of the three things that will actually last. He says, "Lots of other things will fall away, but actually there are three things, faith, hope and love." Which is interesting because you might have thought, "Why hope?" Surely, when we're there, there won't be anything to hope for.

But that tells me right there when he says that faith and hope and love last, that they are actually qualities we can know and experience in the present, which will actually characterize our experience in the future. And the idea of hope being something which will also characterize us in the future indicates to me that it won't just be an endless going around the same circle, it will actually be a world full of new possibilities in which our creative, loving personalities will be able to contribute materially, and I mean materially, to things that will be so in God's new world. So these are hints and guesses, but I think they are strong, sure, sign-based.

The language of new possibilities seems to me once again just another word for mystery. There'll be something worth having, it's not what we've got now, but it's worth having. Okay, thank you.

(Laughter) So Professor Wright, Professor Kingen touched on the subject of the resurrection, and it seems that a lot of your vision for this new life is, or all of your vision for this new life is contingent on the actual bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. What do you say to someone who doesn't buy that? There were in the ancient world many Jews who believed in something like I've said and believed in resurrection before the time of Jesus, and Jews went on believing in this through to the rabbis and many to the present day without believing that this happened to Jesus. My vision of a new creation, which includes bodily resurrection, is not absolutely Jesus-specific.

The shape that I believe that has is Jesus-specific because what we see in the New Testament is that the resurrection of Jesus has remolded that Jewish belief in very specific ways so that, for instance, there is physical both continuity and discontinuity because the new body of Jesus is somehow different. It's one of the really strange things in the New Testament that people don't instantly recognize him and it becomes apparent that he is gone. I mean, resurrection isn't resuscitation.

Let's get that clear. It's not your question, but it's an important footnote at this point. People often say, "So you're saying Jesus just came back to life again?" And the answer is, "No, that's not what the texts say." He went, "As it were, through death and out the other side into a new sort of body." So, yes, basically Paul says, if the Messiah wasn't raised, then we're wasting our time.

Our faith is futile. And then he says, "If Jesus wasn't raised, might as well be Epicureans. Let us eat and drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." And that's a pretty good argument.

If there is no future life, then, okay, make the best you can of the present one. The odd thing is that because of the future life that he does envisage, there is still an imperative to make a different sort of best of the present one, not a selfish, "I'm just going to eat and drink and be merry," but a creative, positive contribution to transforming the world in the present, in advance of God's transforming it in the future. So, yes, it is for me all pegged on Jesus, as you look detected already.

It's hard for me not to come through Jesus into any of the major questions like that, but that's not just a kind of a cipher. Jesus said it, Jesus did it, whatever. It's actually a very specific shaping of a hope which existed before the Jewish hope and that brought it into that very specific place.

But I thought the question was, how do you persuade somebody who's skeptical? Oh, the answer is you might take five minutes and explain it to you. I tried to 700-page book, which I did ten years ago to do that. I just signed a few earlier this evening, so they're still around, they're out there somewhere.

It is, of course, a big complicated question because the main argument as far as I see is that it's historic, and I started off as an ancient historian, is that it's impossible to explain historically why early Christianity existed and why it took the very specific shape it did from its earliest evidences unless you say that something quite extraordinary happened a few days after Jesus was executed. And when you focus in on what that extraordinary thing was, all the evidence is that despite their expectations and despite our expectations, he really was thoroughly alive again three days after his death. Now, of course, they knew that that was absurd.

They knew that dead people don't rise just like we do. They weren't stupid. They weren't ignorant of the so-called laws of nature, but they believed that they were witnessing the moment of new creation.

Seems to me that what that argument actually says is we have reason to believe that they were sincere. It doesn't yet follow that they saw what they thought they saw. That's certainly a possibility, and that has been, of course, explored in the literature and by many people.

Though there are several odd passages which don't really fit with that, particularly when they weren't expecting it, when they actually, some of them, like St Paul, were desperately not wanting it and yet were confronted by this. Now, of course... I'm sorry, I don't find that at all any further evidence. People, it seems to me, often are surprised by things.

They think they see things, they think they see things that they weren't expecting. Yes. And then, I mean, sorry, this is a shrinking down of a much longer argument which really would need to be laid out and I and others have done that.

But part of the deal there is that they were transformed by this, that when we see people believing things that, in fact, aren't true, they become more fantasy-laden and more liable to be self-deceived on other things. Whereas these beliefs really seem to have energized communities, and particularly that the message of the resurrection of the crucified Jesus actually transformed people's lives when they heard it, and that relates directly to the question we were dealing with earlier, that the transformation which happens to somebody's life in the present is part of the thing which then forms whatever continuity we want to talk about into the future. It seems to me there are plenty of other episodes throughout history in which people have thought that someone was, let's say, a Messiah, had their lives transformed and the person wasn't a Messiah.

Oh, yes. So you can't merely point to the unexpected nature of it, you can't point to the sincerity of their belief, you can't point to, I mean, all these things I suppose, they're not irrelevant, but I don't see how they may, and I'm close to making a compelling case. It's interesting you should say that because one of the arguments that I would use and do use is that we know of at least tenor a dozen messianic or prophetic movements a hundred years either side of Jesus.

There were several people who somebody thought, "Ah, this is the one, it's this person here." And the most famous probably is a man they called Bar-Kok-vah, which means son of the star, who became king briefly, Messiah, in 132 AD and was hailed by the greatest rabbi of the day, Rabbi Akiba as Messiah, and then three years later the Romans came in and closed in, and they got him like they did to Simon Bongyora in AD 70, who was killed at the end of the Roman triumph in Rome and several others like that. And now here's the thing, we have good evidence from historians like Josephus for how those movements worked, played out, what happened, not for Bar-Kok-vah, he's 50 years after Josephus, but we have evidence. We know what happened to those movements after the death of the founder.

Either the people were picked up and killed themselves, so there wasn't any movement left, or they gave up the movement and went back home and hid, or they got another leader. They didn't go around saying, "Actually I think God's raised him from the dead." I mean, we know what happened in those movements, and the only movement in that whole period that was focused on one person that after his death did say, "Actually God's raised him from the dead" was Jesus, which is interesting because frequently when they got other leaders, they would get a leader from the same family, a brother, a nephew, a cousin. We've got those whole little dynasties you get through the first century.

Jesus' brother James was the great leader of the church in Jerusalem, the kind of

Ancoman, while Peter and Paul were dashing around the world. Nobody ever said James was the Messiah. They said he was the brother of the Messiah.

Why would they still say Jesus was the Messiah after he died? Because they all did believe he'd been raised from the dead. And now, okay, they were sincere, but that doesn't mean they were wrong. The way they ran the movement.

The Brazzl of Hasidim think that the dead master from 200 years ago was the Messiah. They haven't named anybody else, and you can't think that they're right. But they haven't said he's been raised.

I admit, these people said that he's been raised from the dead. I asked, "What was the evidence that we have to believe he was raised from the dead?" Well, you can't say they didn't have another leader because of another movement where they had the leader die and then they didn't put another leader in place. You can't say their lives were transformed because there were other movements where people's lives were transformed.

The question, of course, is one of judgment, so it won't surprise you to hear me say, "My take on it is a bunch of people sincerely were disappointed at the death of their leader." They were surprised and they ended up believing that he'd been resurrected. But the historical evidence seems to me to be so thin that if it's going to be based on they must have been sincere and they must have seen it because they couldn't have hallucinated it, people hallucinate things all the time. Of course they do, and they did in the ancient world just as much as they do now, and they had language to distinguish between hallucination and reality.

There's a wonderful story in the book of Acts where in the story, and whether you believe the story or not is irrelevant to this particular point, where Peter is in prison, he's going to be executed the next day, and he gets out of jail free because an angel comes and taps him on the shoulder and leads him past the guards and takes him out. And the text says, interestingly, Peter did not believe that what he was seeing was real. He thought he was having a vision.

Now that tells me whether or not you believe that particular story. That tells me these guys are well able to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Oh, no, no, it doesn't matter at all.

It shows that they have the difference between fantasy and reality. All sorts of people who have that distinction nonetheless misclassify the nature of their experiences. So you're perfectly familiar, I take it with, for example, even Alexander's work, Proof of Heaven.

Maybe not. It's a contemporary surgeon. He had a near-death experience.

He goes on for several pages about how he's had the most deepest near-death experience. I haven't heard this for that. I know what you do.

I'm sure you've seen things like this. He's perfectly familiar with the idea of hallucination. He simply insists his laws don't want them.

So the mere fact that the ancient Christians, the early Christians, did had the distinction still doesn't mean that they couldn't have been taken in. Yeah, that's certainly the case. But they all said that there was an empty tomb, which is otherwise unexplained.

That's why I've argued in one of my books that you need to say in order to explain the rise of their belief. However, wrong might have been. You have to say that there were two things.

One, real appearances of Jesus. And two, an empty tomb. Because they knew about visions and hallucinations.

And a quick visit to the tomb would have checked that, yeah, his body was still there, so okay, it was a vision. And if there had just been an empty tomb but no sightings of Jesus, then the tomb's been robbed. People robbed tombs, particularly people who were supposedly famous.

If I could press one more skeptical note before maybe we'd run to another question. So I've been conducting the last several minutes of exchange on the assumption that the people saw what they claimed to see. Of course, we don't have the testimony of those people.

What we have, as obviously you know, are the gospels written some time later. You may want to bring in Paul at this point, but at least as far as the resurrection goes, what we have are gospels written well after the fact. And so then we still have to ask about the historicity of those documents.

And one possible hypothesis is of course they're accurately reporting what people genuinely saw. But another possible hypothesis is these are historically damaged documents, not accurate to what was actually going on at the time. I think to put a lot of weight on it is to put a lot of weight on a very thin basis.

Yeah, it's interesting that you raise that argument because we actually, as I tell myself, in my discipline people often say we know that St Mark has written in 65, Matthew in 75, Luke, whatever. We actually don't know that. All the gospels might have been written as late as 100 AD, or they might have been written as early as 40 AD.

We just don't have the evidence to say that. And the more we know about the early church, the more we don't know when the gospels are written. However, the resurrection narratives are significantly different in certain specifiable, demonstrable ways from other

bits of the gospels where the tradition has obviously developed and people have reflected on how the ancient scriptures are being fulfilled or whatever.

But to push it back to contemporaneous, I don't think even you're not going to be prepared to say you think the textual evidence supports that hypothesis. Which text, sorry. The kind of textual evidence you were just alluding to.

Do you think that that's strong enough to give an independent historian reason to think these are contemporaneous narratives which were then embedded in larger and later documents? Certainly within a generation or so. And with a generation or so, plenty of time from my point of view to think that we no longer think we have accurate contemporaneous testimonies as to what people saw, thought they saw. Well, okay.

A generation is actually comparatively short. I remember vividly where I was when Martin Luther King was shot, etc. And people do have strong memories, especially when it's something that has been really important to them.

I've written letters of recommendation about the quality of students being my assistant teaching, my teaching assistants who weren't teaching assistants for me. Because my memory confidently told me this person had taught for me. And when I realized when I went back and checked the historical record was, they hadn't actually taught for me.

I had had discussions with them about their teaching. And my memory had perfectly, sincerely and convincingly generated pseudo memories of their teaching experience with them. But when there are four independent accounts, and one of the interesting things about the Gospels is that the resurrection narratives have clearly not been copied from one another.

Even when they're telling the same story, they use very interestingly different language in a way that doesn't happen earlier on in the text. But then there are other features as well. There's the absence of biblical illusion and echo.

And it's interesting because Paul writing in the early 50s says that the Messiah was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures. And we can see which scriptures they were using to explain that. The resurrection narratives have virtually no reference to the Scriptures.

Though the crucifixion narratives do. It looks as though these are, as it were, pre-reflective, kind of breathless. Oh my goodness, this is how it was.

And they haven't been tidied up. They haven't been harmonized. And here's one thing in particular which is interesting for all sorts of other reasons.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians written in the early 50s, he says, "Here's the tradition. The Messiah died. He was buried.

He was raised. He appeared. He appeared to see fast.

That's Peter. Then the twelve. Then five hundred at once.

Then me. What's missing? In the Gospels, the first people he appears to are Mary Magdalene and the other women. What's happened is that the public tradition of the church has airbrushed the women out because, as everybody knew, and this was a familiar jibe from pagan critics later on, the women were not regarded as credible witnesses.

In all four Gospels, the women are the prime witnesses. Now, if you were writing an account, a fictitious, a fantasy account, sometime after Paul, you wouldn't invent the people who you knew, the skeptics were going to say these are not credible witnesses. I'm not claiming that I'm not floating the hypothesis that the Gospel writers deliberately made up out of whole cloth a tradition.

Perhaps they were sincere. What I'm claiming is we don't have evidence that that's historically accurate representation of what took place in the contemporary and its mighty tradition. It's always possible to be skeptical about any historical traditions.

The best evidence we have, say, for Julius Caesar, for Augustus, for Tacitus, apart from Julius Caesar's own writings, Tiberius, sorry, are historians like Tacitus and Suetonius, who are much further away from the emperors they're writing about than the Gospel narratives are from Jesus. But it isn't only that. It's a convergence.

History doesn't... History isn't like mathematics. History is the balance of probabilities. And the thing for the Christian is that it isn't just a historical argument, A plus B equals C, if you're lucky.

It's a convergence of several different things where those arguments are going on, and they matter, and they're important, and I've engaged in them. But then at the same time, that sort of meets up around the back with this strange thing called faith, which you can't engineer and which is mysterious and won't... it isn't the same sort of thing. But again and again, when we're talking about Jesus, yes, we have to do the historical arguments, but yes, we also have to say that Jesus tends to show up in people's lives as a strange, haunting, mysterious, beckoning, loving, healing presence.

And I know a lot of people who've become Christians purely because they have, in some way or other, met Jesus like that without any historical arguments at all. Christian shows up in many people's lives as a healing, loving presence. In that about to posit the divinity of Christians.

That's why I'm saying that for Christianity, there is this strange convergence of history and faith, and the historical evidence is actually very compelling. One of the best books on the gospels written recently by my former colleague, Richard Borkham, is the Gospels

as eyewitness testimony, where he is a first-century historian, is arguing that actually the form that the gospels use, the way the stories are told, would have been construed in that culture as saying, "These are eyewitness testimonies which you can trust." So, I mean, it's possible to distrust anything. I remember my philosophical colleague, John Lucas, a long time ago saying, in Oxford in the 1960s, a good philosopher could disbelieve any proposition no matter how true it was.

You know, that's what you and I were trained to do, to challenge and test and push back and things. My position is one that, "Oh, we can challenge anything." My claim is that, indeed, the last element that my uncharitable hypothesis is that the last element you introduced explains a lot. This is not dispassioned history of a reading of historical documents you're reading, you're offering us.

It's a reading of the historical documents motivated by a desire to have a certain conclusion emerge rather than another emerge. You could say that if you wanted, the trouble is that it doesn't actually fit either my own personal experience or that of many other people I could introduce you to, for whom the historical evidence has challenged us and has actually challenged and radically modified the faith which we started with in ways which we certainly didn't want. In my case, by emphasizing the bodilyness of the resurrection and the sense that God actually is concerned with, bodies with the world, I grew up in a Christianity which said, "Basically, as long as you believe this, that and the other, you'll go to heaven." So really, it's not a big deal to worry about this world.

And this gets on to a whole other area, of course, of the so-what and how does this affect our living well in the present. But the more I've examined the history, that faith was shaken, twisted, turned upside down inside out in ways which are active, very painful, unpredicted by me, not desired by me, to a point where I now believe that God, the God who is going to remake the world, has started that process in Jesus and wants us to be involved with it in ways which are costly and difficult and dangerous for us. Go ahead.

So I'm aware the clock is ticking and we need to wrap things up. So one of the things we wanted to ask both of you to do is to ask a question of the other. Of course, we have been asking questions.

I get it. Do you want to ask one more question, either of you to the other or should I move on? I need to think about that. I've been asking rather more questions of you than you of me, so I'll give you a chance.

Yes. Are there any moments in your life when you find yourself challenging the robust materialism which you have expressed, moments possibly of aesthetic awareness, moments of just sheer awe at the beauty of creation, moments of loving and being loved, which make you think if this is not more meaningful than the whole world is a sick joke? To put it another way, how do you stop yourself simply collapsing into a kind of sartrean pessimism, just saying the whole things? All my moments of joy are simply

deceiving. This is the universe mocking me.

Good. So in an initial part of our discussion, you asked me if I was an epicurean, and in the sense of do I think that we're just atoms in the void bouncing together and have clumped together for a while? The answer to that is yes. Later part of the discussion, you reverted to epicureanism and said, "And of course if epicureanism is true, then one might well think each drink can be married for tomorrow we die." I don't think that follows at all.

No, no. That is actually a caricature of epicureanism, but it was a familiar one in the area. Exactly.

So it seems to me that the fact that we are just physical objects doesn't in any way undermine the reality of beauty. It doesn't in any way undermine the reality and significance of love. It doesn't make music any less wondrous.

It doesn't, for that matter, make morality an illusion. It would be a discussion for a whole other day, I suspect, to start to ask, "What do I think a basis of morality might be? How might one try to ground morality in a secular worldview?" But it seems to me that these are challenges that can be met. And so if the question is, do I ever have experiences where in the face of the sublime or the beautiful or the wondrous that I think materialism must be false, the answer is no, not at all.

On the other hand, if the question had been, do I ever have moments where I wonder whether materialism is true? And the answer is, absolutely. Because like any other philosophical view, philosophical positions are extraordinarily difficult to make out. The issues are very, very complicated.

I have views about any number of philosophical positions, philosophical questions I have positions on. But I know very, very intelligent people who know the same arguments and can spend many a long day arguing things. And I realize that reasonable people can disagree about these things.

I've also had the experience over the course of my life of changing my mind about philosophical positions. And so I have a kind of fallible-list attitude towards my materialism. It might be wrong.

There are certain places where I think materialism has a rather difficult time with it. But I don't think that other views have an easier time with it. But I think that a lot of places in philosophy where all views have a hard time with it.

But this gives me enough pause that I wouldn't want to, as it were, bet my life on the truth, if God were to come down now and say, are you prepared to bet whether or not materialism is true? I'll give you a hundred bucks if you're right and I'll kill you if you're wrong. I'm not taking that bet. But for all that... This is a kind of a diabolical virtue

version of Pascal's version.

Yeah, I just say. But for all that, it does seem to me that materialism is true. And I don't think there's any difficulty, a special difficulty in finding a place for what you and I suspect both value in a physicalist worldview.

Beauty and love and art and so on. Yeah. What difference would it make to you if you did actually look hard at Jesus and ask yourself, what impact might he have on my life, should he have an impact on my life, is Jesus for you simply a rather strange figure of history about which some novelts were written long time after his death, or do you actually find him in any sense a haunting and provocative presence? That's a great question.

I suppose the answer is, I do find him a strange and I'll confess unattractive figure. But what's a Nietzschean reasons? What's that? For Nietzschean reasons? No, I don't like a lot of his teachings. Okay.

Interesting. But it's not that it's through lack of attempts to familiarize myself. Well, this isn't come up over dinner, but I'll mention to you that as an undergraduate I was actually a religion major.

Okay. And so I took, I don't know, I think two classes on the New Testament, a class on the early church fathers, a class on the late church fathers, a class on the Reformation, a class on early 20th century Protestant. I've done my time trying to understand the Christian worldview.

It doesn't speak to me. It seems to me you are well inoculated against it. I won't ask where you studied, where you'd tell me later.

[laughter] So, one of the questions we wanted to ask both of you and you've already asked Professor Kagan is what would it take you to adopt his views and become a non-theist? I think if I really were convinced that Jesus had not been raised from the dead, then I think I would still find the Jewish worldview deeply attractive, however often tragic, and I don't know what that would do to me, but I would still want to say that I resonate with the Jewish idea of there being a God who made a heaven and earth with human beings having a vital role somewhere at the heart of that. And the Jewish hope is that that will still come to pass. So, that would be one option.

So, I might still be a theist, but if I didn't believe Jesus was raised from the dead, why would I be a Christian? If I don't know what it would take to make me abandon that kind of a heaven and earth Jewish or Christian worldview altogether, I know people from my own tradition who have quote unquote "lost their faith." It's a very tragic thing, it's often a very sad thing. Sometimes it's just a long, slow attrition that life has not worked out the way that they thought it was going to, and it seems as though they had pegged their

faith in God, and God has let them down again and again and again. I kind of bought into a Christianity which was that Jesus said, "If you want to follow me, it's going to be tough." So, I kind of expect that there will be all sorts of tough things, so I'm sort of inured against that being a faith-destroying thing.

So, I don't know, I find it very difficult to imagine that I would slide further than into some kind of a Jewish worldview. So, final question for the night, Professor Kagan, what takeaway message do you want to leave with the students who are here? So, actually, what I want to say something about is the purported topic of tonight's discussion, which we haven't talked about for one minute. Which is living well in the light of death.

That's what I'm aware of. So, look, this is not a criticism because if anybody's at fault for this, it's me. I just found myself so captivated by Tom's views that I couldn't resist the temptation to ask him more about them.

But I believe death is the end. I suggest that at the outset, I've said nothing at all that should give you reason to believe that. I don't think the arguments for believing that death is the end are something that can be stated in a sentence or two.

It's a long, complicated argument. When it needs to go into these kinds of details about the metaphysical questions about what is a person, what are our components, and what is the nature of identity. But nonetheless, having done all of that, I believe death is the end.

And so, the question then becomes, so how should one live in light of that? I said in my opening remarks that I believe what we need to do is to push back against the darkness. We need to, I believe, overcome death, but we can try to reduce suffering. We can try to accomplish something with our lives.

We can try to make the world better for others. Now, all of that is important in some sense whether or not there's an afterlife. All of that's important.

Whether or not death is the death of our bodies is really our end. I think the takeaway point of really believing the death is the end is it heightens the idea that what we do is of, it's not only of significance, it's the only thing of significance because it's all we have. And so, although I gather from Tom's views that, of course, he wants to resist the kind of other world regarding this which Dom plays the significance of this world.

Still, I'll use the word soften again. The significance of this world in comparison has to be reduced somewhat when you think there's going to be a second act. If you don't think there's going to be a second act, this is all we've got.

This is literally all we've got. It's the only life you're going to have. Don't waste it.

How should we live? There's about 19 urgent questions to be asked here and we haven't

got the time to do it sadly. If we believe that there is a God who in Jesus has revealed new creation, then new creation has already begun and we are invited to be part of it. And part of the Christian belief is that we're not simply whistling in the dark, we're not simply pushing back the dark.

We are actually tremblingly, vulnerably, often getting it wrongly, being people of new creation here and now, which means people of healing, people of forgiveness, people of hope. There's all sorts of commonality between a Christian vision of what we ought to be doing in the world and all sorts of other visions because actually it's not rocket science to say, wouldn't it be good if we brought health, if we brought education, if we brought wisdom, if we brought alleviation of poverty, etc. The worrying thing is that just as Christians have often tried and failed to do the sort of good things I'm talking about, so secularists have often tried and failed some of the great experiments, social experiments of the 20th century were undertaken by people who said, let's get rid of all that religion stuff, let's get rid of all that Christianity stuff, we will build utopia here and now.

And it just was horrible and disastrous and you can come back and say, as people do, well, some of the Christian experiments have been pretty disastrous too. Nevertheless, as has been said again and again, in the ancient world, which was a very brutal place, nobody else was looking after the poor, the Jews looked after their own poor, the Christians actually were known as the people who looked after the poor. Nobody else was trying to do education for people except for the rich or the elite, nobody else was trying to do medicine, hospitals, schools, etc.

became universal through the Christian, this is an oversimplification, but not that much of an oversimplification. Buddhist gave to the poor, Buddhist is in the hospitals. Well, yes, but if you track back and see any of this is a whole other argument, but what I'm saying is the Christian belief is that new creation has begun in Jesus, that the power of evil has been defeated by what happened on Jesus cross, that obviously is a whole other topic, and that therefore there is hope not only for the ultimate future but for the penultimate future.

And yes, of course it makes a difference, but the difference it makes is not, we don't have to worry about the present because there's a future. The difference it makes is because there's a future, there is hope that we can actually do something in the present. So I would just want people to take away serious reflection on what actually happened in and through Jesus, and if that did happen, what that would mean for the reality of new creation here and now.

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