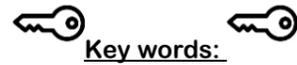


Death and the Afterlife Knowledge Organiser



Key words:

- Disembodied existence: existing without a physical body
- Resurrection: living on after death in a glorified form in a new realm
- Beatific vision: a face-to-face encounter with God
- Purgatory: A place where people go, temporarily, after death to be cleansed of sin before they are fit to live with God
- Election: predestination, chosen by God for heaven or hell
- Limited election: the view that God chooses only a small number of people for heaven or hell
- Original Sin: a state of wrongdoing in which people are born because of the sin of Adam and Eve
- Unlimited election: the view that all people are called to salvation but only a few will be saved
- Parable: a story told to highlight a moral message
- Particular judgement: judgement for each person at the point of death
- Parousia: used in Christianity to refer to the Second Coming of Christ



Christian teachings about the afterlife

Christians reject the idea that a human soul can leave one physical body at the point of death and be reborn into a new physical body in this same world (reincarnation).

Christians also reject the concept of **disembodied existence** - the soul moving on without a body (Supported by Plato). Although Plato's dualist ideas were influential in Christianity.

Christians do however accept resurrection: living after death in a glorified physical form. An individual will be given a renewed spiritual body.



Influences – Jewish eschatology

Eschatology: the part of theology concerned with death, judgement, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind

Saducees: don't believe in life after death, God only gave us this life – God's Kingdom on Earth – which we need to look after.

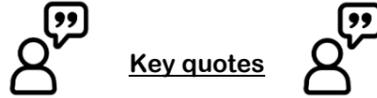
Pharisees: believe in resurrection of the body after death and in angels

Life after death is not a prominent theme in Jewish scripture.

Influences – Ancient Greek Philosophy

Plato- dualist- body and soul are separate entities

Our soul is capable of life after death.



Key quotes

“Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people.”

Genesis 25:8

“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Daniel 12:2

“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

John 11: 25-26

⁴Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

¹⁵He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Mark 16: 14-16



Aquinas

- Beatific vision, a face to face encounter with God. The afterlife is out of space & time, an eternal moment with God.
- The Fall didn't destroy our ability to choose right from wrong & God will let the good into Heaven & condemn the wicked to Hell.
- Purgatory is for those who are neither elected nor condemned. A mortal sin needs to be committed for immediate entry to Hell.



Aquinas was predominantly inspired by Aristotle, however, when it came to life after death he held a more platonic view. He agreed that the soul can survive the death of the body.

Soul= “life principle” or “form” of a living thing. That which gives a distinctive character to living things. (*Think formal cause from Aristotle*).

- ✓ Human soul- rational.
- ✓ This enables life after death to be a possibility. The soul gives humans the ability to reach their purpose (telos).
- ✓ They are able to reason and make a free choice to love God.

Final goal and reward = being in the presence of God

Perfect happiness cannot be achieved in this life. Perfect happiness can only be achieved after death, by living eternally, outside of time and in the presence of God.

Faith will be replaced by knowledge. In the Beatific Vision all doubts of God's existence will vanish as we see God face to face.



Strengths of Aquinas

The afterlife is beyond space and time. This view of the Beatific Vision avoids the issues of the protestant view of heaven. We don't need to worry about endless days in heaven with all that time to fill. The Beatific Vision is a single simultaneity. One eternal moment in the presence of God.



Weaknesses of Aquinas

- If the Beatific Vision is when the soul is timeless in God's presence, how is it the same person who died? (Is this in conflict with the idea of resurrection?)
- Many characteristics we have require sequences and linear thinking. Things we enjoy depend on time.
- Maybe this idea of a timeless soul, compared to a physical existence prior to death is too different for it to be the same person...again in conflict with St Paul's ideas on resurrection.



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Heaven

Christians believe the faithful go to heaven. Those that believe in God and have followed his rules.

Is often described figuratively in different dimension and it is a place where God lives, surrounded by angels.

Heaven is normally depicted as spending eternity in the presence of God. To help Christians understand the concept of heaven the metaphor of God sitting and ruling is used.



Quotes

- 1) 'My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?' John 14:2
- 2) 'The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass' Revelation 21:21



1. This metaphor conveys ideas of comfort, return and familiarity under the authority of unconditional love.
2. Signifies that there will be so much wealth around that people can even afford to walk on it; no one will go without. Heaven is also described as a place with no suffering, no pain or death, where sin will be washed away and people will be purified and live in peace.

Challenges to belief about heaven

Bernard Williams – is an eternity in heaven desirable? Surely it would become boring after a while?

Williams argued that part of the pleasure of living is making choices about what we will do with our limited existence and setting ourselves targets/objectives that we may or may not achieve. However, if we have time to choose absolutely everything, the pleasure is gone.



Response to challenges

Karl Rahner – limited earthly life supports concept of timeless afterlife



Hell

Place of eternal punishment where Christians are separated from God for eternity

Difference of opinion within Christianity as to whether it is a physical or spiritual place

Concept of hell raises issues as it challenges the Christian belief of an omnibenevolent God – is any sin *that* bad that a human should be condemned for eternity?

Hell is seen figuratively as being downwards, below the physical world. In the Bible, hell is sometimes described figuratively as a rubbish dump, where the useless people are thrown.

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" Revelation 21:8



Hume

Whole idea of hell calls God's justice into question because a finite sin can never deserve an infinite punishment without parole

Others argue when we do wrong, we wrong God and every wrong deserves eternal punishment

Hick

Intermediate state makes a lot of sense, Hell is not eternal because Hell as eternal is contradictory to an omnibenevolent God. The afterlife is a continuation of the soul-making started on Earth. The New Testament teaches about reconciliation, not punishment & Jesus preaches about restoring the relationship between God and humanity. Pope Benedict was critical as he thought it disregarded Jesus' sacrifice and failed to take into account the need for atonement for sin.

The belief about hell developed as a way of social control and encouraged them to follow religious authority

Purgatory

Catholic belief – where the soul goes to be cleansed after death

Catholics believe prayers from the living can contribute to cleansing process, helping the dead soul to get through purgatory

This can be done in this earthly life through repentance and confession

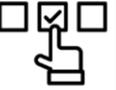
Karl Rahner → Purgatory should not be understood as a place of pain but as a metaphor for the soul's greater awareness of consequences of sin in time between death and last judgement.

Pain of purgatory is self-inflicted

Protestants reject views of purgatory → not supported in Bible and contradicts the idea of salvation. Ideas of purgatory are wrong because they suggest Jesus did not complete the final act of salvation on the cross.



Election



God chooses eternal destiny of each human and knows where we are going to end up before we are born. This links to the idea that God is omniscient (all knowing) and his transcendence (outside of space and time)

Election → (predestination) chosen by God to go to heaven or hell

In some versions of Christian teaching → God does not just know but chooses himself



Augustine

Believed in Original Sin & so no human is worthy of a place in Heaven. It is only through God's grace that we able to reach Heaven. Moral acts mean nothing

Believed that only a few would be saved and this is known as 'limited election'.

John Calvin

Double predestination, some are elected for Heaven, others Hell. God knows how we will choose to act & gives grace or punishment appropriately. But Christians shouldn't assume they have been saved or presume to really know anything about election.



Critiques of limited elections

It gives a controlling picture of God and leaves no room for human choice (free will) → is there any point in living morally if God has already decided where we go? We cannot change anything.

Other Christians argue that the message of Christianity is that due to God's love there is possibility of salvation for all

Unlimited election

Karl Barth - Disagrees with double predestination, it is simplistic & a misinterpretation of the Gospels. We are all able to reach Heaven, Jesus' sacrifice restored our relationship with God, allowing for salvation of all. If we accept Christ we can be saved, if we reject Christ then we won't.

John Hick - John Hick believed that God will save all, regardless of their beliefs

He argues that everyone will reach God in the end, after death.

In his view, different religions are different expressions of the same universal desire for God, there are no right or wrong religions but different practices and doctrine from different cultures.



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Parable of the Sheep and Goats

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?' ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."



- No middle ground – there is a sharp division between the sheep and goats.
- No reference to beliefs. Actions- helping the needy etc. will be what gets you to heaven.
- However – sheep- "prepared a place for them", so have they been granted the grace of God? Are they acting morally as a result of their salvation rather than as a cause?
- Goats face harsh, eternal punishment. It is not what they did do, it is what they didn't do. They missed the opportunity to help others.



When does God's judgement take place?

Some argue straight after death, others argue at the end of time – both can be supported by Biblical views

Irenaeus → believed that we do not enter heaven until the final Day of Judgement and that people exist in a perfect state of happiness after death until this point

Exceptional people (martyrs/saints/prophets) might have a 'fast track' to heaven.

This is a popular Christian view known as 'particular judgement'

Calvin supported this view as he argued that the dead are conscious, either in peaceful bliss or pain – whatever God has chosen for them.

This is different to final judgement → the idea that whole nations are judged as well as every person in a final conclusion to all creation.

Parable of the rich man and Lazarus seems to suggest this as Lazarus was taken straight to heaven → however parable is not meant to be literal.

Many Christian prayers refer to deceased Christians as though they are already in heaven.



Are heaven and hell eternal?

Christian thinkers agree that heaven is eternal → they just disagree over the meaning of the word

Aquinas: The beatific vision of God is an eternal, timeless moment rather than a length of time which stretches to infinity.

This view allows the escape from the idea of heaven being boring as there would be no time to fill

Eternity of heaven is seen as an endless, everlasting length of time

Seen as most compatible with teachings of the Bible which refers to activities in heaven e.g. singing God's praises (singing is an activity that happens in time)

It seems more compatible with the idea that we exist in some way and we continue to be ourselves in heaven

Perhaps an eternal heaven makes more sense alongside the view that we continue to be the same people



Parousia – second coming of Christ

Some people take this viewpoint literally, that he will return and rule and judge

Some believe it will be a single and final event



Others believe that the transformation and perfection of creation is underway and is the role of Christians in the world today

Karl Barth → interpreted it to mean events such as the resurrection of Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit and Pentecost