



Hereafter : Searching for Immortality

Richard Schweid

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As long as people have been on earth, they have constructed various explanations of what happens after death. Hereafter combines an overview of the history of these theories and a survey of the current attitudes toward immortality. Other than physical form and genetic structure, we hold little in common with our earliest ancestors in terms of how we live, but one thing we do share is fear and helplessness in the face of the fact that this self, which takes so much effort to construct and inhabit and nurture, is likely to last considerably less than a century. Responses to the prospect of dying can be organized into three main categories: those who believe that somehow we shall be resurrected to pass eternity with intact bodies as the same people we were during our earthly sojourns; those who believe that what survives is a "soul", or essence, which leaves behind forever the dead and decomposing receptacle in which it resided to move on in some fashion; and those who believe that death erases our lives entirely. Schweid augments his research with interviews with Yale Divinity School theologians, biotechnologists, farmers, garbage collectors, bail bondsmen, preachers, rabbis, imams and soldiers.



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