10 Good Questions about Life and Death

Our birth is nothing but our death begun (Edward Young, Night Thoughts)

10.102978470775035 framer, D-vanloaded from thirps://onlinelbray-wisey.com/doi/10.02978047075035 framer by Holy Angel University, Wiley Online Library or [25.02.225]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelbray.wiley.com/ner-nas-a-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

10 good questions about life and death

christopher belshaw

10.10.10.10.2798470775035 framer, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.10.10.27978470775035 framer, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/arms-nad-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use, OA articlester generated by the applicable Creative Common Library on [25.03.20.25]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/arms-nad-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use, OA articlester generated by the applicable Creative Common Library on [25.03.20.25]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/arms-nad-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use, OA articlester generated by the applicable Creative Common Library on [25.03.20.25]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/arms-nad-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use, OA articlester generated by the applicable Creative Common Library for rules of use of the common Library for rules of use of use of the common Library for rules of use of use of the common Library for rules of u



© 2005 by Christopher Belshaw

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK 550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of Christopher Belshaw to be identified as the Author of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

First published 2005 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2005

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Belshaw, Christopher.

10 good questions about life and death / Christopher Belshaw.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-4051-2577-2 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 1-4051-2604-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Life. 2. Values. I. Title: Ten good questions about life and death. II. Title.

BD431.B387 2005 128—dc22

2004021396

ISBN-13: 978-1-4051-2577-2 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN-13: 978-1-4051-2604-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 11.5/13pt Perpetua by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on Blackwell Publishing, visit our website: www.blackwellpublishing.com

Contents

Preface		v
1	Where Can I Find Answers?	1
2	Is Life Sacred?	15
3	Is It Bad to Die?	30
4	Which Deaths Are Worse?	44
5	Might I Live On?	59
6	Should I Take the Elixir of Life?	77
7	Who's Who?	92
8	Is It All Meaningless?	109
9	Should There Be More, and Better, People?	129
10	Does Reality Matter?	145
Notes and Further Reading		161
Select Bibliography		169
Name Index		173
Subject Index		179

Preface

This book might never have existed. Or it might have existed in a different form. I had a mind to write a more scholarly book, dealing with just some of the topics that are addressed here. But I somehow found my way into neighbouring fields, and wrote instead about the environment. And then, teaching philosophy of religion, I thought I saw a gap for a textbook. Again, it's unwritten. The book you're looking at now couples ideas from those different sources, with much about life and death, some about immortality, and a little about the population explosion. The textbook is now dead in the water, while the scholarly book should, in time, take shape.

My interest in these topics goes back a fair way, to my time as a graduate student in Santa Barbara. Tony Brueckner taught there, and some of the things he'd written, with John Fischer, about the badness of death struck me as deeply interesting and profoundly wrong. Around the same time I came across Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons*. Without these people, and their writings, my life today would be unaccountably different. I more or less gave up on epistemology, metaphysics and history of philosophy, and focused instead on these questions of life and death.

Several people have read and commented on various chapters, in various of their incarnations. I've gained much from their feedback, and thank them for their interest and their time. These people are Tina Beattie, Ann Gallagher, Steve Holland, Gary Kemp, Carrie Mercier, Catherine Morris, John Shand, Helena Silver, Andrew Ward, and Penelope Whitworth. Many other people have helped in a less direct way, for I've read papers dealing with the themes of several chapters in various places, including the universities of York, Glasgow, Cardiff and the Open University, benefiting always from those audiences' comments.

I also need to give special thanks to Tom Baldwin, for inviting me to teach courses at the University of York that have fed directly into this book, and thanks as well to the students there, stimulating in several ways, and encounters with whom can make one glad to be alive.