

# 'Those Who Taste It Merit Life': On the Superfluity of an Everlasting Afterlife

## Aaron Segal

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### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Some people believe in an afterlife. Others don't. Among those who do, many of them believe in an *everlasting* afterlife, one that goes on forever and ever. But I'd venture to say that most folks on *all* sides of that debate agree about the following conditional claim: *if* there's an afterlife, and especially if there's an *everlasting* afterlife as standardly conceived, then that fact has immense practical significance. After all, it's commonly held that if there is an everlasting afterlife as standardly conceived then it offers enormously great goods, unobtainable in this life--so great that they dwarf, in quality and quantity, the paltry goods we can enjoy in our meager lifespans. And that fact seems to have the consequence that if there is an everlasting afterlife as standardly conceived, then we ought to *orient our lives* around it, at least to the extent that it's realistically attainable. Among other things this means that you should choose a way of life that maximizes your chances of living on forever in the hereafter, and that it's reasonable to think about the afterlife a great deal, even to dwell on it.<sup>2</sup>

As I said, these conditional claims are widely held on all sides. But I don't accept them. I myself subscribe to the traditional Jewish view that at least some people will enjoy an eternal afterlife, and I think my conception of that afterlife, inspired by classical Jewish texts, is pretty standard for theists. And yet I don't think that the everlasting afterlife offers any good that is unobtainable in this life, nor do I orient my life around it; I certainly don't dwell on it. (To the extent that I think about it, I do so for philosophical purposes, like writing this essay.) And I don't think my combination of views is idiosyncratic for a traditional Jew. It's a prevalent one and well rooted in Jewish texts, as I will soon argue.

But it's admittedly puzzling. Indeed, it's puzzling in two ways. One puzzle is about the very denial of the conditional itself: I imagine it strikes many readers as pretty unintuitive, perhaps ridiculous, to say that *even if* there is an everlasting afterlife as standardly conceived, it offers

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<sup>1</sup> This essay draws on Segal (2017a), Segal (2017b), and Goldschmidt and Segal (2017).

<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, Pascal famously held that the eternity spent in Heaven, if it exists, is *infinitely* great, and so one ought to embark on a religious path for its sake, even if there is only a *miniscule* likelihood that the path leads there.

no good that is unobtainable in this life, and is not worth orienting one's life around. What gives?

The other puzzle is about the combination of that denial with the claims that (a) there is indeed an everlasting afterlife so conceived, and, moreover, (b) this everlasting afterlife is something that *God specifically arranges* for those who get it, rather than something that naturally follows from a certain kind of life, or that comes to be by chance, or of necessity. This combination is puzzling because it's not clear why God would do this. What's the *point* of an everlasting afterlife, you might wonder, if it doesn't afford us anything we couldn't otherwise get? And if there isn't any point, why would God go out of His way, so to speak, to ensure it? My central aim in this essay is to address those two puzzles, but I first want to briefly substantiate the claim that my attitude is Jewish.

## 2. Judaism

Belief in an afterlife is woven into the fabric of traditional Judaism. The second blessing of the *Amidah*--the ancient prayer at the heart of traditional Jewish liturgy, recited thrice daily--refers to God no fewer than six times as the One who resurrects the dead. One of the central Biblical verses upon which that blessing is based, Daniel 12:2, goes further still, in stating that the resurrected will enjoy *hayei olam*, that is, everlasting life. And the *Mishna Sanhedrin* 10:1, teaches that one who denies the Scriptural bona fides of the resurrection (which heralds an afterlife for those resurrected) has no part in the World to Come (i.e., in an afterlife). The position that some human beings will enjoy an everlasting afterlife has thus been Jewishly normative for approximately two millennia.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, while it's woven into the fabric of traditional Judaism, belief in the afterlife is hardly its warp and woof; the afterlife is simply less central to Judaism than to Christianity or Islam. Indeed, one who mistakenly boils Judaism down to just the Hebrew Bible (and understandably nods off while reading the difficult book of Daniel) could be forgiven for thinking that according to Judaism there *isn't* any afterlife. It's true that alongside the verse in Daniel 12:2, there are other Biblical "intimations of immortality," including the promise recorded in Isaiah 25:8 that God will "destroy death forever" and the description in Psalms 125:1 of those who trust in God as being "like Mount Zion that cannot be moved, enduring forever" (see Levenson 2008, chs. 5 and 12). But those are far from explicit.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a survey of Jewish views of the afterlife, see Raphael (2009), Brody (2016-17), and Goldschmidt and Segal (2017, sec. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Also, there are other Biblical verses that present a different picture. Thus, Ecclesiastes 9:10: "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest".

More to the point--since it would in fact be a mistake to boil Judaism down to the Hebrew Bible, but an even bigger mistake to try to understand Judaism while ignoring it--one gets a remarkably consistent impression from the Hebrew Bible that it's possible to live a maximally fulfilling, spiritually uplifting, and good life *even setting aside* an afterlife. Abraham, and Isaac, and David, and even Job (after the reversal of his misfortunes) are said to have died "old and full (of days)" (Genesis 25:8, Genesis 35:29, Chronicles I 29:27, Job 42:17). Their lives were *full*, or literally *sated*, apparently not lacking for anything. And it's not that these pious individuals trained themselves, in the manner of the Stoics or Epicureans, to set their sights low, thereby ensuring their desires were satisfied: David purportedly sought nothing less than to "dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of [his] life, to behold the graciousness of the LORD". As the medieval Jewish commentator, Nachmanides, explained the verse describing Abraham's death, "He [Abraham] saw all the desires of his heart and was *satiated with every good thing*." With every good thing, *period*, not just with every good thing that he happened to desire.<sup>5</sup>

A number of medieval Jewish philosophers (Judah Halevi, Nissim of Gerona, and Don Isaac Abarbanel, among others) made this very point in response to the charge that theirs was a this-worldly, and hence spiritually immature, religion. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* I-II:91:5) made the charge succinctly:

Hence the Apostle (Galatians 3:24-25) compares the state of man under the Old Law to that of a child "under a pedagogue"; but the state under the New Law, to that of a full grown man, who is "no longer under a pedagogue."...For, in the first place, it belongs to law to be directed to the common good as to its end, as stated above (I-II:90:2). This good may be twofold. It may be a sensible and earthly good; and to this, man was directly ordained by the Old Law: wherefore, at the very outset of the law, the people

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<sup>5</sup> Well, probably not *period*. For one thing, the claim will have to be restricted to those good things that a *human being* could possibly enjoy, since presumably there are goods that, say, only God can enjoy, and Abraham didn't enjoy those.

But even restricting ourselves to just those good things that a human being could possibly enjoy, there are presumably all sorts of activities that are usually good, on balance, and that Abraham didn't get to do--like going to a Major League baseball game on a breezy summer evening, or listening to the Beatles greatest hits. This, however, doesn't call for a further restriction, just for a clarification. Plausibly, when it *is* on balance good to go to the baseball game, there are things about attending the game that *make it the case* that it's good: *good-making features*, such as quiet relaxation, being part of a tradition larger than oneself, the adrenaline rush that often accompanies a homerun, and so on. The claim is that Abraham's life had each of these good-making features, not that he participated in every sort of activity that is usually on balance good. [As a terminological note: when I speak of 'a good' or 'the goods' (i.e. when I use 'good' as a *count noun*, as opposed to either (a) as a *mass term*, as in 'promoting the good', or (b) as an *adjective*, as in 'that was a good salad'), I mean a *good-making feature* of an activity, or experience, or stretch of life, rather than an activity, or experience, or stretch of life *that is on balance good*.]

were invited to the earthly kingdom of the Chananaeans (Exodus 3:8-17). Again it may be an intelligible and heavenly good: and to this, man is ordained by the New Law...Hence Augustine says (*Contra Faust.* iv) that “promises of temporal goods are contained in the Old Testament, for which reason it is called old; but the promise of eternal life belongs to the New Testament.”

These Jewish philosophers effectively conceded that Judaism is this-worldly in emphasis, but denied that it follows from this that Judaism is spiritually immature (see Rosenblum 1994 and Kogan 2004). To the contrary, they said, the Torah in fact promises *in this life* the very same spiritual goods that are ordinarily held to be available only in the hereafter. It promises more opportunities for encountering God, not fewer. Thus, the 15th century Jewish philosopher, Don Isaac Abarbanel:

The felicity of the soul and its cleaving to the Creator may He be blessed, which is the true reward, is already made explicit as part of this covenant [pertaining to this life], as it says (Leviticus 26:12): “And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be My people.” This is none other than the connection and cleaving of the divine to us, when our souls cleave to the upper world, even when we are embodied...Thus, *what the fraudulent religions promise to man after his death, the divine Torah promises to the pious already in this life*, in such a way that they already experience with their senses in this world the felicity of their soul that awaits them after death (Commentary to Leviticus 26:3, emphasis mine)

The pious literally *experience* in this life the most wonderful and exalted things of the afterlife: foremost among them, an intimate clinging to God.<sup>6</sup>

Let’s make the view I’m attributing to these various Jewish philosophers, and endorsing myself, more precise. In honor of the philosopher most explicit on this score, I shall call it ‘The Abarbanel Thesis’:

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<sup>6</sup> A recurring refrain in the Sabbath hymns, drawing from the Rabbinic literature, is that the Sabbath is *me’ein olam ha-ba*, an other-worldly oasis in the otherwise drab week. In an even more sensuous vein, the Hasidic master, R. Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk (18th c.) interprets the phrase from the Sabbath prayers, “those who taste her [the Sabbath] merit life,” to mean that to sincerely and meaningfully observe the Sabbath *is itself to taste the eternal and supernal afterlife* (*Pri Ha’aretz, Vayeshev*). We can actually *taste* the afterlife, according to this and other Hasidic teachings.

**The Abarbanel Thesis:** human beings can, and some human beings do, enjoy in their finitely long and embodied lives whatever goods they could enjoy at all (and so in particular, whatever goods they could enjoy in an eternal afterlife)

Given the Abarbanel Thesis it's no wonder that Abraham is said to have died, sated with all that was good. For if anyone was pious enough to merit in this life all the goods that are ordinarily reserved for the afterlife, Abraham was.

### 3. First Puzzle

But how could the Abarbanel Thesis be *true*? As I asked before: what gives? Let's make explicit the difficulties that lie behind that incredulous question. One apparent and glaring difficulty with the Abarbanel Thesis is that a finitely long and embodied life is, well, *finitely long*, while the afterlife to which it's being compared is everlasting, i.e. *infinite* in duration. Won't this all by itself give rise to there being goods available in an (infinitely long) afterlife that simply can't be had in this brief life of ours? With all the time in the world in Heaven, Abraham could enjoy all the blessings he received from God--companionship with Sarah, opportunities to do acts of lovingkindness, being in God's presence, etc.--for so much *longer*. Indeed, forever. So isn't there *this* good, for instance, which can be enjoyed only in an infinitely long life: **being in God's presence forever?**

A second apparent difficulty with the Abarbanel Thesis is that even if we set aside the difference in duration, a finitely long and embodied life is, well, *embodied*. And embodiment has been alleged, at least since Plato, to preclude the realization of certain goods. The goods allegedly precluded are at the very least epistemic (relating to what we can know) and volitional (relating to what we want). Epistemically, we are impeded by our reliance on sense perception and imagination, both of which can be misleading, and both of which *are* misleading regarding the most important subject of all, theology (see, e.g. Maimonides *Guide of the Perplexed* III:9). Volitionally, we are impeded in the pursuit of the good by our bodily needs for things such as food and sex, needs that feed our egocentric desires, and so in turn our greed, envy, pride, vanity, and so many other vices besides. These impediments are often claimed to follow from our being the embodied subjects that we are; so long as we're embodied, we will be saddled with them. Thus, Abraham (and *a fortiori* everyone else) must have been missing out on at least *some* very great goods when he died: knowledge of God unobstructed by the veil of matter, and a perfected volitional structure, for starters.

#### 3.1 Finite Duration

We've now made explicit the apparent difficulties that lie behind the incredulous, "What gives?" In response, I say that these apparent difficulties are *merely* apparent. Let's begin with the first apparent difficulty. In my view, it's simply mistaken to think that duration, even infinite duration, *just as such*, contributes to making a process, an event, an experience, or a life more desirable. Of course, ordinarily, we do more things the longer we have. But that's not to say that duration just as such contributes to the desirability of anything; it's to recognize a commonplace truth that everyone should accept.

To see more precisely what I have in mind, it helps to consider the following thought experiment. Suppose you learn that God is about to speed up greatly and uniformly all the processes going on with you and with everything with which you could interact; actually, for the sake of simplicity, suppose God is about to speed up greatly and uniformly all the processes going on with *everything whatsoever*.<sup>7</sup> Because *everything* is speeding up, it'll all seem just the same as it otherwise would: your best friend will be talking a lot faster, but you'll also be processing everything a lot faster. You'll do exactly the same things you would otherwise do, in exactly the same order, with exactly the same people. It'll just take a lot less time: if it's fast enough, you'll be dead in a millisecond.

It seems to me that learning this divine plan shouldn't bother you one iota. Your life will go just as well (or as poorly) as it otherwise would; the shortened lifespan makes your life no worse. Which is to say, your actual life (in which this remains just a thought experiment) is no more desirable just for being longer.

And it's not just because your actual life is still finite. Consider a second thought experiment. You arrive in Heaven. In your honor, God decides to speed up greatly and uniformly everyone's afterlife. In fact, He's going to squeeze in everything in a finite amount of time. Here's how: all the processes that would have happened in the first year subsequent to your arrival will be sped up (uniformly) so that they take just half a minute. (So far this is just like the previous thought experiment.) All the processes that would have happened in the second year subsequent to your arrival will be sped up even more (but still uniformly) so that they take the next *quarter* of a minute. And so on. Your afterlife and everyone else's, which were originally going to take forever, will now last just a minute. Again, everything will seem just the same.

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<sup>7</sup> If that's impossible, because "time is a measure of change," as Aristotle held, we can modify the case so that there is an enormous cosmic clock somewhere very far away--so enormous that its operations set the standard for time's passage everywhere but far enough away that you will have no interaction with it--with respect to which everything in your life and the things with which you interact speed up.

You'll do exactly the same things you would otherwise do, in exactly the same order, with exactly the same people. It'll just take a *lot* less time.

It seems to me yet again that even learning this divine plan shouldn't bother you one iota. Your afterlife will go just as well (or as poorly) as it otherwise would; its finite duration makes it no worse. Which is to say, your actual everlasting afterlife (in which this remains just a thought experiment) is no more desirable just for being infinitely long.

These thought experiments are meant both to explicate my claim and to invite you to agree with me that it's intuitively plausible (see also Sorenson 2005, 2013). If you don't agree that it's intuitively plausible, perhaps you'll be moved by arguments on its behalf.

There are a number of such arguments, several going back to antiquity. In a remarkable convergence of otherwise radically opposed philosophical "schools," the Stoics, Epicureans, and Neo-Platonists all accepted my claim. Thus, according to Cicero,

Epicurus maintains that long duration can not add anything to happiness, and that as much pleasure is enjoyed in a brief span of time as if pleasure were everlasting... (*Fin.* 2.87-88)

As Cicero goes on to say about the Stoic view,

If a person finds the sole Good in Virtue, it is open to him to say that the happy life is consummated by the consummation of virtue; for his position is that the Chief Good is not increased by lapse of time. (*ibid.*)

And even Plotinus, the leading Neo-Platonist, concurs:

If in the greater length of time the man has seen more deeply, time has certainly done something for him, but if all the process has brought him no further vision, then one glance would give all he has had. (*Enneads* I.5)

Each had their own argument, varying with their different views on what goods there are. The Epicureans held that pleasure is the only good, and assumed that pleasure is not increased by a mere increase in duration.<sup>8</sup> The Stoics held that having a virtuous character is the only good, and assumed that having a virtuous character is not increased by a mere increase in duration (see Luper 2013). And the Neo-Platonists held that seeing things deeply is the only good, and assumed that seeing deeply is not increased by a mere increase in duration.<sup>9</sup> If you assume the

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<sup>8</sup> See Bramble 2016 for a defense of the view that "*Purely repeated pleasures*—i.e., pleasures that introduce nothing qualitatively new in terms of pleasurable-ness into a person's life—add nothing in and of themselves to her lifetime well-being," which seems to entail the Epicureans' second premise.

<sup>9</sup> Note well: none of this is to deny that we ordinarily have more pleasurable experiences, or develop further our virtuous character, or see things more deeply, the longer we have. It's just to say that temporally compressing or

second premise of more than one of these arguments, you can hold a correspondingly more generous view about what goods there are. For example, if you assume that none of pleasure and virtuous character and understanding is increased by a mere increase in duration, then you can assume that the goods are pleasure, virtuous character, *and* understanding.

I leave these arguments for your consideration, and offer my own argument. My argument has just two premises.<sup>10</sup> The first premise is that any feature of a life (or portion thereof) that is good-making says *something* about how that life (or portion thereof) is *in itself*. It can't be *exclusively about* how some other portion of the universe is; it can't be, as I call it, 'purely extrinsic'. The fact, say, that I exist in a universe in which there's a certain black hole in the Andromeda Galaxy about which no human will ever know, can't contribute to the desirability of my life. That fact has *nothing to do with me*. The second premise is that the feature of a life, **going on forever**, and, more broadly, features of the sort, **lasting such-and-such amount of time**, are indeed purely extrinsic.

I take it the first premise is relatively unexceptionable. The second premise, on the other hand, is probably surprising. The reason to accept it is that it follows from a more general claim that size (spatial or temporal) is purely extrinsic, a claim that in turn follows from the very peculiar behavior of point(instant)-sized things and things/stretches made of point(instant)-sized things.<sup>11</sup> Since any two things that have positive size, like a baseball and a basketball, are made of the same number of point-sized things (i.e. uncountably many), the question arises how they get to be different sizes. I claim that when you examine the mathematical theory of size (measure theory), together with some very plausible metaphysical principles, the natural conclusion to draw is that they get to be different sizes in virtue of what else *is or is not to be found between the points* (Segal 2016). In other words, it's a matter of how some *other* things are.

To summarize: on intuitive grounds, ethical grounds (having to do with what things are goods), and metaphysical grounds (having to do with the nature of duration, and size more generally), I conclude that infinite duration just as such contributes nothing to the goodness of a life or a segment thereof. Thus, **being in God's presence forever** isn't a good-making feature of a life--even though **being in God's presence** is of course a good-making feature. And given the

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expanding a stretch of life, *while holding fixed* its pleasure/virtue/understanding profile, makes no difference to how good that stretch is.

<sup>10</sup> Still, the details are rather complicated, and I can provide only a very brief sketch in the space I have here. For a much fuller presentation, see Segal 2017a.

<sup>11</sup> Here I assume that spatial, temporal, and spatiotemporal things are, or at least could be, made up ultimately of point(instant)-sized things. There are very good theoretical reasons to suppose this is the case, and it is a workaday assumption in the regular practice of physics.



thought experiments, it seems unlikely that there's any other good that absolutely *requires* infinite duration. The first apparent difficulty for the Abarbanel Thesis is merely apparent.

### 3.2 Embodiment

The second apparent difficulty is that even setting aside duration there are said to be (very great) goods that it's possible for a human being to enjoy, but that cannot be enjoyed while embodied. Whether the difficulty is genuine depends, for any such putative good, on three things: (a) whether it's a good, (b) whether it's possible for a human being to enjoy it at all, and (c) whether it cannot in fact be enjoyed while embodied. Thus, for any candidate good that is supposed to be available to us in the afterlife and only in the afterlife, there are three responses available to an adherent of the Abarbanel Thesis: (a) deny that it's a good, (b) deny that it's possible for human beings to enjoy it (even in an afterlife), or (c) assert that it can be enjoyed even while embodied.

Allow me to exemplify how each of these responses with different candidate goods. Start with the candidate good that I mentioned earlier: a reformation of one's volitional structure so that one wants only what is good, unopposed by any unduly egocentric desires. That certainly *sounds* good. But you need to think through what it means. Someone who desires only what's good would presumably never choose what's bad; what's more interesting is that it's hard to see how they even *could* choose what's bad. Suppose you have no desire whatsoever to hop on one foot for the next hour--not even a desire to do so to show how wrong I am. No desire at all. To the contrary, you have a very strong desire to continue vegging on the couch. Could you nonetheless choose to hop on one foot? It doesn't seem like it (see van Inwagen 1989). But then someone who desires only what's good has no *morally significant freedom*: sure, maybe they could equally well choose chocolate ice cream as vanilla ice cream, but regarding any decision of moral significance, they're not free to choose anything other than what they do choose. And very many philosophers and religious thinkers have contended, quite plausibly, that lacking morally significant freedom would be a *bad* thing for us: perhaps we wouldn't be persons, perhaps we wouldn't be responsible for our actions, and perhaps our love and service of God would be far less meaningful than if were free. So when you think through the consequences of the proposed volitional transformation, it's far from obvious that it's good at all, let alone as good as it initially sounds.

Consider now the good of knowing God. Here an adherent of the Abarbanel Thesis can divide and conquer. Regarding some sorts or degrees of knowledge of God, she can say that it's just not possible for creatures like us to have that sort or degree of knowledge, whether in this life or in an afterlife, whether embodied or disembodied. For instance, *complete* propositional

knowledge of God--knowledge of every fundamental truth about the divine nature--would according to many theists require infinitary capacities (for God is infinitely rich). And not only do we finite creatures not in fact possess those capacities, we likely *couldn't* possess them: that is, no being that had such capacities would be identical with any of us. (I am effectively assuming that we are *essentially* finite.)

If, on the other hand, what's at issue is something else--say, *incomplete* propositional knowledge, or non-propositional *personal* knowledge--then she can say that such a thing is in fact available in this life. Abraham, along with many of us, know *some truths* about God. And Abraham spoke with God, walked with God, and thereby came to be one of God's intimate companions (Genesis 18:19; *Tosafot Shabbat* 137b). As an intimate companion, he knew God personally. Apparently, neither being embodied nor any other feature bound up with our pre-mortem existence is any barrier to this sort of knowledge of God.<sup>12</sup>

I have tried to illustrate each of the three responses available to an adherent of the Abarbanel Thesis. My aim was not to *conclusively show*, for the few candidates I considered of goods-available-only-while-disembodied, that they are not in fact so; it was rather to suggest that for each such candidate at least one of the three responses is quite plausible. You might prefer a different response for some candidates, or think that a number of responses work. All well and good.

Of course, even if I were to conclusively show that none of the candidates I considered is in fact a good-available-only-while-disembodied, that would leave open the possibility of there being other candidates, which I *haven't* considered, that are. But I don't think that's much more than an abstract possibility. For one thing, the candidates I considered are, at least from what I can tell, the most promising ones out there.

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<sup>12</sup> To the contrary, suggest certain Jewish texts and practices: our being embodied is what enables us to serve God, which is what enables us in turn to know God personally. When a Jew dons phylacteries every morning, a daily symbol of his wholehearted devotion to serving God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), it is customary to utter the verses from Hosea (2:21-2): "And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in justice, and in loving kindness, and in compassion. And I will betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness; *and thou shalt know the LORD*". We come to know God, we seem to be saying, only by devoting ourselves to *doing* what is righteous, and just, and loving, and compassionate. And that is in turn because one comes to know God by devotedly walking in His ways--doing as He does--and thereby clinging to Him (Babylonian Talmud *Sotah* 14a). But of course one needs to be embodied to wrap oneself in phylacteries, and one needs to be a social being, and hence embodied (see Swinburne 2019: 84), in order to pursue justice and righteousness. [For an excellent philosophical discussion of the positive assessment of embodiment in contemporary Jewish thought, see Shatz (2013).] It's no wonder then that according to a number of Talmudic views, the eternal afterlife is not only embodied, but also involves performing the very same acts of devotion and goodness that occupied the person in this life (see Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 91b-92a). The afterlife is an arena for continuing to do the same good deeds one did in this life.

For another, much more general thing, I'm convinced by Nachmanides and his philosophical disciples that the eternal afterlife of which the Biblical and Rabbinic sources speak is itself *embodied*. He maintains that those who merit an eternal afterlife will be collectively resurrected after the Messiah comes, never to perish again--and it is that post-resurrection eternal life that the Rabbis of the Talmud characterized as "the world that is wholly good" (Babylonian Talmud *Kidushin* 39b). Clearly enough, according to Nachmanides, being embodied does not preclude enjoying the goods that will be enjoyed in the afterlife.<sup>13</sup> (And it's hard to imagine that there are *other* goods that could be enjoyed by a human being but that won't be attained in either this life or the afterlife. Even if there are, that would impugn the Abarbanel Thesis only in letter, not in spirit.)

And Nachmanides is far from alone. Any materialist about human persons--anyone who thinks that human beings are *identical* with some *body*--will presumably have to hold that if there is an afterlife, it is embodied. After all, quite plausibly nothing that *is* a body could become *disembodied*. (Can you imagine a piece of clay becoming disembodied? I mean, take a piece of clay. Can you imagine *that very piece* somehow becoming disembodied? I certainly can't.) I myself am not a materialist, but materialism is all the rage these days, even among Christian philosophers who believe in an afterlife.<sup>14</sup> Clearly enough *they* agree with me and Nachmanides that being embodied is no barrier to enjoying the goods of the afterlife.

To be sure, Maimonides and *his* philosophical disciples disagreed on this point with Nachmanides and his. (See Segal 2017b and Goldschmidt and Segal 2017 for a more detailed discussion of this controversy.) According to Maimonides, the eternal afterlife is disembodied, and *must be* disembodied in order to allow for the great good of living forever: for one can come to be immortal only by apprehending, and thus becoming made up of, eternal truths (*Mishne Torah* Laws of Repentance 8:2-3). But I never claimed my defense of the Abarbanel Thesis was consistent with every major Jewish philosophical position on the afterlife--as a matter of fact, I've contradicted Maimonides twice over, since I have just now assumed with Nachmanides that disembodiment isn't needed in order to enjoy eternal life, and I argued in the previous section that living forever isn't a great good (or even a good at all). So be it. As I have argued elsewhere, Maimonides' view that a person comes to be *made up of* whatever

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<sup>13</sup> Thus, Nachmanides himself denied that being embodied necessitates the having of egocentric or otherwise problematic desires--he held that in the embodied afterlife we will no longer have these desires (commentary to Deuteronomy 30:6)--while endorsing the suggestion that the elimination of these desires is a good. He would offer the third reply, not the first, to the candidate-good of a reformation of our volitional structure.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Baker (1995), van Inwagen (1995), Murphey (1998), Hudson (2001), and Merricks (2007).

eternal truths she knows faces very grave difficulties, metaphysical, moral, and religious (Segal 2017b).

I conclude that the Abarbanel Thesis is defensible, and by my lights likely true.

#### 4. Second Puzzle

But even if it's defensible on its own, it might not be when combined with other parts of the traditional Jewish package. Abarbanel himself, in keeping with normative Jewish thought, believed in an eternal afterlife. And so do I. In addition, I don't think that an afterlife is something one can naturally attain just by knowing certain things (as Maimonides and his disciples would have it) or just by having the right attitude (as the contemporary philosopher, Mark Johnston (2010), would have it), nor is it something that one comes to have by chance, or of necessity (due to the "indestructibility" of one's soul or some such thing). No, it's something that God arranges specially for those who get it. The combination of these views with the Abarbanel Thesis should seem puzzling. Why *does* God make this special arrangement if, per the Abarbanel Thesis, an afterlife is dispensable? What's the *point*?

I can hear some of you reacting to this puzzlement with puzzlement of your own. After all, just because human beings *can* enjoy in this life whatever goods they could enjoy at all doesn't mean they all *do*. And quite obviously many don't. Many human beings have rather miserable lives, with nothing close to the idyllic picture of Abraham (or even Job) on his deathbed, and no real opportunity to develop a relationship with God. So there's this simple explanation, you might say, for why God specially arranges an afterlife: He does so to provide the great goods of the afterlife to those deserving people who didn't enjoy them in this life.

But this simple explanation just won't do. For one thing, if anyone gets an afterlife, *Abraham* (and others pious enough to merit the goods of the afterlife in this life) does. At least that's what Jewish tradition says. Why does God go out of his way to give *Abraham* an afterlife if he lacked nothing when he died at the age of 175? For another thing, why does God go out of His way to give *anyone* an *eternal* afterlife? Why not just give anyone who died in need of some compensatory good the 175 years that Abraham lived and all the goods it involved? In general, why have an afterlife go on forever if, as I argued, infinite duration just as such doesn't contribute anything to the goodness of a life?

The puzzle can be resolved, I suggest, if we reject a tacit assumption lying behind these questions. We've been assuming that when God grants someone an eternal afterlife, He does so for *the sake of the "afterlifer"*, to make her life go better than it otherwise would be. That's a natural assumption, and one that's widely held even in Rabbinic literature on the afterlife.<sup>15</sup> But, given the Abarbanel Thesis, we should reject it. Instead, we should say that He does so for *His own sake*. After all, God presumably has an abiding interest in his intimate companions, those for whom He loved and cared.<sup>16</sup> A world in which those intimate companions perish at some point and never live again is one in which God's own interests are thwarted; thus, God's own interests serve as reason enough to grant human beings an eternal afterlife. Indeed, the great work of Jewish mysticism, the *Zohar*, consistently characterizes the age of the resurrection--when eternal life will be granted--using a verse in Psalms (104:31) that speaks exclusively of God's glory and joy: "May the glory of the LORD endure forever; let the LORD rejoice in His works!"<sup>17</sup> On this way of seeing things, there's no genuine puzzle in Abraham's having already lived as full a life as a human being could live--suffused as it was with a loving and devoted relationship with God--and God's nonetheless arranging for him to live forever in the hereafter. God will resurrect Abraham to eternal life not because it will make Abraham's life go better (though of course it won't make it go any worse!), but because God, who is by nature eternal, cannot bear the absence of those He holds most dear.

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<sup>15</sup> Thus, R. Ya'akov (Babylonian Talmud *Kidushin* 39b) interprets the verse (Deuteronomy 22:7), "that it may be good for you, and your days will be long" to refer to the "the world that is wholly good, the world that is everlasting" (i.e. the eternal afterlife).

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps that's most people. I take no stand here on the question of who merits an eternal afterlife.

<sup>17</sup> *Zohar* I 119a, 182a, and II 57b.

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