

One-way Journey

Who was the fool?
Who was the wise man?
Who was the beggar?
Who was the emperor?

Death... and then?

Werner Gitt

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Four skulls lie on a low wall in a church in South Tyrol, Northern Italy. Above them is a sign bearing the words, "*Who was the fool? Who was the wise man? Who was the beggar? Who was the emperor?*" The emperor's power and wealth are no longer there to give us a clue to his identity. Maybe the beggar's skull is directly beside his, but likewise, the beggar's poverty, rags and rumbling stomach are no longer there to attest to his identity. Perhaps we should erect a second sign with the words: "*Death has made them equals!*" But is this, in fact, the case?

Unlike marketing strategies that target certain classes of customers, death is certainly no respecter of persons; no-one can escape it by reason of class distinction. It is no wonder, then, that many people have paused to reflect deeply on it, whether philosophers, poets, politicians, sportsmen, actors, illiterates or Nobel Laureates. The ancient Egyptians were particularly assiduous; their Pyramids of Giza are the world's largest monuments commemorating death. But is such human effort really of any value? In the words of the German poet Emanuel Geibel: "*Life is an eternal riddle, death an eternal mystery.*" Of the many attempts to comprehend the meaning of death, the theory of evolution is undeniably the most widely renowned.

Death in the world-view of evolution

Death is deeply anchored in the constructs of evolution; so much so that we would have to conclude that without death there would be no life on Earth at all. This is clear from the four basic tenets of evolution concerning death:

1. Death – a necessary condition for evolution: German physicist Carl Friedrich v. Weizsäcker pointed out: *"If individuals did not die there would be no evolution and no new individuals with new attributes. The death of individuals is a pre-requisite for evolution."*

2. Death – an invention of evolution: The biology professor Widmar Tanner, from Regensburg in South Germany, poses the justifiable existential question about death: *"How and why did death come into our world if it were not needed at all?"* and provides the answer: *"Ageing and lifespan are phenomena of adaptation which have developed in the course of evolution. Death's invention has essentially accelerated the progress of evolution."* For him the built-in program of death offers a perpetual chance for evolution to experiment with something new.

3. Death – the creator of life: How far the worldview of evolution diverges from that of the Bible is made particularly clear when evolution elevates death to become the creator of life. This is expressed by the microbiologist Reinhard W. Kaplan: *"Built-in ageing and dying may be distressing for the individual, particularly for humans, but that is the price to be paid for the fact that evolution created life in the first place."*

4. Death – the absolute end of life: According to the doctrine of evolution, life is based solely on the properties of matter at the boundary between physics and chemistry (Manfred Eigen, German biophysical chemist and Nobel Prize winner).

Here we see that evolution can provide no satisfactory explanation for what death is all about. There is no room for a continuation of life after death when reality is reduced in such a way to mere material phenomena. Humans are reduced to biological ma-

chines, rendered useless when the organism dies. Death serves only the rise of subsequent life in the train of evolution. The value of a human life is only as much as its contribution to evolution.

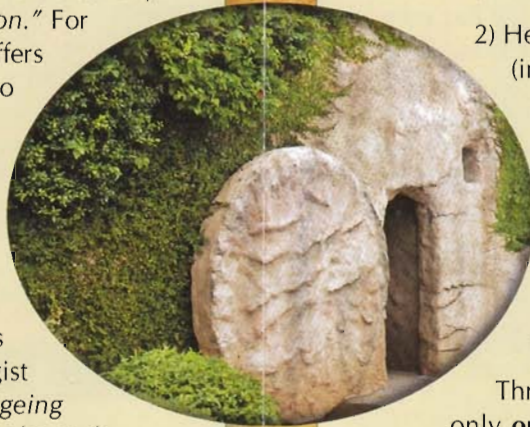
Who has the answer?

Is there anyone who can give us an answer to all these stirring questions about the nature of death and what comes after it? If there were such a person, he would have to satisfy all of the following four stringent requirements:

- 1) He, himself, must have experienced death (in order to provide first-hand knowledge).
- 2) He must have returned from the dead (in order to tell us about what he experienced).
- 3) He must have power over death (making him an authority on the subject).
- 4) He must be completely trustworthy (in order for us to believe the account he relates to us).

Throughout history, there remains only **one person** who fulfils these conditions, Jesus Christ.

- 1) He was crucified and died outside the gates of Jerusalem. His enemies wanted to be sure that he was dead, so they thrust a spear into his side, causing blood to pour out (John 19:34). This convinced them that he really was dead! [Satisfying requirement 1]
- 2) He had already predicted that he would rise again from the dead on the third day. That actually happened, and the first witnesses were the women who went to his tomb on Easter morning. The angel there told them, **"He is not here, he has risen!"** (Luke 24:6). [Satisfying requirement 2]



3) The New Testament reports three instances of resurrections from the dead through the power of Jesus: Lazarus in Bethany (John 11:41-45), the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-17) and Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:35-43). No person has authority over death other than Jesus alone. [Satisfying requirement 3]

4) Of all the people to have walked on the face of this earth, only Jesus has ever been able to live up to his statement, ***"I am the truth"*** (John 14:6), in spite of all the attempts of his enemies to prove a single accusation against Him. [Satisfying requirement 4]

Could we have arrived at the right place, the source of all truth? The truth is vital. Who wants to base his life on an error? Let us be clear: **only one** has the necessary qualification to give us a clear answer. He tells us what happens to us immediately after we die. In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus explains this, using the example of two people who had just died. One of them knew God; the other had rejected Him. Lazarus is carried by angels to Abraham's bosom, to a place that Jesus also calls Paradise (Luke 23:43), where he fares well and is comfortable. The other man, who had lived richly, found himself in Hell when he died and he described his atrocious situation with the words, ***"I am in agony in this fire"*** (Luke 16:24b). **Death is by no means the great equaliser.** On the contrary, if, during life on Earth, we think there is a massive gulf, the chasm will become indescribably deeper on the other side of the wall of death. How shall we explain this?

Three-fold death

The Bible's message is unambiguous that this world and all life are the products of God's creative act. It was a finished and perfect creation, which God designated as "very good". He created all things through his master craftsman (Proverbs 8:30), the Lord Jesus (John 1:10, Colossians 1:16), while re-

maining true to His attributes of gentleness, mercy and love in creation; far opposed to the strategy of evolution, which is marked by suffering and tears, cruelty and death. Anyone who regards God as the author of evolution, who suggests that this was his method of creation, is misrepresenting God's character. The idea that God is steering evolution (so-called theistic evolution), then, is utterly untenable.

So where does death come from, if it is neither a factor of evolution nor corresponds to God's character? Firstly, death is universal. All people die, whether in their youth or later in life, whether morally respectable or thieves and murderers, whether believers or unbelievers. Such a universal and radical effect must have an equally radical cause.

The Bible speaks of death as the consequence of human sin. In spite of God's warning (Genesis 2:17), man misused the freedom he had been given, and fell from God's grace. From that moment, the law of sin came to apply: ***"The wages of sin is death"*** (Romans 6:23). Man stumbled onto what we might call the death track, shown as the thick black arrow in the diagram. We can picture it as a **train of death**. Ever since Adam, who was responsible for allowing death to enter creation (1 Corinthians 15:22a), the entire human race is now on this terrible train: ***"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned"*** (Romans 5:12). Before the Fall of Man death was unknown to all creation.

Now when the Bible speaks of death, it in no way means the cessation of existence. The biblical definition of death is "separation, detachment". Because the Fall signifies a three-fold death (see diagram), there must be a three-fold separation.

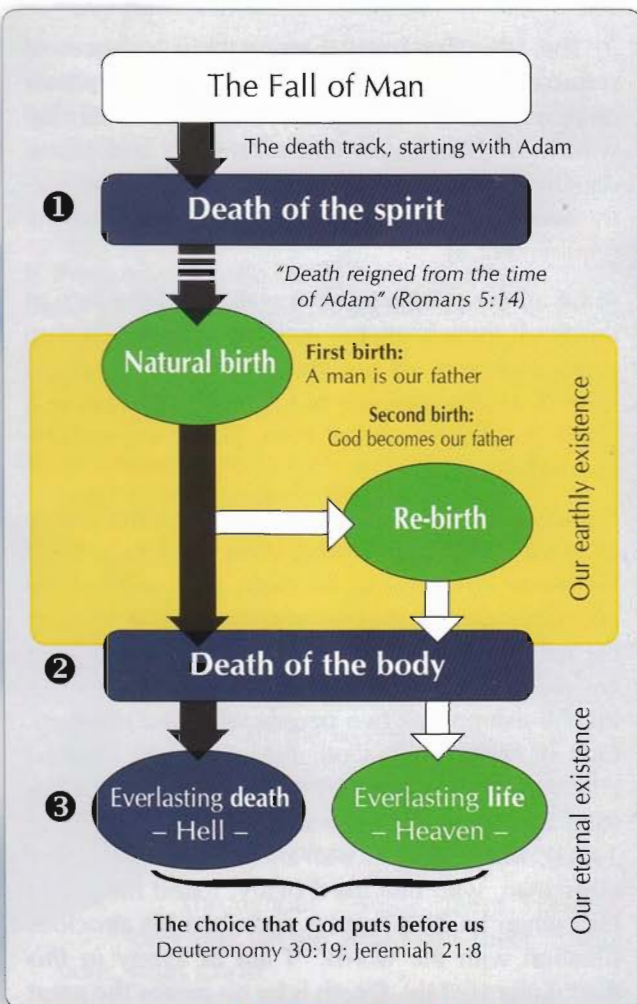
1. Death of the spirit: At the moment of the Fall, mankind's spirit died, which means that man was banished from fellowship with God. To this day, his is the state of all humans who have not discovered

that they may entrust themselves to their Creator. They, alone, determine their lives and are victims of the passions and delusions resulting from their separation from God. They lead their lives as if God did not exist. They have no idea who Jesus Christ is and reject the message of the Bible. Although they may be very much alive in body, they are spiritually dead.

2. Death of the body: A further consequence is the death of the body: **"... until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken"** (Genesis 3:19). All of creation is subject to decay because of the Fall.

3. Eternal death: The final destination of the death train is eternal death. There, human existence will not be extinguished (Luke 16:19-31), but rather continue in a state of eternal separation from God. It is subject to the wrath of God because **"the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men"** (Romans 5:18). Jesus calls this place of doom Hell; it is the place of the most unimaginably gruesome existence: the fire there cannot be extinguished (Mark 9: 43 & 45) and is everlasting (Matthew 25:41). **"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"** (Luke 13:28). It is a spine-chilling place where **"their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched"** (Mark 9:48); a place of **"everlasting destruction"** (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

How does God regard our self-inflicted flight to destruction? His unlimited mercy and His love for us allowed Him to send His only Son to the Cross to accomplish His unique **action plan** to rescue us. The words of Jesus **"It is finished!"** mark the consummation of this plan. It is the express will of God (e.g. 1 Timothy 2:4) to rescue us from everlasting Hell, or, to put it figuratively, to make it possible for us to jump off the runaway death train. We are invited to enter by the narrow door that leads to Heaven (Matthew 7:13a+14). According to the testimony of the Bible, Jesus is the only door, the only way to be saved. When we get on board the train of life, we find ourselves on a different track — the route to everlasting life.



Changing trains means that we turn to Jesus, are honest with Him about ourselves, ask Him to forgive us, repent and accept Him as our Saviour. In God's eyes, we then become new creatures. This amazing gift of forgiveness is available to each of us, personally and freely. This gift of grace has cost God an inestimable price, the sacrifice of His Son. Accepting God's offer is the breakthrough that will give you eternal life (John 5:24). This chance is offered to you only during the course of your life on Earth, so make the choice today (you cannot guarantee there will be a tomorrow)!

The Way to Life

A young man came to me after a lecture. I asked him, "Where are you now?" His brief answer, in response to my train analogy: "I am standing on the platform!" He had recognised one thing: he should leave the death train as soon as possible! He asked, "How can I get on the train of life?" I showed him the way and he is now happily travelling towards the best of destinations.

God is not only a God who is angry about sin, He is also a loving God toward the sinner. If we embark on the train of life today, we will have also booked a dwelling in a place of beauty, Heaven, of which it is said in 1 Corinthians 2:9, **"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."** Your eternal home is only a decision away. Will you choose death or life? Heaven or Hell? **"I have set before you [everlasting] life and [everlasting] death, blessings and curses. Now choose life..."** (Deuteronomy 30:19). Once again, we see that God's will points clearly to life. The diagram clearly shows that:

If you are born **only once** (natural birth), you will die twice (first death of the body, then everlasting death);
but if you are born **twice** (natural birth, new birth through Christ), you will **die only once** (death of the body)!

Trusting in the Son of God will free you from the condemnation of His judgement and will give you assurance that you have eternal life: **"Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from [spiritual] death to [everlasting] life"** (John 5:24).

If one considers the enormity of every decision of faith, it becomes clear what a tragic effect the concept of evolution and its teachings on death has on its adherents. It obscures the danger of eternal

death and could cause people to miss the offer of rescue. But Jesus has come to save us from the abyss, from Hell. Turn to God with a prayer today, and with that, abandon the train of death and jump on the train of life. You can allow God to begin this radical change of direction in your life with the following prayer:

"Lord Jesus Christ, I recognise the fatality of my situation. My way of life is by no means consistent with Your Word. Now I know that I am sitting on the wrong train. I am deeply moved and implore you to help me. Forgive all my guilt, for which I am truly sorry, and change my life as I read Your Word and learn to live by it. With Your help, I want to board the train of life and stay with You forever. I accept You into my life now. Be my Lord and give me the will and the strength to follow You. Thank You from the bottom of my heart that you have freed me from my sin and that I am now called a child of God. Amen."

Director und Professor (retd.)
Dr.-Ing. Werner Gitt



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Original Title: Reise ohne Rückkehr
Author's home page: www.wernergitt.de
Translation from German: Harvey Nimmo
Cover design: Elise Christian

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Am Hofe 2, D-29342 Wienhausen, Telefon: 05149/ 98 91-0, Fax: -19
E-Mail: bruderhand@bruderhand.de; Homepage: bruderhand.de

Nr. 1510: Englisch / English, 1st edition 2011

