



# Surviving Death (Carl G. Hempel Lecture Series)

*Mark Johnston*

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In this extraordinary book, Mark Johnston sets out a new understanding of personal identity and the self, thereby providing a purely naturalistic account of surviving death.

Death threatens our sense of the importance of goodness. The threat can be met if there is, as Socrates said, "something in death that is better for the good than for the bad." Yet, as Johnston shows, all existing theological conceptions of the afterlife are either incoherent or at odds with the workings of nature. These supernaturalist pictures of the rewards for goodness also obscure a striking consilience between the philosophical study of the self and an account of goodness common to Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism: the good person is one who has undergone a kind of death of the self and who lives a life transformed by entering imaginatively into the lives of others, anticipating their needs and true interests. As a caretaker of humanity who finds his or her own death comparatively unimportant, the good person can see through death.

But this is not all. Johnston's closely argued claims that there is no persisting self and that our identities are in a particular way "Protean" imply that the good survive death. Given the future-directed concern that defines true goodness, the good quite literally live on in the onward rush of humankind. Every time a baby is born a good person acquires a new face.

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