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**Death is not Bad for the Person Who Dies: An End to a Philosophical Debate**

For this essay, I will be addressing the philosophical debate on whether or not death is a bad thing for the person who dies. The side I have chosen to defend in this paper is in favour of death not being a bad thing. The definition of death which will be used is the total cessation of all bodily functions, which in turn results in a person ceasing to exist (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.100). Initially, to defend my argument, I will summarize the Epicurean view and the common-sense view to explicate and assess the Epicurean Dilemma. Following this, I will expand upon why I think Epicurus and Lucretius are correct to think that 'death is nothing to us'. To further consolidate my argument, I will then appeal to Nagel's discussion regarding whether or not anxiety is an appropriate response to death possibly depriving of future goods worth having. In conclusion, I will summarize my defence on why death is not a bad thing for the person who dies.

As defined by Silverstein, the common-sense view is the perspective in which the death of oneself is the alpha of all evils a person can ensue, meanwhile the Epicurean view is the perspective that death can't be an evil for the person who dies (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.185). The Epicurean dilemma itself is the discord between the opposing perspectives of the Epicurean view and the common-sense view (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.185). To determine a conclusion for the Epicurean dilemma in favour of death not being a bad thing for the person who dies, I will analyze and deconstruct the common-sense view to determine why it is one of a false claim.

As mentioned previously, death is the total cessation of all bodily functions (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.100). Bodily functions include physical, mental, and emotional operations, as all of these functions rely on working vital organs in a living person. The cessation of bodily functions, in turn, also means the cessation of all physical, mental, and emotional processes. For

this argument, the area of focus will be on the emotional processes. Although when people refer to emotions, they speak of the heart, the source of all emotions comes from the brain, an organ hosting bodily functions. If death is the total cessation of all bodily functions (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.100), then death is also the total cessation of the function of the brain. If death is the total cessation of the function of the brain, then a person will cease to exist. If a person ceases to exist, then there are no emotions to experience and there is no one left to experience them. The person who ceases to exist, and cannot experience emotional processes, therefore cannot experience badness from being dead because experiences and feelings are for those who are alive (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.185). This analysis, therefore, renders the common-sense view as a false and incoherent argument, leaving the Epicurean view as the true and coherent response to the Epicurean dilemma.

Considering the above analysis determining the Epicurean view being the true and coherent response to the Epicurean dilemma, I do believe that Epicurus was right to claim that death truly is nothing to us. The deconstruction of the common-sense view solidifies Epicurus' claim that good and bad experiences are sensations, and sensations are experienced when alive (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.164). We are afraid of death, but when death takes place, there is nothing that we experience because we are stripped of all sensations (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.164). This makes the fear of death irrational, as we only experience moments leading up to it, if we are conscious for those moments, and not death itself.

Epicurus states that it is foolish to fear death because we are in fear of something that we do not have any prior experience of and have no specific timing as to when it will occur (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.164). An event that we have no idea when it will take place, or how it will take place, has no bearing on us, meaning we are creating internal grief by

interweaving fear into an unpredictable moment. Lucretius is correct in stating that we cannot be deprived of things that we are not capable of desiring because we are dead (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.173). I agree with Lucretius that we cannot experience badness in death because we no longer exist in death (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.173), as his argument is in conjunction with my deconstruction of the common-sense view.

I do not think that the anxieties of death depriving the person who dies of future goods worth having is a logical fear. I will address various arguments by Nagel to further elaborate on why this view is incorrect. Nagel's account of what a person does not know cannot hurt them (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.180), will be the primary supportive argument to this perspective. I think that this statement applies to both life as Nagel recounts, and death, specifically for the person who dies. Once death occurs, there is no person present to be aware of any future deprivations. If the person no longer exists and there are no sensations to be experienced, then the deprivation of future goods does not apply to them because sensations are for the living. Nagel's doubt of anything truly being bad for a person without an attachment of obvious unpleasantness (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.180) further validates this argument. Death is the ultimate lack of any type of experience due to the annihilation of existence, therefore, it cannot truly be bad in the sense of deprivation because there is no form of experience to be had to begin with.

Nagel states, if being alive is positive, then losing life is negative (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.179). Nagel's mistake in this analysis is that life and death are not something to be gained or lost; life either exists or it does not. A person does not consider the non-existence of life before birth as bad, or as a loss (Brennan and Stainton, pg.179), yet it is the same as the non-existence of life after one has already begun to exist. The anxiety of death exists only

because a person fails to acknowledge the previous non-existence before life is interchangeable with the non-existence after the end of life. After all, the state of not-being is the same both before and after. Despite there being no true determination of when death will take place, a person instinctively expects to live as long as humanely possible, with the idea that this is equivalent to old age. This expectation creates a false notion of there being an appropriate age to die (old age), accompanied by an equally as false notion that there is such thing as dying too soon because death is somehow depriving that person of the time they would spend being alive (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.182). As mentioned above, life is not gained or lost and it is either in existence or it is not, rendering the belief illogical.

Nagel mentioned that if life is an overall pleasant experience, then this must mean that death is the opposite of life, meaning its experience is overall bad (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.177). I argue that this perspective on death is incorrect, as the perspective that life is good does not necessarily equate death to being bad because, for something to be bad there would need to be a form of unpleasantness attached to it (Brennan and Stainton, 2010 pg.180). People have a perverted sense of preserving all life no matter what the quality of life is because there is an overall belief that being alive is associated with something positive. Due to this perspective, death is then looked upon as a negative regardless of circumstance. Although this essay is not to indulge in the reasons why life does not have to be positive just because one is alive, this key concept is at the core as to why it is believed death is bad.

In conclusion, death is not a bad thing for the person who dies because to be dead is to no longer encompass any experiences or sensations that one would during their time alive. In death there are no sensations, no experiences, no thoughts or feelings; it is the overall concept of nothingness. To claim that in that nothingness there is badness is illogical, as nothingness itself

removes any implications of positive and negative. In the dissection of the common-sense view, it was much clearer that the Epicurean view is the logical response to the Epicurean dilemma. Nagel had an overall discussion in which he attempted to appeal to both the common-sense and the Epicurean view, but in further analysis, it was proven that his discussion could also be dismantled to favour the Epicurean view. The argument of death being the cause of deprivation is one experienced only by the living because only when a person is alive is there a possibility of a future. Death is not robbing the person who dies because there is no contract or guarantee that a person is supposed to live any amount of years once they are born. If death and life are opposite of one another, then to be alive is to have the ability to experience and to be dead is to not have any experience, rather than being alive is to experience something positive and to be dead is to experience something negative.

## Works Cited

Brennan, S., & Stainton, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Philosophy and death: Introductory readings*. Broadview Press.