

Coping with uncertainty: fear of death argumentative essay samples

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



English 224

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* not only compels the readers' brain to think, but also leaves room for discussion of the author's definition of reality. The story constantly challenges each character's mind with the uncertainty of reality due to fears that each of them have; the fear of death is a persistent idea through out the novel. Each character has internal conflicts that cause life's uncertainty, mostly with simulacra and the idea that the reality they are experiencing is just a figment that their mind has created in order to cope with the fact that they will eventually face death. Jack's fear of death through out the novel leads to Babbalanza and him conversing about their mutual fear of mortality saying, " Who will die first?"(p. 30) like it was possible to identify something of that magnitude. Jack's fear of death in the beginning of the novel reveals his inability to cope with uncertainty but undergoes a positive transformation in the end. When he sees Wilder cross the highway and made it to the other side, Jack realizes that no one can control or predict death; through this scene he finally developed his coping ability to the ambiguity of life.

Wilder's young innocence stemming from his inability to properly communicate quite possibly plays one of the biggest roles in the novel. While every character faces the fear of death which seems to be the main theme of the novel, Wilder does not yet have the mental capacity to realize that in reality he will one day die. In a passage taken from the last chapter Wilder oblivious to the possibility of death ride his tricycle across the highway narrowly avoiding cars passing at high speeds. Motivated by some unexplained force he makes it to the other side, falls over and rolls to the

bottom of the embankment; perhaps realizing the danger that was now behind him, he begins to cry. Wilder's experience changes Jack's perspective on death, not that his fear has totally vanished but in a way that Jack understands that no one can explain death or know why it happens. It just happens. Just as Wilder did as he crossed the highway, Jack attempts to ignore death, by refusing to answer calls from his doctor, not because it will allow him to avoid death, but to allow death to remain a mystery. Jack's fear of death still remains, but Wilder's ordeal has allowed him to accept that one day it will happen to everyone at times they least expected. Wilder while unable to talk or explain why he crossed the highway, showed Jack that ignoring the fear of death allows for a sense of survival where he can stop trying to anticipate death and its arrival and just allow reality to run its course.

Just as Wilder chose to cope with his uncertainty of imminent death by ignoring it, Babette attempts to ignore it by acquiring an experimental drug called Dylar. Babette, while refusing to admit to having the drug, takes it constantly to avoid her fear of death ignoring the possible side effects. When Jack finally finds the pills, he confronts her on multiple occasions but fails on getting an honest answer from her. In bed one night Jack confronts Babette telling her what he has found out and that he has found the pills with the name "Dylar", eventually she breaks down and tell him of Mr. Gray the man who has Dylar and what he made her do to acquire the drug. Babette explains that even after taking the drug that she still fears death saying "I'm afraid to die I think about it all the time. It won't go away"(p. 186). At this time Jack understands that the drug does not have the effect it is supposed

to have. Babette goes on to explain the side effect that it can have, that it can cause your brain to mistake language for reality, meaning spoken words can be mistaken for their physical form. Though Babette was not successful in coping with her uncertainty she attempted to do so by ignoring it similar to Wilder's childhood ignorance towards death.

Jack's inability to keep his mind off Dylar and Mr. Gray causes him to use a handgun given to him by his father-in-law in attempt to kill Mr. Gray. While this may not be ignoring the uncertainty of death, Jack is in fact ignoring the idea that he is taking another person's life, causing Mr. Gray's life to end.

Jack may not understand that he is ignoring his uncertainty by attempting to replace it with the feeling of killing, suggested by his colleague Murray Jay Siskind. Similar to Wilder's adventure crossing the highway, Jack's mind while heading to the motel where Mr. Gray stays, is in a strange state of curiosity and anger and he says "Elegant. My airy mood returned. I was advancing in consciousness. I watched myself take each separate step. With each separate step, I became aware of processes, components, things relating to other things" ignoring his human feelings he plans to kill Mr. Gray. Not until Mr. Gray shoots back at Jack does he realize that Mr. Gray as a human also, fears death as well. Jack drags Mr. Gray into the car and drives to a Pentecostal church where nuns tend to them both. Jack converses with the nuns in German discovering that these nuns do not believe in religion, they only maintain the image of religious strength to uplift those they treat. The nun tells him "If we did not pretend to believe these things, the world would collapse"(p. 303), Jack cannot comprehend the idea of a nun not believing in heaven and religion, if they didn't believe why should he?

Eventually he leaves the church and returns home. Not able to sleep, the chapter ends with Jack's realization that " There was nothing to do but wait for the next sunset"(p. 305) At this point I believe Jack's fear of the uncertainty of death changes for the better. Waiting for the next sunset is like waiting for death in a way, if we sit around waiting for it, we ignore the fact that we are surviving everyday and not meeting death.

Allowing Mr. Gray to survive is the start of Jack's transformation in coping with his uncertainty; his fear of death is still there but in a different way than its previous state. When Wilder crosses the highway it shows Jack that death is just a natural thing that happens when it is your time, if you live your whole life fearing death then you forget to live happily and purposefully. It isn't until everyone on the overpass begins to disperse after watching the sunset that Jack sees the way humans group together to mask their uncertainty, he notes that " It is not until some time after dark has fallen that we slowly begin to disperse, shyly, politely, car after car, restored to our separate and defensible selves"(p. 309) I believe it is at this moment that Jack realizes death is an individual experience and that he must eventually face. Jack says that his Doctor is trying to get a hold of him for a type of body scan to see the progress of the exposure to Nyodene D. Jack says that " He is eager to see how my death is progressing"(p. 309) implying that the doctor is somehow intrigued by his failing health. He says that he is afraid of what it knows about him, somehow implying that ignoring death may not be working for him like it worked for Wilder on the freeway.

Jack's acute fear of death is challenged by his exposure to the toxic chemical during the train accident. The specialists explain to him that Nyodene D. will

stay in his body for thirty long years and they could only give him particular data for his chances of survival after 15 years. This condition brings him greater agony and his worries about dying intensified. Everyday, he fear the future and is preoccupied with the concept of death that he failed to appreciate the brighter side of life. But as the story progresses, Jack was able to accept that human suffering is an inevitable part of life and he resorted to making the most of his days by spending quality time with his wife, his stepson and Wilder.

The " White Noise" excellently explains the rationale behind the human's fear of dying. While it is natural for people to fear death, the extreme fear of the mere concept of dying is worse than death itself. Through the character of Jack, Delillo was able to show the detrimental impact of a person's acute fear towards the uncertainty of life. He lived a troubled life and unable to indulge in the many pleasures that life offers because of his constant and increasing fear of dying. He spend his days looking for ways to cope with his fear and ultimately, three important events fueled the change of his perception about the uncertainty of his existence. First, that moment when he saw Wilder who crossed the highway made him reflect that death is both unpredictable and uncontrollable. Second, his discovery of Babette's addiction to Dylar and the persistence of her fear of death made him realize that even science can not suppress one's fear of death. Lastly, the shooting scene with Mr. Gray is a surprising revelation that his fear of death vanishes totally during special circumstances. These three experiences triggered the protagonist to reevaluate his perceptions regarding the uncertainty of human existence. At the end of the novel, the author leaves a significant

message to the readers. This message implies that human life is temporal in nature and death is something that should not be feared. Rather, life is something to be enjoyed to the fullest and humans must only appreciate each and every heart beat.