

# Coping with death



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Existentialists and intellectuals relatively have similar views about certain things. Existentialists are intellectuals while some intellectuals can be existentialists. However, there are instances when their philosophies can reveal differences which make them stand out and identify themselves. This paper aims to discuss how one is likely to cope with the issue of death in an existential and intellectual point of view. Coping with Death Death has been the most absolute event that is bound to happen to human beings even before they were born.

It is one constant thing that will be waiting at the end no matter how well or bad we live our lives. Throughout life, there are inevitable instances when we are forced to cope with the death of someone, whether a stranger's, relative's, or plainly, the thought of ours. Since existential views root from the idea of existentialism and intellectual views from intellectualism, let us first identify the distinction between these two philosophies. One of the most famous existentialists in history is the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.

He defined existentialism as a philosophy which focuses on the existence of man alone and not on his essence or for any other purpose. He argued that man exists without meaning or definition. However, he stated that essence and meaning only manifest later in our lives. It is through our decisions that we come to begin the definition of our existence (Earnshaw, 2006, p. 74). Clearly, it is evident in his argument that religion is out of the picture. In the book *Existentialism*, Steven Earnshaw quoted Sartre's (2006) claim:

If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself (p. 74). Based on the definition by Sartre, it is now

reasonable to say that existentialists view death as something that just happens without any meaning at all. If we are to cope with it existentially, it can be claimed that death is a fearful event because it does not provide a sensible reason.

It does not label our meaning; rather, death ends it. On the other hand, there are also existential arguments with regard to death which claims that death is necessary to remind us of "possibilities." Without death, one would not be obliged to be cautious in his/her decisions because that individual has all the time in the world to do them in "trial and error." Now, we move on to intellectualism. This philosophy is actually quite self-explanatory in nature. An intellectual acts in accordance to reason.

Similar to existentialism, intellectualism also disregards the involvement of religion, for religion is based on faith which is unfounded with solid evidences. Nonetheless, intellectuals can have different ways of coping with death. Since reason is more complex than the idea of "existence comes first" by Sartre, intellectuals can vary in their opinion of death. As for me, if I am to cope with death intellectually, I can start off by going back to the theory of evolution.

As rational and mortal animals, we are capable of deteriorating because of several conditions such as diseases, old age, natural disaster, etc. Hence, death is a cycle which is scientifically normal and inevitable. Most likely, if one is to view the concept of death either existentially or intellectually, he or she is still subject to fear its arrival. However, there is a loophole in both of the arguments because the root of our existence is still questionable. They

can bring up the Big Bang or the Theory of Evolution, but as far as I am concerned, there is no solid evidence of the first inhabitants on earth.

As long as theories have not been proved with concrete evidence, there is no way that we can reach the answers about life and death. In any case, existentialism and intellectualism do not provide the perfect way to cope with issues like death. What they can only provide is the flailing argument that we are considered materials which have the capability to break down and crash at any point in time. Would it not be better to accept death knowing that something unimaginable is waiting for us?