

The discussion of nagel thomases death

[Philosophy](#)



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Nagel, Thomas, “ Death”, from *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge Press, 1979.

Section Thomas Nagel dissects the argument of death being a bad thing or not and comes up with a variety of examples to prove his case. His whole article balances the two arguments, on one hand, death is seen as dreadful because it takes all we have and makes it unbearable to lose it. On the other hand, if one perceives death as not responsible for the loss, but as a mere blank that happens in a person’s existence, then it will be seen as something that has little or no value.

Death can be a subjective concept. It depends on the context when and why it happened. For example, in comparing the perception of death of a young person and the death of an old person, one can easily point out that the death of the younger person is more of a loss because he still has his whole life ahead of him. The older person’s death does not make it better to the people he leaves behind, but at least he has had more time and chances to make his life worth living. Another context is if the person has seen his life as good, then death is perceived to take away that goodness and so, it is viewed as evil, and dreadful. But for those whose lives do not seem to have anything good to offer, then they may even look forward to death claiming them so as to end their misery.

Nagel raised three problems with regards to death. The first is if there could be anything that can be bad for a person without him knowing about it. If death comes at a time that is unexpected, then the dead person is unaware that he is dead, so could that be considered bad? Another problem is the understanding of existence. Simply put, if a person is still alive, he exists, and if he has died, then he no longer exists, so this premise seems to point no time when death can be blamed for such a misfortune, if it is indeed seen

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as a misfortune. The last problem is related to the previous two. In case of non-existence before one is born and after one has died, how can one view death and non-existence after one has lived as bad while the non-existence before life as not?

Nagel argues that perceptions of misfortune and death depend on time. If a person has been doing very well in his life and is suddenly struck with a fatal accident that leaves him as helpless as an infant, then it is considered a tragedy by his family, friends and society in general. This is not the same for the infant who has not achieved anything else in his life except to be born alive and to grow into the infant he is now. Simultaneously, for the individual himself, he does not seem to care what has happened to him as long as he is kept comfortable physically. This can be paralleled to death. The corpse of the person may be left to rot naturally but the individual's loss is grieved by people around him. The loss is actually felt by those he left behind and not by him. The mentally ill may also be clueless as to his own existence, but the people around him mourn the death of his potentials to be a highly functioning person.

If a person's life has got everything good going for him then death would really be seen as a culprit that would end the good fortune one is amassing even if death is viewed as a natural part of life. If one sees as everything in life as good, then he is bound to see the end (death) in a bad way.

Section 2

Nagel's arguments about death seem to be logical and agreeable to me. He takes on an objective and detached approach towards death that it is so easy to draw the line between existence and non-existence when death claims a life. He is right in saying that death is viewed as unfortunate if one

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sees his own life as worth living, no matter what his experiences are, but death is seen as something irrelevant if one just lives for the sake of existing. If death comes, it is not a big deal.

Although I agree with Nagel's premises, I am not as detached as he is, and not as easily convinced by logic that death merely ceases one's existence. Anyone's death is considered a loss to his or her family, and calls for other people's sympathy and empathy. People may mourn the loss of opportunities for the dead person, and may feel their regrets that he or she may have amounted to something more had death not claimed him or her. No matter how unsuccessful the person who died may have been, no matter how much death relieves him of life's stresses, it is still considered a loss to the people he leaves behind. No longer will he be seen alive, with them, and perhaps, making an effort to make his life better than it is. He is deprived of chances in improving his lot.

How much more if the deceased person has lived a very fulfilling life? His accomplishments are celebrated, and his legacy lives on, but he is already gone to reap the glory. That would likewise be a pity! Ideally, one is given the honor he deserves while he is living rather than posthumous, although the family would still appreciate such honor bestowed upon their beloved departed.

So, as much as I agree with Nagel's well-argued points about death and misfortune, I still believe that it should be given more weight in terms of the human experience. It creates a great impact in the lives of those the deceased has left behind. He or she may cease to exist, as Nagel premises, however, it is the memory he or she leaves behind that may inspire, enliven

and empower the people who would cherish them. This way, the death gives way to more life.