

The value of Death

To question whether life is worth living or not, is perhaps the most arrogant view on life possible. However, it is also the most relevant question to ask as a living being. Why live? Why tolerate suffering and unhappiness? Why designate value to empty pleasure and brief flashes of happiness and joy? Is it *worth* it? One must also consider death; to end life is to begin being dead. What is it like? Is it perhaps better than living? One can trouble oneself with these questions for eternity, or one could simply ignore them and live life as most others, experiencing the many mixed feelings one is destined to feel during a lifetime. But then again, once planted, the question will most likely never truly let go; “Why am I here?”, or perhaps even more interesting: “Why am I *still* here?”

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A year consists of 365 days, 24 hours a day, 60 minutes an hour and 60 seconds a minute. 31 536 000 seconds of living, and that in just one year. Approximately one third of these are spent sleeping, which leaves about 20 million seconds. What makes these seconds worth living? Is it the comfort of the bed, the joy of food, the satisfaction of accomplishments, the rush of love or the pleasure of sex? All of these emotions contribute to the general wellness of a human being, thus giving life some form of positive value. Perhaps some of the answer lies in something as uncomplicated as this. Simply experiencing positive emotions *does* give life meaning. A hedonist will most likely name this, if not as the sole reason, at least as the general goal of continuing life. It does seem rather inviting, does it not? To live life seeking pleasure and happiness, avoiding the troubles and plunder of asking why. The hedonist: “You ask: “Why bother living?” I ask: “Why bother asking: “Why bother living?”” My thoughts spring to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. The hedonist falls into Kierkegaard’s category of the aesthete. The aesthete living a hedonistic life *will* find pleasure, and will most likely be satisfied with this life. However, at a certain point he will discover the emptiness of his own existence, and anxiety grips him. The nothingness of his life obscures his up-to-this-point-view on life’s meaning. Once having discovered the lack of actual meaning in simple pleasure, it is very difficult to go back. Experiencing pain can have the same effect, in form of either physical pain or feelings like sorrow and loss. Once having experienced pain too great to find meaning in what is left, it *is* difficult to live on. To some, it even makes death seem better.

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When faced with the overwhelming loss of realizing that that which gave life meaning before no longer does, one cannot help but wonder: could death be preferable compared to life? In times of suffering and unhappiness the fearsome depression grips the mind. The brightest days seem dark, and the darkest days seem even darker. The suicide is, I believe, not so much about dying as it is about ending life, and in extension ending the suffering. This seems, in a way, fair enough. A life filled with suffering and pain consists of more negative than positive emotions and experiences, thus giving life negative value in overall. The wish of dying must to some extent base itself on the idea that death has a greater, more positive or at least less negative value than life, but how does one rate the value of death? Can one simply say: “Death is nothingness, thus valueless; ergo the state of being dead must be better than living a life of negative value.”? Is feeling *nothing* to prefer over feeling pain? A typical situation which brings this topic to the discussion-table is this: Which is better; life in prison or the death sentence? Of course, this matter greatly depends on the view on death. Religion has its explanations, with paradise or reincarnation as the most common. However, for the sake of argument, assume atheism to be the globally accepted non-belief system. One must assume that the most likely consequence of dying is that the ability to perceive information is permanently lost. The brain dies, and there is no immortal soul to save your very consciousness or maintain your ability to think, observe or pass on through time. The moment you die, it is all gone, and *there is no way back*. Can this be better than living a life of negative value? How dark must a life be before nothingness seems brighter?

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Non-existence. *Taste* the word. Now imagine its meaning. What was the world like before you came to life? Well, you wouldn't know, you weren't there. What will the world be like after you are gone? Well, you won't know, you won't be there. The human capacity to understand life, the universe and all of its mysteries has boundaries. Imagining non-existence is, in my opinion, beyond these boundaries. Beyond the rim of the universe we don't find a big pool of nothingness, stretching infinitely far out from the center. There is no shift from a vacuum to nothingness. There is *nothing*, to such an extent that the human mind could not possibly imagine its full meaning. In a dimensional perspective, the mind cannot imagine nothingness without giving it three dimensions “fill it with nothing”, as if nothing was a substance. Beyond the rim of the universe there is no space to fill with nothingness. No

dimensions, no *nothing*. In the same way, one cannot imagine not having a consciousness, simply because one needs a consciousness to be able to imagine not having it. Like the space filled with nothing, one needs a consciousness to fill with the lack of one. Therefore, death doesn't make sense, because the factors for being dead are incomprehensible. Non-existence. *Taste* the word. Unimaginable, is it not?

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The arrogance when it comes to considering suicide lies in this: fully knowing what life consists of, one dares to imagine oneself wise enough to deem the unimaginable death preferable. The question of the suicide does not limit itself to whether life is worth living or not, but includes the question of whether the value of death *can be* greater than the value of life, no matter how negative that life's value might be. I cannot possibly begin to understand what horrors of suffering one might go through, and how the mind may be broken by the devastating power of the depression. Therefore I can neither speak for those living under worse conditions than myself, nor speak for myself should I ever enter such a state of life as those considering suicide. However, I can firmly say, considering the way I see death, that any form of life, no matter how gruesome, seems better to me. I would spend every second of my life in prison, in fear or in agony, hoping for one day to be able to experience some form of positive emotion, rather than with a hundred percent guarantee end all of my hopes of ever feeling happy again. Any life is worth living, compared to not living at all.