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What Will Happen When We’re Dead

As a human being, it is inevitable not to experience death. No matter how different our lives have been but we all have the same ending of being dead. And the most provocative question about death is what truly happens when we are dead. Until now, nobody has found the satisfying answer. Nobody has found the truth about what will happen when our lives end. This is why not only philosophers as Clarence Riley, Gregory Green, and Sam Harris but also many poets like Edgar Allan Poe have been thinking and feeling about this concept that all human beings have to obligate someday in our lives: They try to establish some hypotheses and give reasons to protect their ideas about the correct future after death.

It is quite unpleasant to find out that the truth about death is never revealed for the fact that if somebody died, he would not be able to come back to the Earth with the exact same mental state and form of physical appearance as the time he had been alive, unless his soul might still exist somewhere in this living surrounding yet we will discuss the soul later. Hence, nobody has witnessed the real situation of death and then can produce the truth value of it. So, we have to use human reasoning to make sense of this abstract concept probably to prepare before facing actual death at the end.

Why do we want to prepare and make up reasons before this consequence happens? Is it true that we fear of things that are out of predictability zone for human mind since they are so threateningly mysterious that can bring some danger with themselves? We feel so feeble when things are not in our control and ruled under our limited knowledge of the Universe. Fearing the unknown is common sense even in the case that the unknown is not necessarily to be death yet can be any phobia as fear of height or fear of small space. Phobia is sometimes associated with lack of self-esteem and result of not knowing the future outcome of a situation as no human being can witness death to find out the truth of it.

Therefore, the thought about death is very private and each individual has different viewpoint about death based on his imagination or even influenced by the people living around him. Single opinions about death are so varied that there will be no limitation to the list; however, some examples about thoughts of death affected by the majority can be named as whether a person believes in the existence of God or not. As what Riley and Green brought up in their article, “Taking the Sting out of Death: A Christian Educational Perspective”: “In some cases, fear of death is based on a sort of misguided lack of self-esteem; a fear that they have not been good enough to get into heaven or that they should have lived their lives in a fashion more pleasing to God” (Riley & Green, 2012). Hence, the lack of self-esteem results in irrational fear of death in which a person might not feel pleased enough about himself and about his life; he assumes that he is not good enough while living so that he fears of not being able to get into heaven. This viewpoint can be considered as the first hypothesis of death via religiousness, the faith in which God exists and creates the heaven and hell to decide human belongs after life as His judgment. According to this hypothesis, reality of what happens when we’re dead turns out to be already established. The only matter is that still nobody goes to death, witnesses it, and then comes back to real life to tell the story, but only owning a thought of death through Words of God and the existence of God. On the other hand, some people see death as the end of life and then that is all, there is nothing more after life; death is the absolute end of life. But as similar as the topic of this paper, we are confused and in thirst of figuring out the truth value of death. With the desire of uncovering some certainty, we still face fear in this circumstance, struggling to look for things to believe in but still have no clue.

Besides the fear and low self-esteem of facing death, we borrow religion and depend on the thought of the existence of God because we try to avoid grieving. At first, the thought of not guiding human beings to grief seems to be a very nice idea because ultimately we all want to achieve happiness instead of being tortured by any misery. On the other hand, it turns out that the belief in God’s existence with His creation of Heaven, Earth, and Hell usually consoles people because death is not an end but in fact the beginning of the eternal happiness. If one lives long enough, he or she will surely witness deaths of some people around him or her, including the people that he or she has had close relationships with. With no doubt, taking in the fact that the people whom used to know in life, have a relationship, care for them, and even love them did not stay alive anymore is quite unbearable at a moment. And the unbearable moment is the process of grieving. Yes, grieving means sobbing, missing, crying, and feeling hurt. Grieving brings all actions that nobody genuinely wants since they are very negative and truly ugly. Therefore, the belief in God is so important to most people since via the belief, death is more explainable and hopeful. Death is no longer a heavy ending for our short life; it is instead a transition to a better place which is known as Heaven. As what Harris said via “On Death” interview that while standing in front of a young child to tell her about the death of her grandfather, for example, it is a real challenge to tell the bare truth. If we told her that he had been gone forever and there is no chance to see him again – it was the entire end of anything between the girl and her grandfather, it would damage the innocent mind terribly. Now, the only things left that let the girl still have some concepts about her grandfather are memories in her brain and probably some objects reminding about their time together. Nonetheless, if we simply said to the girl that death is not a big problem at all for God exists and He let us die to decide whether we can go to Heaven or Hell. And then we clarified to her that Heaven is for the good one and Hell is for the opposite. Finally, the lesson is that she should live a good life to re-unite with her grandfather in Heaven. Hence, the second explanation is much easier; it would not only soothe the child’s feelings but also teach her a lesson about living a good life. The easier way is absolutely more achievable to complete in which most of us succeed in doing the easy way yet only a few can accomplish the hard way. That’s why we need to comprehend grieving of death even though nobody on Earth wants grief purely. There is still no evidence saying death can bring us closer to God and we should not depend on the belief of God to keep ourselves away from grieving. We all have to die and it is unfortunate to see somebody whom we know die before we do; but death truly separates us from the dead people and we no longer have them in life, we enduringly lose them. However, we must lose some because that is how life works: some must die and some must be born.

Our mind keeps reasoning to confirm some reality of death and as being mentioned above, we question whether only our body meets death or there is a little chance for our soul separately to still exist on itself even though we are physically dead. This kind of query appears in our mind because of some irrational fear again. Usually the soul is commonly claimed to be in charge of the life of a human being that beside the tangible body, the soul makes us alive. The soul carries intelligence value, spirituality, and all other significances that a human is ready to pay for anything to earn throughout his life time; the soul is the ultimate value of a human being. To imagine the relationship between our soul and body, think about when you turn off the light in a room, it means that the light is killed. Yet, is the light completely killed? You still can turn the light on anytime because the electricity is always there to benefit the energy of the light. Now, even if the light is broken or unable to be used anymore, the electricity still exists. In brief, the light is killed as if a body is dead physically. The electricity taken from energy is still there although the light is killed congruently our soul might still exist in space and time of the Universe. Consequently, we might die physically but not completely with the soul.

Besides the unchangeable fact that we are all mortal, some people make their own decision to decide their own destiny. Life is short on time scale, a human being regularly lives about 70 years. Comparing with the age of another creature like a turtle which can live hundreds of years, our time of living is pathetically short. Nonetheless, committing a suicide happens quite prevalently. In this case, some people might not be able to endure life anymore, they don’t mind the fact of the unknown outcome and they don’t fear it. Along with most clinical psychology research, one of the main reasons that people, especially young people choose to kill themselves, is because of an inability to communicate with the others (Pommereau, 2005). They don’t find themselves to fit in any group so their life becomes stuck since we, human beings, are social animals and without the ability to socialize, we’ll become dying in mental stage before leading to any physical injuries. Consequently, a hypothesis for this condition is that people might think after life, death is actually another life in which they will be able to escape from this reality to join the other world. This idea is hardly judged not to make sense because like the other hypotheses above, no one can behold the real deal. Death, in this case, is a sign or a gate to walk through to come to another world and then whatever can happen next. Probably, after entering into this second world, things might be similar with the heaven. Negatively, it might not be as perfectly happy as the paradise yet still brings some positivity – some hope of being fit in a group that a number of people might need to take a risk as committing a suicide to experience the second world or death.

Along with philosophy, death is a big topic in poetry as well. Many poets have been enthused from the concept of death, dying, and things that happen when we’re dead. As watching somebody else’s dying, along with the fear of seeing death in front of your eyes, the feeling of loss can be developed too, predominantly if you have a relationship with the person who is dying as what I mentioned above. The sense of losing somebody that you’ve known is tough, it’s like something belongs to you but is being stolen away. You don’t want to lose your object since you believe you are yourself the owner of the thing. If you lose any object or more specifically something very materialistically luxurious as a diamond ring, it only means that you no longer own the thing. The thing might still exist on this planet, it might just be in different forms or afterwards belongs to somebody else but eventually exists. Diamond is formed from many kinds of minerals contributed years after years and minerals previously condensed via such a long time of many natural resources. Also paper made from tree, which is a kind of natural resource, will always exist because we can recycle it. As such, even human life is recyclable as well yet we should mourn for a loss of life since unlike objects we have souls. Our unique souls differentiate ourselves among our mankind and make us irreplaceable in spite of the fact that new lives and new souls are regularly born. For this reason, it will be extremely exquisite if the hypothesis about death is only for physical body but the soul is immortal and possibly exists in undeterminable forms. In the meantime, we still need to know how to grieve the death since we should not lean on the belief of God to avoid suffering. It will turn out that we are afraid of confronting the truth and prefer to be fooled just to feel better. Yet feelings may be necessary for poets because only feelings give them reasons to live and to work on life, to be inspired. Feelings can bring them to touch a very high level of ecstasy and incredibly dark angle of sorrow. If a poet must accept the fact that death is the end of all things on Earth, there will be hardly anything more awful than death for death finishes the soul presented in a living body. Death stops the only means – our bodies among us to connect with each other. Indeed, the death is so crucial for a poet to handle that he tries to imagine about this ending like believing in God or thinking more positively that death is actually an escape from this tough world. Edgar Allan Poe in “For Annie” described the death of Annie as likely the best thing to happen to her at that moment because she had suffered the worst pain of her illness before taking her last breath. As watching her dying on bed, the narrator was powerless to help her out of pains and only he knew merely death would bring Annie no more sensing ability. She would not have to go through the unbearable illness anymore: “Thank Heaven! The crisis – / The danger is past, / And the lingering illness/ Is over at last – / And the fever called “Living”/ Is conquered at last.”/ (Poe, 1849).

Death is astonishingly dark and enigmatic. None of us know for sure what exactly will happen when we close our eyes for eternity. But we should not fear irrationally and lean on the belief of God only to be relieved. It is selfish and weak. If the harder way might lead us to find out the truth about death, it would be worth it so that we must need to be on the track of true path. We need to know grieving is a part of life and since life is not perfect, grieving is fine. After mourning a death, it means we need to stand up and keep moving on with our own life. It is only the end of the dead people yet not the end to us – the still living creature.

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