



The Psychological Freedom of Knowing that One Day We Would Die: A Debate on the Balance Between Life and Death

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Essay

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Abstract

This essay explores the psychological freedom that emerges from the acceptance of death, arguing that it should not be seen as merely a one-sided freedom of death without the complementary freedom of life. While death is often met with dread and fear, it can foster a sense of authenticity and alignment with personal values. However, this realization must also emphasize the importance of life, as the goal of psychological well-being lies in living, not just acknowledging death. This balance allows us to live fully, prioritize meaningful experiences, and discard trivial concerns. By drawing on Carl Sagan's reflections on humanity's insignificance within the cosmos, this essay encourages empowered and responsible living that embraces both life and death.

Keywords: Mortality; Existentialism; Authenticity; Psychological Freedom; Life and Death

Introduction

The Duality of Life and Death

In modern society, death is often avoided in discussions, met with discomfort and aversion. However, viewing death merely as an end limits our understanding of its potential for psychological freedom. This essay proposes that psychological freedom, rooted in the awareness of mortality, cannot exist without an equal acknowledgment of the freedom to live fully. A debate that considers both life and death is crucial for fostering holistic mental health, emphasizing the importance of living authentically while recognizing the inevitable end.

The Path to Authentic Living

One might ask, "If I am destined to die, what is the point of striving for anything in life?" Far from causing despair, this question offers a framework for reconsidering how we

live. Death, in its finality, inspires us to focus on what truly matters. By accepting death's inevitability, we shed societal pressures and distractions, attuning ourselves to our deepest values. However, this realization must emphasize life's inherent value. Psychological freedom stems not just from the acknowledgment of death but from fully embracing the potential to live according to our authentic selves. And by embracing our authentic selves and living in accordance with its values, we are able to live life in a much more harmonical and settling way because our actions are not coming from a sense of inauthenticity and false sense of mask or self that we try to portray to the society for the fear that if I don't portray this version of myself to the society, then society would reject me and not like me. The knowledge of death teaches us to live authentically and live in a way that is aligned to our values, ideas and standpoints and not hide behind the imaginary and fake conceptual crutches of the society.



The Balance Between Freedom and Responsibility

While accepting death liberates us from the illusion of endless time, it also imposes a responsibility to live well. Psychological freedom is incomplete if it focuses solely on death without embracing life. Even if technological advancements were to one day defeat death, the quality of life would remain paramount. It is our limited time that urges us to infuse meaning into our days. By balancing life's finite nature with the acceptance of death, we free ourselves from trivial concerns and focus on living authentically and joyfully. It's the knowledge of limited time that we have here on Earth that we get with the realisation that one day this is all going to end for us (we are going to die), makes us to even more fully take in and experience the full spectrum of experience totally.

Cosmic Insignificance and Its Implications for Life

Carl Sagan's famous reflection on the "pale blue dot" reminds us of the smallness of human life in the cosmos. In his words:

"The earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. On it, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever lived, lived out their lives. The aggregate of all our joys and sufferings, thousands of confident religions, ideologies and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilizations, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every hopeful child, every mother and father, every inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every superstar, every supreme leader, every saint and sinner in the history of our species, lived there on a mote of dust, suspended in a sunbeam. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and in triumph they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of the dot on scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner of the dot. How frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity -- in all this vastness -- there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. It is up to us. It's been said that astronomy is a humbling, and I might

add, a character building experience. To my mind, there is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly and compassionately with one another and to preserve and cherish that pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known" [1].

This cosmic perspective underscores both the insignificance of our existence and the preciousness of our lives. Psychological freedom emerges when we realize that life, however fleeting, offers us the opportunity to live with kindness, compassion, and authenticity. However, this freedom is not derived solely from the acknowledgment of death; it must be accompanied by the recognition of the importance of living well. This cosmic perspective can seem to be nihilistic and pessimistic from one angle, but if we look at it from another angle it can make us humble, it can allow us to let go of the daily small worries that we would be better off without. It makes us realise the fact of our limited knowledge and finiteness. Most of the times, it is the grandiose and dogmatic attitude of "I know everything" about everything which makes us to suffer miserably because when we start to claim that we are here forever and we know everything, then our self becomes the centre of everything. With grandiosity, comes too much caring about things that don't matter at all, the constant effort to worry about what other people think of you and so on and so forth.

Death and Life as Co-Teachers

In conclusion, psychological freedom emerges not from a one-sided acceptance of death but from a balance between life and death. Embracing mortality should not overshadow the importance of living fully. Death, rather than being feared, should remind us to live with purpose, focus on our relationships, passions, and values, while discarding unnecessary fears and societal pressures. A debate on psychological freedom must consider the equal importance of life, as the goal of mental health lies in fostering a freedom that empowers individuals to live well, not merely to accept death. It's not that coming face-to-face with the knowledge that one day we are going to die is an idea which should make us sad, but rather it should very much make us to embrace whatever little time we have on this earth and to make us to live life fully rather than to deny life. The knowledge of Death makes us see the worthiness and the beauty of even the most mundane things of existence leading to a sense of enjoyment in even the seeming small things of life, because a person or an individual who has realised the reality of death sees that the things, relationships and the people which I am experiencing in this life is fleeting and is not going to be here forever, so why not make the maximum use of this life, live

it to the fullest potential, capacity and try to soak and feel the warmth, the coldness, the depth, the uncertainty and the mystery of every experience that life throws at us.

Reference

1. Sagan C (1996) Pale blue dot: A vision of the human future in space.