

Philosophy of Death

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Philosophy of Death



(The graveyard from Poiana Mare, Romania)

Death is a concept for the state of a biological organism having ceased to live (although this term is also used figuratively for the degeneration of a star, or a language that has lost its last speakers). This state is characterized by a definite break in the consistency of vital processes (nutrition, respiration ...) necessary for homeostatic maintenance of the organism, that distinguishes the death of a temporary alteration as in the case of hibernation or some freezing.

At the cellular level, death means the cessation of the basic functions of a cell. In multicellular communities, this may be accidental death (necrosis) or controlled or programmed death (apoptosis). However, there are sometimes disorder that challenge this common death: the cell is then said to be immortal because it can be split into daughter cells an unlimited number of times. Unicellular organisms that reproduce by fission are only immortal principle, although after marking it appears that these cells are also aging, which alters their homeostatic and reproductive capacities. In multicellular organisms, sexual cells, called germ, are potentially immortal, unlike their somatic cell envelope eventually die hopelessly under the influence of external pathogenic factors, or because of the phenomenon of aging. Somatic envelope then forms what is called a corpse, which then decomposes under the action of oxidation, bacteria and various scavengers and organizations contributing to the recycling of organic and inorganic material.

At the organism level, death can be seen as the end of life as opposed to birth, or as the absence of life. In the first case, the fact that the heart may stop beating for a while before being revived raises

the question of the boundary or transition between life and death. Addressing this issue, the World Organization for Animal Health considers death as “the irreversible loss of highlighted by the loss of brainstem reflexes brain activity” and it adopts a definition of death as that brain death, as distinguished from a simple cardio- circulatory stop, condition called “clinical death”.

At a broader, historical and biological spatiotemporal scale, if the individual disappears as a single entity at the time of death, part of his genetic heritage persists in its progeny (if it exists) and the life of the species and ecosystems in which it integrates continues while evolving.

In paleontology, the discovery of funeral rites is an important factor in determining the degree of social awakening of a hominid.

This awareness of death is an engine of social cohesion (uniting to resist disasters and enemies) and action (to do something to leave a trace). It is an important element of metaphysical reflection. This is also what gives the symbolic power to acts such as homicide and suicide.

The Enlightenment in Europe, prompting the mastery of nature, suggests the emergence of a rule of the degradation of the body of man.

According to Plato, death is the separation of soul and body. Finally freed from his fleshly prison, the immortal soul can freely reach the sky of Ideas, Eternity, the domain of philosophers. (cf. *Phaedo*)

According to Epicurus, death is nothing because "as we exist death is not, and when death is we are not. Death is, therefore, no relation either to the living or to the dead, given that it is nothing for the former, and the latter are not." (*Letter to Menoeceus*).



The Triumph of Death, painting of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1562)

Jankélévitch, in *Death*, itself offers a reflection on the death from a grammatical point of view:

"Death in the third person is the death - in - general, abstract and anonymous death" (this is the impersonal death), "the first person is certainly a source of anxiety [...] In first person, death is a mystery for me and my very intimately, that is to say, in my nothingness" (the death of the "I"), "there is the intermediate and special case of the second person; between the death of another, which is far and indifferent, and death-esteem, which is even our being, there is a proximity of the death of close"(this is the death of "you").