Steven Luper-Foy investigates questions concerning the nature of death in his article, "Annihilation". In contrast to Epicurus, Luper-Foy asserts that there are dire consequences if one agrees with Epicurus' claim that death is neither good nor bad for the one who dies. Namely, that this person will be incapable of living a fulfilling or meaningful life. Other philosophers – for example, David Velleman, in his article, "Well-Being and Time" – have maintained the view that death is not inherently evil, but death can be considered either a good or a misfortune for the one who dies, depending on the particular circumstances at hand. With these considerations in mind, I will be examining the merits of Luper-Foy's "epicureanizing our desires" framework, as compared to Velleman's narrative structure perspective, as either framework may be employed as a means of coping with one's inevitable death.

Given that both Luper-Foy and Velleman are responding to Epicurus' claim that death is not bad for the one who dies, it is critical to first provide an overview of this Epicurean view. Specifically, Epicurus asserts that death is nothing to us, neither good nor bad. This is, in part, because death is the privation of all sense experience, for when we exist, death is not present, and when death is present, we no longer exist (Epicurus sec. 124-125). As a hedonist, Epicurus asserts that something can only be good or bad for a person if the person can experience the goodness or badness of the thing in question. Likewise, this hedonism perspective entails that pain is evil, and pleasure is the highest good, such that the good life is one in which pain is eliminated (Epicurus sec. 126). Finally, given that death annihilates the person, that person can no longer be the subject of any goods or bads, now that the subject ceases to exist.

Taking these points together, it is clear that death cannot be a misfortune for the one who dies because there is no subject that exists at death, nor can the subject, even if she could exist in death, experience pain or suffering in death, given that complete annihilation removes all sense

experience. Finally, it is worth noting that Epicurus employs his arguments against the badness of death to demonstrate how foolish it is to fear death, as fearing death is more painful than death itself, since there is no pain or pleasure in death (Epicurus sec. 126).

With Epicurus' argument firmly in place, the subsequent difficulty is to determine in what ways Epicurus' argument could be incorrect. Indeed, death seems to be an obvious evil or misfortune for the one who dies, and not merely a matter of indifference, but for what reasons is this so? Hence, Luper-Foy seeks to weaken Epicurus' position by asserting that any Epicurean who maintains the view that death is a neutral state, whereby death is neither good nor bad, is committed to exceedingly detrimental life consequences. That is, an Epicurean must live a life of indifference, since Epicureans assert indifference toward death itself (Luper-Foy, p. 272-273). Based on this indifference to life and to death, Epicureans must relinquish all fulfilling desires that would otherwise bring meaning to life or make life worth living (Luper-Foy, p. 276). The consequence is that Epicureans must live a kind of life that no one would wish to live, as this life is merely death-tolerant and "requires that we give up all desires that give us reason to live." (Luper-Foy, p. 290). Instead, Luper-Foy argues that by becoming a Neo-Epicurean, we may "epicureanize our desires" and thereby cope with the inevitability of death by living a meaningful life that is life-affirming (p. 285).

Luper-Foy argues for his position by differentiating between four types of desires a person can possess, which include escape, independent, dependent, and conditional desires. Escape desires are such that life circumstances are so intolerable that death, in this case, is preferable to living (Luper-Foy, p. 273). Independent desires do not depend on an individual being alive in order to be achieved or fulfilled, but dependent desires do dependent on the existence of the individual (Luper-Foy, p. 275). Lastly, conditional desires are such that they

influence a person only when he is alive. For example, while I am alive, I desire to be well fed (Luper-Foy, p. 276). The satisfaction of these desires can be both unfulfilling and fulfilling, but most importantly, in contrast to unfulfilling desires, fulfilling desires can only be satisfied when the person is still alive (Luper-Foy, p. 274-275).

According to Luper-Foy, the evil of death transpires when the satisfaction of fulfilling desires is thwarted by death (p. 271). Ultimately, any desire that can be thwarted by a premature death, and thereby causes pain or misfortune, is a desire an Epicurean cannot possess, given that the Epicurean must live a life that is indifferent to death. Unfortunately, Luper-Foy asserts that fulfilling dependent desires, the only desires which are capable of being thwarted by death, are the desires which give life its meaning (p. 278-279). Consequently, according to Luper-Foy, it is not possible for an Epicurean to treat life with indifference, while also living a life-affirming, meaningful life. Thus, an Epicurean may only possess escape, conditional, or independent desires, or have desires that are unfulfilling, all of which lack reasons for living (Luper-Foy, p. 279). Luper-Foy illustrates this point via an example of an Epicurean mother who can only value the welfare of her children while she is still alive to do so. At death, she must remain indifferent to her children's future, or else she must convert this desire into an independent desire (p. 281).

In order to live a life that is meaningful, whereby the fulfillment of fulfilling dependent desires is possible, Luper-Foy recommends that a person epicureanize his desires just before death approaches (p. 284-285). That is, a person must convert dependent desires into independent ones, either by completing these dependent desires while still alive, or by abandoning these dependent desires altogether (Luper-Foy, p. 285-286). To make this process feasible, she must consider the boundaries of a normal human lifespan within the limits of the technological capabilities of her time-period. By considering such limits, she must be certain not

to form any longstanding fulfilling dependent desires that would become unfulfilled at death (Luper-Foy, p. 283). Rather, at the verge of death, she must possess only conditional, independent, or escape desires (Luper-Foy, p. 283).

I wonder whether the method by which we epicureanize our desires is a far more complicated process than what Luper-Foy seems to be suggesting. For instance, how would a person have the knowledge to discern the opportune time to epicureanize her desires? On the one hand, if she attempts to epicureanize her desires too early in life, her life will likely become a boring and meaningless one. That is, she would endeavour not to form additional fulfilling dependent desires by either converting such dependent desires into independent ones, or by abandoning those dependent desires altogether. Further, I must wonder whether it is even possible to halt the formation of fulfilling dependent desires, while one is still alive to do so. I reckon that while a person is alive, she is continuously forming these fulfilling dependent desires, one way or another, with no means of stopping altogether. It is conceivable that the constant formation of fulfilling dependent desires is necessary in order to be a person with self-agency and autonomy, who can think and feel, and love and hate, and make decisions about her future because she is still alive to do so. On the other hand, if she attempts to epicureanize her desires but was too late, rather than too early, and has since unexpectedly died, then her dependent desires will have remained unfulfilled, such that she was unable to epicureanize her desires whatsoever. In either direction of time, then, effectively epicureanizing one's desires appears to be an arduous, if not impossible, task.

Yet, given Luper-Foy's qualification that we must consider both the average human lifespan and the technological capabilities of our time when choosing to epicureanize our desires, he is likely aware of this timing problem. Nevertheless, I reason that simply having knowledge

of the average length of a human life is not sufficient information by which to time the epicureanization process effectively. This is because the average life span changes dramatically, depending on one's sex, age, and a vast number of other variables, such as socioeconomic status, level of crime in one's living area, level of education, and access to healthcare, just to name a few. There are simply too many variables and interactions between variables to realistically calculate at which point in time one's death is statistically likely, resulting in little information to make use of to determine the appropriate time by which to epicureanize one's desires. Moreover, Luper-Foy himself asserts that even if a person is able to successfully epicureanize his desires, he must still face the agony that precedes dying, and stresses that a person could, and probably should, commit painless suicide in order to minimize such agony, although few of us will be so lucky (p. 289).

Based on the above considerations, Luper-Foy's epicureanization process seems to be a far more dubious process than what Luper-Foy himself admits, effectively resulting in a rather inadequate method by which to develop a meaningful and fulfilling life. This, I think, ultimately impedes a person's ability to cope with the inevitability of her death. Certainly, even if a person can, as Luper-Foy suggests, successfully epicureanize her desires, is painless suicide really the best course of action to mitigate this supposed agony preceding death? Doing so seems, at least to me, to be a rather slippery slope. This is because, if the variables required to calculate the average human lifespan in a realistic manner are far more complex than Luper-Foy realizes, such that it is impossible to calculate this average lifespan correctly, then a person may commit suicide too early, and thereby shorten her life unnecessarily, such that a timing problem of a different sort still remains. Given that Luper-Foy's epicureanization process appears to be inadequate, one must wonder whether alternative theories exist by which to cope with the

inevitably of one's death. Fortunately, Velleman offers a unique narrative perspective, whereby death is regarded as the final chapter of a person's life story.

When philosophers employ cumulative frameworks in order to explain the badness or goodness of death, they sum momentary pleasures while subtracting momentary pains. This process produces a net welfare value by which to determine the value of that life, which conversely influences the subsequent goodness or badness value of that person's death (Velleman, p. 330). Velleman strictly opposes this cumulative approach, in fact, he stresses that this type of framework is impossible to carry out, as the modes of value required to successfully complete the required calculation, specifically related to momentary well-being and overall well-being, are incommensurable (p. 349).

Instead, Velleman posits that well-being cannot be additive because the welfare value of a person's life – diachronically or over time – is simply not equivalent to the sum of the synchronic momentary well-being enjoyed within that period of time, and vice versa (p. 330). Velleman illustrates this point through a variety of thought experiments. For example, Velleman suggests that even if two lives had the exact same cumulative welfare value, but one life became increasingly better over time, and the other life became increasingly worse over time, we would prefer the first life simply because it is a better life (p. 332). In other words, the additive view cannot account for why, in Velleman's example, we prefer the first life over the second one, despite the fact that both lives contain the same amount of synchronic well-being. Therefore, the additive view must not be entirely correct in its approach to the value of a given life and subsequent death.

Velleman further asserts that later events can alter the meaning of earlier events and vice versa, such that "an event's place in the story of one's life lends it a meaning that isn't entirely

determined by its impact on one's well-being at the time" (p. 335). In other words, a person may not fully understand the impact of an event when it first occurs, but over time, those events can play a larger role in her decision-making and outlook on life. In this way, meaning can be assigned to previous events that a person may have overlooked, or assumed were unimportant, but by considering events within her overall life-narrative, she can come to realize that those events were actually quite significant to her overall life story. Certainly, various events in one's life, both pleasurable and painful, may contribute equal amounts of momentary well-being, but these same events contribute different levels of overall well-being, depending on the individual's life story.

Rather than simply calculating the momentary pleasures in a person's life to determine whether the life lived was a good life, a person should focus on the second-order property, or overall well-being, of that life. This is because, according to Velleman, death is the final chapter in one's overall life story, and a good life is not based on one's ability to accrue momentary well-being as long as possible (p. 344-345). By examining events in context, and by bearing in mind how a person can confer meaning to such events retroactively, misfortunes can be redeemed when given a meaningful place in a person's broader life story (Velleman, p. 338-339). According to Velleman, there is an ideal time to die that, in effect, celebrates and vindicates the life that was lived (p. 344). To illustrate this point further, Velleman sketches a possible death scenario, whereby a terminally ill man must choose between an experimental treatment and euthanasia (p. 346-347). This choice is not a question of which option will provide this man with further time to fulfill additional desires and pleasures, but rather, it is a choice about what will "make a better ending to his life story" (Velleman, p. 347).

One consequence of Velleman's framework is that, even an early death can, in some circumstances, be meaningful and thereby premature death is not necessarily a misfortune for the one who dies. However, it must be noted that premature death can – but is not always – harmful, if it spoils a person's life story (Velleman, p. 341). For example, if a person dies before reaching the climax of his life, he is therefore powerless to complete his life story and was unable to confer retroactive meaning to his overall well-being. This assertion is, of course, in contrast to Luper-Foy who seems to think that premature death must always be a misfortune for the one who dies, given that Luper-Foy's argument appears to be, at least partially, based on the assumption that Epicureans cannot judge a premature death as being bad for the one who dies. For he says, "Death for them can never be premature or else it would be a bad thing" (Luper-Foy, p. 275).

While I am more partial to Velleman's narrative framework, I worry that his perspective lacks specificity. For example, what exactly constitutes a better life story, as opposed to a bad one? Additionally, I think there may be cases that contain far too much ambiguity to distinguish, at least narratively speaking, which ending is the most fitting. For example, imagine a young girl is diagnosed with terminal cancer. She has two options: either accept palliative care, such that the hospital bed is moved to her family's home where she can pass peacefully in the arms of her sisters and her parents, or leave her in the hospital where she has the possibility of dying entirely alone in a cold, foreign environment. Yet, still, if she remains in the hospital, she may, by some miracle, slowly recover over time, assuming she is provided with medical care that she would have otherwise not received had she returned home. The trouble here is that the narrative is convincing in either case. That is, if the girl recovers while in the hospital, she would quite rightly be considered an overcomer and an inspiration to others, as she would have won her battle against cancer. However, if the girl dies in the arms of her parents and her sisters, she was

surrounded by love in her last moments, albeit a tragedy, it is still a convincing story that follows a narrative structure. Certainly, dying at home surrounded by loved ones is a far better story than dying alone in a cold and isolated hospital bed. Such ambiguous situations concern me because I wonder how practical this framework can be, given that life is full of ambiguity.

Additionally, I worry that Velleman has not escaped Luper-Foy's timing problem, such that if a person thinks there is no more meaning to be retroactively conferred, then his only recourse is painless suicide. Yet, is it not possible that this individual was mistaken, such that he thought there was no meaning to be conferred because his life, for whatever reason, has become stagnant, but in actuality he was but a few days or weeks away from witnessing further profound and meaningful events? For example, imagine an elderly man is living a rather boring, meaningless life. According to this narrative framework, he has presumably reached the climax of his narrative life story, and may now complete his life story by succumbing to death, likely via a painless suicide. However, what if, just before he intended to commit painless suicide, he is contacted, for whatever reason, by a long-lost daughter he never knew existed? Would not this event suddenly confer additional meaning to many past moments – and potentially future moments as well, assuming he begins a new relationship with his newly discovered daughter – in this elderly man's life? In this case, I would suggest that committing painless suicide would spoil this man's life story. Yet, I worry that all of us have the unfortunate possibility of spoiling our own life story, for who among us can ever know the most opportune time to die?

While it is difficult to choose at which point in time it is the ideal moment to die, perhaps this is not Velleman's point. Instead, it could be the case that Velleman is suggesting, quite simply, that there is a fact of the matter that at some point in a person's life, there is an ideal time to die, but whether or not she can ever truly know that ideal time, wherein she may act upon that

knowledge, is irrelevant. Assuming this is the case, I reason that Velleman is, in a sense, removing the heavy burden of requiring oneself to know the precise time at which to die. Luper-Foy, in contrast, appears to require that we know the most opportune time to die; otherwise it would be difficult to know at what point we should epicureanize our desires. Given that Velleman seems to be removing this heavy burden of responsibility, in effect, he is promoting a better framework by which to help us cope with the inevitability of our deaths.

By means of summarizing, Epicurus asserts that death is neither good nor bad, and we ought not to fear it. Luper-Foy hopes to demonstrate how Epicureans are mistaken, such that a person cannot be indifferent to death without also being indifferent to life, which results in a life that is meaningless and unfulfilled. Based on some difficulties with this view, for example, the problem of determining the appropriate time to epicureanize our desires, I am not convinced that Luper-Foy is successful in his endeavour to help us cope with our inevitable mortality. Conversely, Velleman asserts that by regarding death as the final chapter of a person's life, such that the life story has been completed and meaning has been retroactively conferred to the person's overall well-being, death can be viewed as the positive conclusion to that particular life story. Ultimately, if we side with Velleman, it is possible to view death as a meaningful or positive event outside of death-wish cases, including terminal illness, given that such deaths can indeed be meaningful, depending on the narrative structure of the completed life story. Certainly, some philosophers consider death a misfortune in any circumstance because death inevitably deprives us of the goods of life. Nevertheless, Velleman's narrative framework is all the better, as it allows us to meaningfully cope with our inevitable deaths by permitting us the logical possibility by which to place death in a positive light as the completion of our life story, for it may be true that, ultimately, life does imitate art.

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