

Should we Feel Pity for someone Dying Young? 'The Human Predicament' by David Benatar

Post by “Blank_Emu43” of November 1, 2023 at 2:20 AM

Note: I am not certain if this is the correct place for this thread, apologies if it isn't.

A Seventh-day Adventist friend of mine is reading *The Human Predicament* by David Benatar for university. I have never read the book but according to her the author disagrees with Epicurus that [death is nothing to us](#). While the author believes that life is meaningless, death is still bad because it takes away the ability to experience good things in life.

The book asks this question:

Quote

If a child dies young, would you pity him/her (or at least feel remorseful that the child couldn't live longer)? If you do feel pity, you acknowledge a certain badness in death, namely the inability to continue experiencing good things. If death isn't bad in some way, then people shouldn't feel pity for someone who doesn't get to live a 'full' life.

My friend did also send me a picture of the book that includes an excerpt from Epicurus's Letter to Menoikeus, which I will quote here:

Quote

... concepts of 'harm' and 'bad' are not identical. What constitutes harm is arguably even more contentious than what constitutes badness. Fortunately, it is not necessary to engage the more contested question whether death harms the person who dies. For death to be a feature of somebody's predicament, it would be sufficient that death is bad for that person. I shall focus on that question.

There are a number of arguments for the conclusion that death is not bad for the person who dies, but consider first what Epicurus himself had to say in support of this conclusion:

'Become accustomed to the belief that [death is nothing to us](#). For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that [death is nothing to us](#) makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly

comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living. So that the man speaks but idly who says that he fears death not because it will be painful when it comes, but because it is painful in anticipation. For that which gives no trouble when it comes is but an empty pain in anticipation. So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more.'

In this passage, Epicurus is counselling a certain attitude to death, namely, the attitude of indifference.

That's all the text on that page. I wanted to add that in as well because it gives us a better idea as to how the author is thinking. Especially claiming that Epicurus is counselling an 'indifferent' attitude to death, which sounds Stoic.

So, how should we as Epicureans feel about a child dying since they didn't get to live past childhood and experience more good things in life?