

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

Post by “Godfrey” of November 4, 2023 at 4:21 PM

One way to process the death of a child is to understand that, just as my being dead is nothing to me, being dead is nothing to the child. They no longer exist and so aren't missing out on any hypothetical pleasures. The pains that they may suffer before dying are a different discussion, and those pains may be heartbreaking.

If it was our child, after the initial grief has mellowed, we will probably often feel sadness when we think of what the child would be doing if they had lived. We see somebody else their age and maybe feel sadness or envy that our child isn't alive, experiencing various joys, and thereby bringing us various joys. We will always have emotions regarding the child, but these have nothing to do with any actual future the child might have had: we have no way of knowing what that might have been. The only sense in which the child being dead is bad is in the pain it brings to those still living.

To my mind, both we and the child can only experience physical reality (which is both bodily and mental, since the mind is physical). So there is no point in wracking one's brain as to whether there is a loss of potential for something which will never occur and, at best, is only an abstract projection of something that might have occurred.