

Introduction to Philosophy Essay Questions Units 13 – 15
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Abstract

This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements needed for completing *Introduction to Philosophy*, “A Possible World Machine” through the International Society for Philosopher’s (ISPP) Pathways to Philosophy program. This paper attempts to address the question concerning the rationality of fearing death. It should be noted that this paper is written according the American Psychological Association (APA) sixth edition standards.

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Rationality of Fearing Death

Question

The question presented by Pathways to Philosophy (n.d.) is whether, “is it rational to fear death?” (p. 1).

Response

The rational answer to this question is dependent on logic. We may utilize logic to conclude with a resounding *yes* and *no* in answering the rationality of fearing death depending on our premises. The question remains concerning our governing logoi.

In order to state, no, it *is not* reasonable to fear death, we might begin by saying if our body dies, the soul lives, and our body will die, then we may conclude that the soul lives. However, due to the mathematical, or symbolic, nature of material logic, we must inject a certain measure of reasoning to render logical processes human friendly. With that said, there would be no reason to fear death, regardless of our actions, assuming the continuity of soul.

In order to state, yes, it *is* reasonable to fear death, we might instead begin by saying if our body dies, the soul dies, and our body will die, then we may conclude that so too will the soul. Again injecting a certain measure of reasoning to ensure human friendly processes, we might question why the soul would die as well. And with that said, there would be a reason to fear death assuming the discontinuity of soul for surely there must some reason serving to explain why our soul may die along with our physical body. Perhaps our actions might have something to do with the fear itself? Let us first examine those fears most immediate to our body’s death.

With respect to dying, there are reasonable and unreasonable fears, which are also based on logic. For example, planes fly the air above us and if they suffer a catastrophic engine failure can fall out of the sky, and if a plane suffers such a failure above us, it is possible that it could fall out of the sky while we’re walking along on a sidewalk and kill us. It is logical that this can happen at any given moment. Although the odds of this happening are extremely small, the possibility remains. In fact the odds of a plane falling out of the sky and killing us are so small, it is reasonable to assume that the typical person would believe it is unreasonable to fear such an event due to the extreme unlikeliness of it happening.

If we were to express our concerns with someone while we’re walking along on a sidewalk that perhaps a driver for whatever reason could veer off, jump a curb, and kill us, they would likely tell us it is far more likely than a plane landing on us. Is it not fairly reasonable to think that if we’re not killed by a car that a robber may shoot us, or we could drop dead from a heart attack? Certainly the degree of reasonability must be weighed against the likelihood of probability. Yet, the fear of dying seems relative for statistics are not known for their trustworthiness.

If we return to the earlier thought of our soul surviving, we might wonder whether death will be followed by something positive or not so positive. If death is followed by eternal damnation in hell’s fires for example, and our conscience tells us we are sinners, then in the biblical context we may rightly fear death. If however, death is followed by going onto heaven as we might believe reasonable according to a clear conscience, then again according to a biblical context, we should be without undue fear of death. Yet, the tone of our conscience may be speaking to us in a relative tone. How would we know that we were good enough to actually escape eternal damnation and instead find our way into heaven?

Another element of the question that needs to be addressed is the relationship between logic and reason, and the emotion of fear. Where one is ordered to higher thought processes, the other appears to be much more

primitive. The primacy is pointed out to us Hartley and Phelps (2010) whose research on *The Neurocircuitry of Emotion Regulation* suggests critical functions are specific to the amygdala's ability to acquire, store, and express conditioned fear. This suggests that fear is a conditioned response, yet, dying is different than being stung by a bee. Where the bee may have been an unconditioned stimulus prior to having stung, following stinging whereby becoming a conditioned stimulus, thus evoking a fear response, it may be reasonable to be afraid of being stung by a certain bee unless one were passing by in a car whereby the possibility of being stung by that particular bee is nil.

The point being that the brain's fear response is conditioned. Where the activation of the amygdala is indicative of a fear response, its deactivation is instead indicative of fear extinction (Hartly & Phelps, 2010). It has also been noted by Hartley and Phelps (2010) that where the hippocampus is activated during fear extinction, it is less active during fear response. Although they go on to describe electrophysiological qualities involved in the amygdala's relationship with the hippocampus, it is clear that where the former is the brain's emotional center, the latter is its central regulatory mechanism. The sympathetic and parasympathetic relationship appears subject to control via exercises intended to lessen potency associated with the fear-response and extinction cycles.

We may experientially acquire fear having experienced being stung for its experience was both negative and impacting enough to leave an impression, our brain's aid our ability to moderate and subsequently express such fear, appears biologically inherent. It is this biological inheritance if you will, that suggests higher order processes in the pre-frontal cortex that espouse a reasoned sense of discourse with oneself that may be found fostering a cooperative relationship between *mind* and *body*. Again, harkening unto us an age-old dilemma between *one* and the *other*, we will not entertain any more than necessary within the context of our discussion here.

If however, our brains are working against us for it has been suggested that "abnormal amygdala-induced modulation of prefrontal neuronal activity may be involved in the pathophysiology of certain forms of anxiety disorder" (Garcia, Vouimba, Baudry, & Thompson, 1999, p. 294), *then* it is, in part, reasonable to fear death for our biological processes responsible for modulating associated neuronal potentiation would be malfunctioning. If our brain is not working properly, then we may not exercise reason properly. It is only reasonable to think that we should be thinking properly in order to effect proper thoughts.

As far as death anxiety is concerned, it remains a problematic address among those whose respective responsibilities it is to address such anxiousness, or unruly fears. Although psychological practitioners have attempted to incorporate terror management theory into their practices in attempt to recognize salient dyadic encounters with death anxiety, which has been traditionally recognized as best reserved for philosophical domain, as a bondable condition, the topic concerning mortality, and its associated fear remain better suited to philosophic inquiry. One such inquirer, McInerney (2002), identified fear as negative irascible passion. McInerney (2002) goes on to reason that being without fear, deprives one from a first line of defense. Identifying fear as being orientated towards the future (McInerney, 2002), we are able to reason ourselves that fearing something that may not happen, is unreasonable.

Final Thoughts

It is clear then that fear is related to both biologically born emotions as well as higher order process governed by logic and reasoning. It is reasonable to fear something that has a high probability of happening, such as dying in an out of control airplane that is careening towards the ground, but not reasonable to fear dying from a plane crash, which has been reported by Discovery Communications (2014) as carrying a 1:11 actual chance of death. One would however, more reasonably fear dying in a car where the odds of death is 1:5000 (Discovery Communications, 2014). Yet, at the same time, although the body may die, the question remains as to whether the soul dies along with it. For those of us who both believe in God, and God notwithstanding our beliefs for we should assume that He exists whether we believe in Him or not, we may like to think we will

never taste the sting of death so long as we try to keep the faith and act accordingly. If we are good to being by virtue of the golden rule if nothing else, fearing death may inevitably found discounting the factual experience that WE ARE (i.e., plural (or singular assuming distinctive shared consciousness as followed:)) similarly to God's statement of I AM (i.e., singular (or plural, depending on one's perspective means of reconciling multiplicative consciousness in a pluralistic sense)). In the end, we may find it interesting as pointed out to us in our readings that it is difficult at best to imagine not existing. It seems then, that we always were, and always will be, whether we are aware of it or not according to our reality at any discontinuous momentary point in our existential continuum. In the end, perhaps the thought alone is ours to think with it as we will that we should, or should not, fear what our conscience may, or may not, inform us is rightly so.

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