

University of Birmingham
 School of Philosophy, Theology & Religion
Essay/Assignment Cover Sheet 2018-2019
 To be included as the first page of all work submitted for assessment

PLEASE READ AND COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS OF THIS FORM

Module title	LI The Ethics of Killing	
Module level (C, I or H)	I	
Student ID (SRN)	1828260	
Essay/assignment title or question	1) Does Thomas Nagel provide a successful argument for the view that death is bad for the person who dies?	
Actual word count of submitted assignment	1497	
Have you had an extension agreed?		No
If yes, what is your extension deadline?		

REMINDERS

1. Do **NOT** give your name on the assignment or in your file name or provide any information which might facilitate your identification anywhere in this submission; instead put your SRN on the top right-hand corner of each page and include this cover sheet.
2. Assignments should be submitted electronically via the module section on Canvas before 12 noon on the published deadline for this assessment task.
3. A penalty of 5 marks will be imposed for each working day the assignment is late, until a grade of 0% is reached.
4. You must refer to and be guided by the School of Philosophy, Theology & Religion's policy on word count penalties, which can be found in your module handbook. PTR's rules apply to all submissions for PTR modules, irrespective of your home School's rules.
5. By submitting this assignment, you are declaring that it is not plagiarized, but rather all your own work, and that all quotations from, allusions to and paraphrasing of the work of others have been fully cited and referenced.
6. If you believe that your performance may have been affected by illness or similar matters, your submission declares that you have followed the guidance on extenuating circumstances and extensions.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure you upload the correct version of your essay to the correct assignment section on Canvas as Word or PDF documents only.

STUDENT REFLECTION ON FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT

In the academic year 2018-19 we are asking you, as the starting point for your summative assessments, to think about feedback you have received at earlier points in your course and how you have responded to it in this new piece of work. Thinking carefully about the feedback you have received previously can help to improve your performance. It is helpful, too, for the marker to know what feedback you have had previously on similar pieces of work, and how you have tried to act on it. Knowing the range of different kinds of feedback you have had can also help us to use more those kinds that are most helpful to you.

Either in a comment on what you write here, or in their feedback to you, your marker will engage with your reflection. The extent to which you have improved on previous pieces of work will NOT affect your mark. Your work will be marked on the basis of its own merits as a piece of academic work, NOT on the basis of the answers you give in the box below. Instead, your response will help us to work with you to make feedback helpful and help you improve academically.

PLEASE DO NOT include any information here that would enable your identification.

What feedback have you received on earlier assessments, or while preparing this assessment?(Answer in three bullet points.)

- Need more focus on structure
- More focus required on spell checking
- More clarity in my explanations

How have you responded to that feedback in this assessment? (Again, answer in three bullet points.)

- Found new techniques for structuring essays
- Found new methods for spell checking and I've spent more time checking over my work
- I've reworked my plans to create succinct points so I can make sure I'm writing clearly by using my plan as a reference

What feedback on this assessment would best help you think about your next one? (Again, answer in three bullet points.)

- If my clarity has improved
- If I've tried to do too much or have focused on a particular area too much
- If I've defined enough to make the essay accessible

Thomas Nagel's deprivation account is a response to Epicurus' 'experience' argument, and in order to validate his deprivation argument Nagel must disprove the experience argument. I will demonstrate how Nagel's main objections fail to refute Epicurus' argument and therefore undermines his own deprivation account. Nagel's response to Lucretius's argument is irrelevant as Nagel fails to refute the heart of the matter, and therefore I will not cover Lucretius in this essay. I will begin by discussing what Nagel objects to, how he attempts to reject it and how he is unsuccessful in his main objections.

Nagel predominantly attempts to counter Epicurus' first argument; the experience argument. Arguments by Epicurus focus on the 'privation of sentience', where sensation and experience is removed permanently and the individual who dies experiences nothing. The experience argument interpreted from the letter to Menoeceus (Pepper, 2018) is as follows:

- 1) If you aren't aware of something, it cannot harm you.
 - 2) The dead are not aware they are dead.
- C: Death cannot harm you.

The argument states that harm, a negative affect applied to someone, can only be experienced if you are aware you are being harmed. If you are unaware of the harm, then you are not experiencing harm as it requires a sensation. As the dead are unaware of all things, death cannot harm them. Epicurus is referring to 'death' as the process of being dead, where the subject is in a state of non existence, rather than the process of dying or death as a term to describe dying (Rosenbaum; 1986, P217). This clarification is important, as Epicurus is not arguing that the anticipation of death is bad for a person as they live. (Rosenbaum 1986;

P223) Therefore, Nagel must also refer to “being dead” as his definition of death to object Epicurus.

In order to disprove this syllogism, a premise must be disproven in order to refute the conclusion. Nagel attempts to counter the first premise, suggesting that non experiential harm exists and fits in line with many natural intuitions that we have regarding harm. If Nagel is able to describe a non experiential harm, he can attempt to disprove the first premise and therefore refute the conclusion. Nagel is also able to suggest his deprivation account, which relies on the basis of non experiential harms existing. The Deprivation account is the theory that the loss of potential is bad for the victim, and that death is ultimate deprivation and is therefore bad for the individual.

Nagel uses the example of betrayal to suggest that despite not experiencing the feeling of betrayal, a non experiential kind of harm can be identified. Scarre and Nagel both use examples of a friend making fun of another supposed ‘friend’ behind their back (Scarre; 2007, P88. Nagel; 2017, P7). They suggest that despite there being no change in experience for the mocked friend, a form of harm has still affected the friend.

To evaluate this claim, we must first evaluate how experience factors into betrayal. In order to test for non experiential harms the friend must suffer from no consequences of the act of betrayal, as any consequences of the betrayal would cause experiential harm. This is why Nagel suggests that there is no suffering as a result of the betrayal. This means the situation must be the same if the person is betrayed behind their back or not as seen through the perspective of the betrayed friend. From a perspective of someone who knows of this betrayal harm can be experienced through empathy we could suggest that betrayal is harmful. However, as the individual has no awareness of the harm and nothing else has been affected by the betrayal (nobody treats the person differently etc), the person is not harmed. No psychological or physical change has happened to the mocked friend, and therefore the non experiential harm has not affected or changed anything in the mocked friend. Under this pretence, it is safe to infer that non referential harms do not exist as it is not applied to a subject (due to the subject being unaware).

To reiterate this point, I will elaborate further. If we hypothetically had the choice of picking between two identical groups of friends, except one group of friends would betray us, our inclination would be to pick the other group. However if we were to never find out that the one group of friends would mock and insult behind our backs (and no consequences or changes of events would happen due to this change), then there would be no difference between two options from our unknowing perspective. Therefore, the question must be reframed to having a choice between two groups of friends who are exactly the same, as to avoid the bias that one group of friends will mock and betray. If there are no differences between the choices from our perspective, then no harm could come to us no matter what choice we picked, as both timelines would be exactly the same to us. I believe this is a more accurate analogy to death, as death guarantees you will not experience being dead. There is no difference in harm and benefit as death is the absence of existence.

Nagel discusses the idea that the natural view of betrayal would suggest that betrayal isn't bad because we discover it, but because it is bad in of itself (Nagel; 2017, P5). However, as I have suggested by the prior

examples; without the discovery of the betrayal nothing happens to the individual, and therefore the discovery of betrayal must be a necessary condition in order to be harmed. Nausbaum references this idea (Nausbaum, 1986; P218), stating that one must be “casually affected and aware” to suggest a form of harm. In the context of being dead, it is impossible to ever find out one is dead as there is no sentience. There may also be other reasoning behind why one may feel betrayal is bad inherently, and this may be due to what we can imagine happening, and the discovery creates a great shift in reality which is harmful if the betrayal was ever discovered.

If we are to assume the examples I have provided do not disprove Nagel’s argument and that Nagel has proven non experiential harms do exist, Nagel still has to prove that these analogies are applicable to death. Nagel describes an intelligent man who is deprived of his intelligence through a brain injury, rendering him to a content infant (Nagel; 2017, P5). If we were to assume that he has been harmed by the deprivation of his opportunities through this injury, we must evaluate the synchronicity in this analogy. The major difference between this case compared to being dead is that there is a subject to apply the non

experiential harm to. As death is the antithesis of life, there is no subject to apply the harm to. Nagel suggests that death is a complete absence of “any form of conscious survival” (Nagel; 2017, P1). If we are to believe that the permanent lack consciousness of a person constitutes death, than there is no subject that can be harmed. In Nagel’s example we can see the baby is the subject, and that the baby is capable of being happy. This is very disanalogous to death, as death is unique in its total deprivation of everything. To compare any scenario in which the subject is alive or has to the potential to be alive to death is a category mistake. The main characteristic that is necessary for non experiential harms to be applied is the existence of the subject. Fred Feldman refers to this as the “Existence Condition” (Scarre, 2007; P89). This is why Nagel is unsuccessful in countering the second argument posed by Epicurus. The “no subject of harm” of argument is as follows (Pepper; 2018):

- 1) In order for something to harm you, you must exist.
 - 2) When you are dead, you do not exist.
- C: Death cannot harm you.

In Nagels case, what is “harmful” is the deprivation of all future

opportunities. However, as there is no subject to apply this harm to as sentience and all potential of future sentience are also deprived from the being at the moment of death. Nagel also stretches the definition of life, suggesting that harm can take place to a person's life post mortem through a tarnishing of a legacy or misdeed such as breaking a death bed promise. However, the same categorical error is still unsolved and therefore this argument is irrelevant to the main argument.

To conclude, Nagel fails to disprove Epicurus' argument through the deprivation account as non experiential harms are not proven, and if they were they still do not solve the "subject of harm argument" as the analogies used are not analogous with the unique scenario of death. The attempts to extend life past biological limits do not deal with the categorical error and therefore are irrelevant to the core issue.

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