



The Metaphysics of Death (Stanford Series in Philosophy)

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This collection of seventeen essays deals with the metaphysical, as opposed to the moral issues pertaining to death. For example, the authors investigate (among other things) the issue of what makes death a bad thing for an individual, if indeed death *is* a bad thing. This issue is more basic and abstract than such moral questions as the particular conditions under which euthanasia is justified, if it *is* ever justified.

Though there are important connections between the more abstract questions addressed in this book and many contemporary moral issues, such as euthanasia, suicide, and abortion, the primary focus of this book is on metaphysical issues concerning the nature of death: What is the nature of the harm or bad involved in death? (If it is not pain, what is it, and how can it be bad?) Who is the subject of the harm or bad? (if the person is no longer alive, how can he be the subject of the bad? An if he is not the subject, who is? Can one have harm with no subject?) When does the harm take place? (Can a harm take place after its subject ceases to exist? If death harms a person, can the harm take place before the death occurs?) If death can be a bad thing, would immortality be a desirable alternative? This family of questions helps to frame the puzzle of why—and how—death is bad.

Other subjects addressed include the Epicurean view that death is not a misfortune (for the person who dies); the nature of misfortune and benefit; the meaningfulness and value of life; and the distinction between the life of a person and the life of a living creature who is not a person. There is an extensive bibliography that includes science-fiction treatments of death and immortality.

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