

CAN DEATH BE A HARM TO THE PERSON WHO DIES?

Philosophy and Medicine

VOLUME 73

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CAN DEATH BE A HARM TO THE PERSON WHO DIES?

by

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Springer-Science+Business Media, B.V.

A C.I.P. Catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-90-481-5973-4 ISBN 978-94-015-9868-2 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-94-015-9868-2

Printed on acid-free paper

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Originally published by Kluwer Academic Publishers in 2002.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2002

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For my wife
Tsui-Chu

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PREFACE

It is with great pleasure that I write this preface for Dr Li's book, which addresses the venerable and vexing issues surrounding the problem of whether death can be a harm to the person who dies. This problem is an ancient one which was raised long ago by the early Greek philosopher Epicurus, who notoriously argued that death is at no time a harm to its 'victim' because before death there is no harm and after death there is no victim.

Epicurus's conclusion is conspicuously at odds with our prereflective—and in most cases our post-reflective—intuitions, and numerous strategies have therefore been proposed to refute or avoid the Epicurean conclusion that death cannot be an evil after all. How then are we to account for our intuition that death is not just an evil, but perhaps the worst evil: that may befall us? This is the key issue that Dr Li addresses.

Dr Li's book explores various alternative approaches to the complex and difficult issues surrounding Epicurus's notorious argument and provides a defence of the intuitively plausible conclusion that death can indeed be a harm to the person who dies. This challenge to Epicurus's claim that death is never a harm to the person who dies is developed by way of a detailed exploration of the issues raised not only by Epicurus, but also by his many successors, who have responded variously to the challenging issues which Epicurus raised. Dr Li's book is a valuable contribution to, and continuation of, a debate which has stimulated philosophical reflection for millennia.

On a personal note I have known Dr Li for many years and have worked closely with him on these problems, which he first addressed as a postgraduate research student in philosophy at the University of Queensland where he successfully completed his PhD under my supervision. I have high regard for the quality of Dr Li's philosophical abilities and achievements and it is therefore with great pleasure that I welcome the publication of this book to disseminate his arguments more widely to the global community of philosophical scholars.

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