

**DEATH AND ANTI-DEATH,
VOLUME 7:
Nine Hundred Years
After St. Anselm
(1033-1109)**

Charles Tandy, Editor



Ria University Press

www.ria.edu/rup

2009

Printed in the United States of America

Ria University Press

Palo Alto, California

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FIRST PUBLISHED IN HARDBACK AND PAPERBACK 2009

**PUBLISHED BY
Ria University Press
PO Box 20170 at Stanford
Palo Alto, California 94309 USA**

www.ria.edu/rup

Distributed by Ingram

Available from most bookstores and all Espresso Book Machines

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Hardback/Hardcover ISBN-13: 978-1-934297-05-6

Paperback/Softcover ISBN-13: 978-1-934297-07-0

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CHAPTER THREE

Contrasting Conceptions Of *Mors Beata*: Saint Augustine And Albert Camus

Jasper Hopkins

Introduction

A number of years ago the distinguished Cambridge University philosopher Elisabeth Anscombe confided to me the following personal anecdote. She had been on a trans-atlantic flight, she said, on which at one point the stewardesses passed around a card and asked the passengers to sign it and to add a few thoughtful comments. For, as they explained, this was the pilot's last flight before his retirement; and they wanted to give him some token that would make it memorable for him. (Now, pilots in those days generally retired after twenty years of service, so that this particular pilot may well have been a man in his early fifties. No doubt, passengers wrote on the card such things as "Hurrah! Now you will have more time to spend with family and friends!" or "Here's wishing you continued good health along with bright new experiences!") When the card came to her, she too wanted to express something positive and promising. And so, she wrote simply: "Have a happy death!"

Now, one can easily imagine that the pilot must have been taken aback when he read this comment. After all, on his mind was not *death* but, rather, a continuing life in which certain of his plans would be realized and certain of his hopes would come true. And so, in reading the comment, he may well have asked himself, somewhat colloquially: "Just what's with this *happy death* business, and why would anybody be wishing any kind of death on me—happy or unhappy?" Indeed, to the pilot the idea of *mors beata*, or

mors bona, may, for all we know, have seemed altogether bizarre and, possibly, even ironic or sarcastic when made the object of a wish. But to the philosopher Anscombe the expressed wish was not at all unseemly and was, in fact, remarkably considerate, as well as being gently evocative of authentic reflection.

If, like Miss Anscombe (as she wished to be called), the pilot were familiar with Church history and with the writings of the theologian Saint Augustine—as, who knows?, he might possibly have been—then he did not find the expression mystifying. Or if he were familiar with the twentieth-century thinker Albert Camus and his novel *La mort heureuse*, then he also did not puzzle over the intended good wishes. Of course, Miss Anscombe herself, like us, would never know just what reaction was actually evoked.

In being told the foregoing story, I myself began to reflect more intently upon *mors beata*, or *mors bona*, in the case of Augustine, and upon *la mort heureuse*, or *la bonne mort*, in the case of Camus. My musings were along the lines of exploring how one and the same theme gets played out in contrasting ways by the religious *Augustinus fidelis* and the non-religious *Camus infidelis*.

I: *Augustine*

A. The first thought that comes almost immediately to mind when one contemplates Augustine's view of a happy death is his description of the death of his mother, Monica—a description that occupies a part of Book IX of the *Confessions*. Surely, it would seem, he understands her to have undergone such a death. She fell ill with a fever in Ostia, Italy, while she and her son Augustine—together with a small entourage that included both a second son and Augustine's own son, Adeodatus—were en route from Milan back to North Africa. When her fever broke, she displayed

serenity at what she took to be her last days on earth. She was content, she intimated, to be buried at Ostia, even though she had always envisioned being buried alongside her deceased husband, Patricius, back home in North Africa. A few days prior to the onset of her fever, she and Augustine had engaged in serious conversation about life and death. She had indicated her feeling that she had lived out her life, so that death now held even a kind of attraction for her. Her fondest hope, she continued, had been realized in the religious conversion of Augustine, not to mention the earlier conversion of her now-dead husband. Having no fear of death, she died serenely, content with her past life on earth and looking forward to “entering into the joy of her Lord” (Matthew 25:21).

Surely, (so we are inclined to tell ourselves) Monica’s dying with an accompanying sense of preparedness—with an accompanying sense of accomplishment and in the presence of family members and without trepidation or anxiety—constitutes the Augustinian ideal of a good death, so that Augustine, though deeply wounded by her demise, could take solace in the fact that “*illa nec misere moriebatur*”: “she did not die unhappily.”¹

B. Accordingly, it would be easy for us to suppose that Augustine regards such a death as Monica’s to be the paradigm of *mors beata*, of *mors bona*. But our doing so would overly particularize his conception and would make it overly subjectivistic. For when Augustine conceptualizes a happy death, he is not thinking primarily of a death in the face of which the dying individual *feels* happy and *feels* serene and *feels* fulfilled. Rather, his notion is more objectivistic and more centrally situated within the framework of his religious conviction. For his conception embraces also, and especially, the horrible death of martyrs who feel the pain and the agony of mutilating instruments that may or may not cause their death to be gruesome and

lingering. Likewise, Augustine's conception takes account of the deaths of those who die in the grievous awareness that their family-members are also simultaneously perishing with them, whether perishing by fire or flood or sword or whatever. How can Augustine refer to such deaths as sometimes happy?

Clearly, like Aristotle, Augustine is thinking of *eudaimonia*, (Latin: *beatitudo*) as a *state-of-being*, as a *condition-of-being*, rather than as a subjective *feeling*. Thus, he can agree with Aristotle's citing of Solon's maxim: "Call no man happy before the end of his life." For a happy life, notes Aristotle, is a life whose course can be judged to have proceeded well for the given individual and to have come to a benign end. For example, that individual would not have been born deformed, would not have become permanently or seriously incapacitated because of sickness or accident, would not have had children who wallowed in wickedness, would not have become impoverished, would (on the other hand) have had a modicum of close friends, the necessities of food and shelter, etc. In short, for Aristotle, a happy life is a successful life, i.e., is a life that can be judged to have been worth living because it was both honorable and pleasant. Transferring this point of view, and adapting it, to Augustine's religious outlook, we may note that for Augustine a *happy life* is a life that is pleasing to God and is a life in which one's love for God does not fail, no matter what the circumstances. Thus, Job, amid all his sufferings and moments of doubt, continues to believe that God is just and merciful: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). In a corresponding way, Augustine held that a *happy death*—no matter how cruel—is a death that ushers one into the presence of God and that culminates in eternal joy. Or, taking account of Augustine's Catholic theology, we may affirm that a happy death has to do with one's dying "in a state of grace," so that one obtains salvation and will have a

speedy deliverance from Purgatory. Here Augustine cites Ambrose: "*Beata igitur mors quae nos peccato eripit, ut reformet Deo*": "happy, then, is a death that frees us from sin in order to refashion us for God."²

Indeed, "*non potest male mori, qui bene vixerit*": someone "who has lived rightly cannot die evilly."³ So, then, a happy death is constituted by two factors: (1) it is *preceded* by a life of moral probity and of loving-trust in God; and (2) it is *succeeded*, ultimately, by resurrection and by unification with God. Thus, Monica's death serves as a paradigm of a happy death not primarily insofar as, for her, death was serene, welcomed, etc., but insofar as it instantiated the two features just mentioned. Also Augustine views as happy in these two senses the death of the martyr Stephen, who is spoken of in the New Testament Book of Acts (Acts 6:8-15 & 7:54-60) and who was cruelly stoned to death for refusing to renounce his religious convictions. Elsewhere, Augustine *generalizes* when he adduces the Catholic view of baptism: "... *in Baptismo fieri hominis mortem beatam, ubi remittuntur peccata omnia*": "... that in baptism, where all sins are forgiven, a man's death becomes a happy death."⁴ For in and through baptism, if it is validly performed, one enters into a state of grace. And if one continues to live a life of moral probity and to perdure in love for God, he will obtain eternal life. In short, *mors beata* is a death that leads to *vita beata aeterna*.

C. Augustine distinguishes between two kinds of death: death of body and death of soul—i.e., physical death and spiritual death. The former occurs when the soul forsakes the body; the latter occurs when God forsakes the soul, which continues to exist but apart from God.⁵ For as the soul is the life of the body, so God is the life of the soul.⁶ Writing from a Christian perspective, Augustine states that not to love Christ is itself death—spiritual death.⁷ And when in his *Confessions* he looks back on his life prior to his conversion,

he says “*mors mihi fui*”; “I was death to myself.”⁸ That is, though alive in the flesh, he was dead spiritually. One cannot, he notes, avoid physical death; but one can avoid spiritual death by acknowledging and loving God. Yet, loving God involves obeying God and, like Job, trusting in God’s providential governance. Such obedience entails the imperative not to take one’s own life, no matter how wrenching might be the ordeal of death. Augustine argues forcefully against the religious permissibility of suicide, which, as he believes, evidences a lack of faith in God. When Job’s wife urged him to “curse God and die,” Job recognized that he could not justly do so. His faith was so strong that he uttered the paradoxical words: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him” (Job 13:15). These words are paradoxical because if God will slay me, why would I trust in Him? And if I trust in Him, why would He slay me? Augustine holds the view that if Job, in all his misery, neither took his own life nor asked anyone else to take it from him, then a Job-like faith is required of, and possible for, every believer. Moreover, Augustine attempts to sketch-out another rationale for the inadmissibility of suicide—a rationale that is intriguing. The natural law, he remarks, teaches that parricide is morally more condemnable than are certain other forms of homicide. It is so because the victim is one’s blood-relative—and a very close blood-relative at that. So—all other things being equal—killing someone who is this close to one is morally more repugnant and more blamable than is killing someone who is not. It follows, then, Augustine supposes, that killing oneself is the most blamable of all, inasmuch as “*nemo est homini se ipso propinquior*”: “no one is nearer to a man than is that man himself.”⁹

Yet, observes Augustine, one might well long for death, not in order to escape from suffering but in order to hasten the day of “entering into the joy of the Lord.”¹⁰ Thus, the Apostle Paul, writing to the Philippians, declared that for him

to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor; yet, what I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith, so that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again. Only let your conduct be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. And in nothing terrified by your adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake.¹¹

So, in conformity with the thought of St. Paul, Augustine will not sanction a believer's killing himself in order to be present with God all the sooner. In the last analysis, then, suicide is the one type of death that can never be a happy death. For suicide is always morally wrong, Augustine tells us; and it can never be done as an act of faith and can never be a legitimate expression of love for God.¹²

II: Camus (1)

Camus's *La mort heureuse* was his first novel; yet it was published only after his death, since he was never fully satisfied with it. Nonetheless, from it we can glean a conception of his vision of a non-religious, non-existentialist death. It is *non-religious* because none of the characters ever mention God and, apparently, never seem to think of God, whose name is never uttered throughout the work. In this respect, the notion of death that is elicitable from this fictional account is the antithesis of Augustine's notion. Moreover, it is also the antithesis of an *existentialist* vision of death. In *La mort heureuse* (as also in the later-written novel *L'Étranger*) Camus presents us with the figure of a man, Mersault, who views death in a non-serious way. For he views death neither as highlighting the meaning of his life nor as depriving his life of all meaning. Rather, death is looked upon with benign indifference—as neither conferring meaning nor removing meaning, as neither timely nor untimely, as neither a blessing nor a curse.

A. Patrice Mersault, the novel's protagonist, lives in Algiers in his mother's three-room apartment. After her death he keeps one room for himself and rents out the other two. He works in a shipping office as a kind of clerk. His girlfriend, Marthe, is a secretary, though not in the shipping company. Theirs is a casual relationship in which neither one really loves the other but in which each is nonetheless capable of jealousy, since there is a mutual feeling of fondness. Marthe has other concurrent lovers, to whom she makes no commitment other than friendship and sexual favors. It is she who introduces Mersault to Zagreus, one of her former paramours. Thereafter, at times, Mersault goes to visit Zagreus and to converse with him at some length about personal details. Each feels comfortable with the other, so that Zagreus is not ashamed openly to lament his own deplorable condition as a double-amputee who has lost both

legs in an accident and whose life, he says, is ruined. Somewhat enviously, he sighs: “And you, Mersault, with your [fitness of] body, your sole duty is to live and to be happy.” But to be happy, he continues, one needs time; for it takes a certain amount of free time in order to achieve a happy life. And to have free time, one needs to be free of work—something that requires a reserve of money. He convinces Mersault that he, Mersault, needs money and that he must not “take anything seriously except happiness.” Now, Zagreus himself has accumulated much money—a fact that, in part, deters him from suicide. To be sure, he toys continually with the idea of suicide and has even composed a handwritten suicide letter, on which he need only inscribe a date. This letter he has placed in a chest that contains, among other things, a pistol and a small locked-box with packets of his money. Mersault, who stems from an impoverished family background, is shown all of these items, while listening attentively to Zagreus’s meanderings about time, money, physical prowess, and happiness. Though he says little by way of agreement or disagreement, his mind has registered it all.

B. One day when Mersault visits Zagreus he wears gloves. Entering the apartment, he goes over to the chest, takes out the pistol, walks up to Zagreus, places the pistol against his head, and fires a lethal shot. He then proceeds to place the gun in Zagreus’s hand, so as to get his fingerprints on it, in order to make the death appear to be a suicide, especially when the letter is placed conspicuously on the table. He gathers up the money into the suitcase he had brought along and then leaves. Returning to his room, he takes a long nap. Investigators, seeing the suicide letter and ascertaining the fingerprints on the gun, judge Zagreus’s death to be self-inflicted. Mersault, now wealthy, quits his office job and leaves Algiers in order to travel around in Europe. He takes a ship to Marseilles, France; and from Marseilles he travels by train to Lyons, Prague, Breslau,

Vienna, Genoa, and back by ship to Algiers. In Lyons he develops a fever along with flu-like symptoms and begins to feel debilitated. But he continues on, having a certain will-for-happiness and looking for pleasures that might conduce to his happiness. He is hungry for love and for its pleasures; and he feels unshackled from his past. In Vienna he passes the night in bed with Helen, a dance hall damsel. And in the other cities he seeks out similar *liaisons*.

Back in Algiers he comes to think of himself as “*fait pour le bonheur*,” as “made for happiness,” whereas previously he had thought of himself as “*en état de révolte*,” as “in a state of revolt”. He dallies with three lady friends, who are like sisters to him: Rose, Claire, and Catherine—all of whom are cynical about marriage. Rose speaks of the unfortunate fact that “marriage kills-off love.” Mersault, no advocate of marriage, cannot disagree with Rose. With regard to women, he responds principally to female beauty. And what he finds most appealing is female mindless beauty, in which he descries something “divine,” as it were. Responding to such beauty, he takes up with Lucienne, a secretary from a coal company. They decide to marry—though not out of love. Indeed, when she asks him, he tells her that he does not love her. As life would have it, he does not find in Lucienne the *bonheur* that he is seeking. Still, he is no less convinced that “the will-for-happiness is the only thing that counts.” He tries living in solitude, away from Lucienne; he also tries living in a community of three or four persons. What he experiences is not happiness but the awareness that he is *playing at wanting to be happy*, though not playing at forgetting guilt, which never surfaces to trouble him.

C. The fever and flu-like symptoms return with severity. He has, it seems, developed pleurisy. Dr. Bernard at first tells Lucienne that Mersault’s condition is not grave, though he suspects that Mersault may have incipient heart failure.

Mersault does not want to die a sick man. He does not want his sickness to be a transition to death, he does not want to lose his thirst for life, does not want to die while in a coma. In short, when he dies, he wants to die with his eyes open, as he says. If he can find a reason for living, he tells himself, then he will at the same time have found a reason for dying. That is, a justification for living will serve also as a justification for dying. He wonders aloud: 'If one has but one primary duty—namely to be happy—then what is happiness?' At this point, he feels a bondedness with Zagreus, who was concerned with justifying his own existence and who brooded over the worth of an amputee's life.

So what is happiness?, he repeatedly asks himself. And he answers: 'Happiness is the fact that I exist.' Happiness does not consist in an accumulation of pleasures; it does not consist in accomplishing a list of goals; it does not consist in rebelling, be that rebellion ever so authentic. Rather, it consists in abandoning tyrannical standards of achievement and in detaching oneself from one's body and from the quest for corporeal titillation. What matters is that one exists and has existed, that beauty exists and can be experienced, that one needs no justification for existing, that one need not take either life or death seriously, that one need have no deep commitments, no lasting attachments—in short, that one can learn to live matter-of-factly.

Mersault, who knows that he is in the process of dying, sits on the bed in the house that he previously purchased. It is located a hundred yards from the ocean and on the lower slopes of beautiful Mount Chenoua. Lucienne is sitting next to him. As he smiles weakly at her, a soothing feeling of happiness and joy comes over him. *Sa mort est devenue heureuse*. For he has faced the human condition with his eyes open, and he is dying with no expectations other than to die and to feel no regret for having lived.

II: Camus (2)

Camus's depicting of a non-religious, non-existentialist death is repeated in his novel *L'Étranger*, where the chief character is a different one, although his name is also Meursault, now spelled differently. Since this novel is Camus's most well-known one, we need only highlight certain of its episodes. Meursault of *L'Étranger*, like Mersault of *La mort heureuse*, is someone who feels no deep emotion, who entertains no deep thoughts, who develops no deep attachments. He is someone who views the course of his life matter-of-factly, in the extreme. His mother's death brings him no grief; his marriage to Marie is not a product of his love for her; his shooting the Arab on the beach is reactive, not reflective. At his trial he experiences no distress. When condemned by the jury and sentenced by the judge to death, he remains stolid. In prison, awaiting the guillotine, he is able to put Marie out of his mind, because he cannot have feelings for someone who is not there and who may, for all he knows, be dead. When the priest comes offering to hear his last confession, he drives him away, on the grounds of having nothing to confess. He has no belief in God, no consciousness of God, no perceived need of a God. On the eve of his execution he feels no anxiety, no consternation, no remorse.

I opened myself for the first time to the tender indifference of the world. From experiencing the world to be so like me, so like a brother, I felt that I had been happy and that I was still happy.

Meursault, like Mersault, will die in a state of benign indifference. He will have a happy death.

II: Camus (3)

But Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, presents us with what can be called an existentialist motif: namely, defiance in the face of death.¹³ One's sense of the absurd, he writes, arises out of a confrontation between, on the one hand, man's longing and his needs and, on the other hand, the silence of the unreasoning, unreasonable, unaccommodating world. Since Camus takes as a rule-of-method the rule that truth must be preserved, he concludes that the truth of the absurdity of one's life must be preserved. But this truth cannot be preserved if one of the two parties that engender it—namely, human desire and a recalcitrant universe—is removed. So my eliminating myself is disallowed, inasmuch as the absurd ends when death comes, because that is when my desires and needs cease. Yet, if I am to preserve, as best I can for as long as I can, the truth of the deeply-sensed absurdity of my life, how can I best do so? As Camus tells us, not only is the *truth of the proposition* to be preserved but so also is *my very sense of the absurd*. The latter can be preserved (for the length of my life-span insofar as this length is in my power to control) by my refusal to commit suicide and by my revolt against my impossible predicament—the human predicament—wherein I experience my being consigned to suffering, to disappointment, to struggles, to losses, to no hope beyond the grave, to no redemption. Through defiance, through contempt, through my not loving my fate but rather protesting inwardly and outwardly against it, I will be able to achieve some sense of self-worth. Only *l'homme révolté*—man in revolt—can attain to personal dignity and can escape from utter humiliation under the crushing weight of existence. Only when, like Sisyphus, I face the world not with benign indifference but with defiant remonstrance does my life have meaning. Thus, we must imagine Sisyphus—who will not let himself be cowed by the gods—as happy. However, this happiness in no way contributes to a happy death, thinks Camus. For death is

never happy, because it can never be accepted with resignation by man-in-revolt. The notion of a happy death best makes sense within the Christian saga, which for Camus is devoid of truth and, therefore, ought not to be preserved.

III: *Augustine and Camus*

No two conceptions of a happy death could be more different than are the conceptions of Augustine and Camus. Augustine relates *mors beata* to the existence of a loving God and to the assurance of everlasting life beyond the grave. Camus relates *la mort heureuse* to the non-existence of God and to the expectation that death ends all individual consciousness. Augustine repudiates suicide, as does Camus—though their reasons for doing so are completely different. Camus, in his two non-existentialist novels expresses—through the fictional figures of Mersault and Meursault—the view that suicide is neither heroic nor non-heroic, is neither justified nor unjustified. Yet, in his quasi-existentialist *Myth of Sisyphus* he comes to repudiate suicide altogether. In another vein, both Augustine and Camus value detachment in the face of death. Augustine sees the religious believer as detaching himself emotionally and intellectually from the world in order better to re-attach himself to God. The believer also detaches himself from his body; but he does so only with the assistance of divine grace, which strengthens his rational will. What Socrates says of the philosopher, Augustine applies to the believer: the believer practices death all his life. By contrast, in the case of Mersault, detachment is practiced in order to make possible a death in which one experiences no sense of prospective or actual loss but only a soothingly quiet murmur of joy.

Mersault felt no love for Lucienne or for Marthe or for Catherine or for Helen. He felt no guilt at having committed murder. He was detached from his own feelings, from his own core-self, so to speak. Or better, he had no core-self.

The contrary is true for Augustine, who pours out his emotions in his *Confessions* and who understands his core-self to be an image of God. Whereas Mersault sees his own life as fundamentally boring and as having no purpose beyond simply *be-ing*, Augustine sees his own life as having a destiny; and his death he sees as ushering-in that destiny. Camus's Mersault views marriage as, at best, *une passade*. If the marriage is more than *une passade*, then it becomes a form of pantomime, since it will have destroyed whatever love there may initially have been. By contrast, Augustine lauds his mother and father for having maintained a lasting marriage, which Augustine regards as both feasible and manageable. Both Augustine and Camus are moved by beauty. Augustine's passions and temptations are markedly attested to in his *Confessions*: "[Lord,] give me chastity and continence—but not yet!"¹⁴ Only after his conversion does Augustine long to be united to God and to God's Beauty: "Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new!"¹⁵ From Camus's viewpoint Augustine is pursuing an illusion: Augustine dies with his eyes closed, so to speak. His death amid illusion and deception cannot be a happy death; it can be only *mors mala*, because it is not grounded in truth.

All in all, for Camus: this life has no ultimate meaning. Ultimately speaking, it is absurd. And its being ultimately (as also presently) absurd is viewed by Camus in two strikingly different ways: namely, (1) as seen through the eyes of Mersault/Meursault and (2) as seen through the eyes of Sisyphus. In the one case, a *happy death* is a death that one accepts with resignation and with benign indifference; for, as in the case of Nietzsche, there is *amor fati*. In the other case, *death* is something against which a non-religious mortal protests defiantly by railing against the very idea of a Judeo-Christian God, as did Nietzsche when he exclaimed: "*Der Gott, der alles sah: dieser Gott musste sterben!*"¹⁶ In this latter case, there is no such thing as a happy death; there is only a happy life.

Existential Conclusion

We have seen that the notion of a *happy death* is a notion that admits of various understandings, as does the very notion of *happiness*. What happiness *is* and what a happy death *is* cannot be *discovered*: they must be *decided*. And each person must decide these matters for himself. These decisions will not be like *ordinary* definitional decisions but will be akin to the following kind of definitional decision: In medical ethics the question arises as to whether or not to define “brain death” as a state of “real” death. Some contemporary writers such as Paul A. Byrne say “No”.¹⁷ Others such as James Bernat say “Yes”.¹⁸ Still a third set of writers say “Maybe, depending upon a further determination of the neurological facts” (D. Alan Shewmon).¹⁹ Given that a consensus of sorts has now been more or less reached, as reflected in the *Uniform Determination of Death Act* (1981), the debate has moved on to the issue of whether or not to call the persistent vegetative state a state (or a process) of death. Among the answers given back and forth, the most intriguing one is given by Linda L. Emanuel.²⁰ Her view is that each competent individual ought to be allowed to choose for himself what he will regard as counting *for him* as his death. So if he decides that, for him, PVS (or brain death) *is* really death, and if he is an organ donor, then an OPO (Organ Procurement Organization) may legally retrieve organs from him under these circumstances. On the other hand, if he decides that irreversible cardio-pulmonary cessation is the boundary-line between life and death, then only at that point may any of his still-useful organs or tissues be harvested. Parents or guardians would make corresponding decisions on behalf of children.

In a similar way, someone might suppose, it is all right for Augustine to judge that Monica had a *happy death*, given his definition and understanding thereof. But Camus, qua

author of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, would be entitled to judge that Monica encountered *aliqua mors mala* (an unhappy death). Likewise, Camus could admissibly ascribe *mors beata* only to *l'homme indifférent et résigné*, in accordance with Camus's chosen conception.

All of the foregoing discussion leaves us with the question of what conditions, if any, we will choose as rendering our own respective death a happy death. In other words, the question of whether or not there is such a thing as a happy death and, if so, what would constitute it, is ours to answer as we *decide* to. But we can decide only for ourselves, not for others. And, of course, one decision might be the decision not to decide—i.e., the (inauthentic?) decision not to take the question seriously. A follower of Camus might even throw forth the challenge: “How can I decide what counts for me as a happy death, given that I have not yet decided on an answer to the question ‘Why have I not already committed suicide?’ ”

This last question is the existential question that each of us is left with. It is our philosophical heritage from Camus—and from Augustine.

NOTES

1. Augustine, *Confessions*, IX, 12, 29 (PL 32:776).
2. Augustine, *Against Julian the Heretic*, II, 5, 14 (PL 44:683).
3. Augustine, *Sermon on Christian Discipline*, XII, 13 (PL 40:676).
4. Augustine, *Against Julian the Heretic*, II, 5, 14 (PL 44:683).
5. Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, XLVIII, 2, 2. (PL 36:556).
6. Augustine, *On the Gospel of John*, XLVII, 8 (PL 35:1737).
7. Augustine, *Answers to Eighty-three Different Questions*, LXXI, 7 (PL 40:83).
8. Augustine, *Confessions*, XII, 10, 10 (PL 32:830).
9. Augustine, *On Patience*, XIII, 10 (PL 40:617).
10. Matthew 25:21.
11. Philippians 1:21-29 (King James Version with minor stylistic emendations).
12. Augustine, *On Patience*, XIII, 10 (PL 40:616). *Against Gaudentius the Donatist*, I, 30, 34-35 (PL 43:727-728).

13. Camus, of course, did not care to be termed “an existentialist”—any more than did the Roman Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel. Both of these Frenchmen wanted to avoid having placed on their ideas the same rubric as was placed on those of J.-P. Sartre, from whom they wanted to distance themselves. Nonetheless, there are certain existentialist themes embedded in Camus’s writings (as also in Marcel’s). These may be signaled without recourse to assigning the label “existentialist philosopher”.
14. Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII, 7 (PL 32:757).
15. Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 27 (PL 32: 795).
16. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Last Part, “The Ugliest Man”. [*Also Sprach Zarathustra*, IV. Teil, “Der hässlichste Mensch”]. “The God who saw everything, including man: this God had to die!”
17. Michael Potts, Paul A. Byrne, Richard G. Nilges, *Beyond Death: the Case against Brain-Based Criteria for Human Death*. Boston: Kluwer, 2000.
18. James Bernat, “A Defense of the Whole-Brain Concept of Death,” *Hastings Center Report*, 28 (March-April, 1998), 14-23.
19. D. Alan Shewmon “Recovery from ‘Brain Death’: A Neurologist’s Apologia,” *The Linacre Quarterly*, 64 (1997), 30-96.
20. Linda L. Emanuel, “Re-examining Death: the Asymptotic Model and a Bounded-Zone Definition,” *Hastings Center Report*, 25 (July-August, 1995), 27-35.

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