

What's the Worst Thing?

I don't think it's death.

Death sucks, and the drive for life is good. But inability to make peace with the utter inevitability of death can lead a person to things worse than death.

I've written on this theme before (here most recently) as it's cropped up in my life with increased frequency. Panic and denial over death can lead humans to do ugly, shameful things. The goal of a human life ought not to be death denial (though pursuits of life extension are awesome) but dignity from start to finish, including a dignified death.

Dignified death has more to do with the frame of mind of the dying than physical circumstances. There's a reason the peaceful martyr moves us (and sometimes causes a massive social movement). Seeing someone approach death without fear, but with courage, resolve, peace, and dignity reflects the highest human spirit and inspires those of us still living.

The fight for life is noble. Until it's not. We've seen enough epochs of history and fictional portrayals to know the depths of depravity humans can reach when they fall into a zero-sum trap and maniacally compete with their fellow humans for any last gasp of life. We've seen what a fever of fear can do to a mob beyond reason.

Each of us has an individual duty to live well. And living well includes dying well. We can't control the external circumstances of our deaths, but we can control our mentality and example as we face it.