

Death is, as Justice Stevens says in *Cruzan v. Director*, “profoundly personal,” and each human being must come to terms with his own mortality, on his own time. Some obsess over the impending end, while others accept the inevitability of their deaths. However, whatever they choose to do, death will always come. In the United States, wills, advanced healthcare directives, and numerous conversations litter the adult life, without being a common topic in society. Euphemisms, such as “passed away,” replace the word “death,” demonstrating how private the issue is. When the issue *is* discussed, it must be masked. However, as seen in *We Who Are About To*, death does not only impact the individual; it also impacts the society. The novel asks a crucial question: what happens to society when a human being dies?

In order to answer the question, one must first determine the significance of a life. In *We Who Are About To*, the significance comes from lived experiences, unique in their very existence. For example, when Victor passes away, the narrator comments, “It’s a world going out.” She becomes curious, wondering “where he was going, where he came from, who he was” (44). When Victor passes away, the survivors mourn the loss of an individual’s history. No human being can have or share the same experience, and that is the beauty and bittersweet nature of life. As Grea explains, “even if they have left behind some sort of record of what they have experienced,” the “essence” (as coined in Star Trek TNG’s *Measure of a Man*), as it relates to that individual, ceases to exist as the human being ceases to breathe. Therefore, when a human being dies, the society loses a history, as understood by one individual. In turn, society loses a unique perspective; the world loses a little bit of its color when a human being dies. No human being will be able to tell

the same story or convey the same emotion as the one who passed away. In Star Trek TNG's *Measure of a Man*, the android Data is a unique being. As he is the only one of his kind, his death would be a significant loss to society. However, as explained in *We Who Are About To*, every individual, on and off Earth, is unique. Though Victor is not the only human being, he is the only one "of his kind." His death, and therefore, any death, is a significant loss to society.

In addition, with the death of an individual, society loses a wealth of potential. Doors to unrealized futures close with the individual's last breath. As FM wonders, who knows what the individual might have achieved? Even when the society is "unsure of what they are actually losing," there is an intangible yet crucial loss of possibilities (FM). It is precisely this unsureness that makes the death so devastating for a society. FM freely uses the word "maybe" in her piece, explicitly drawing to the reader's mind just how many possible paths disappear with the loss of a life. Whether the individual "merely" impacts those in his inner circle or impacts society at large, his potential to influence others will die with him. In turn, versions of people he could have impacted will die; with them, more versions of people *these potential versions* could have impacted will also die in a mass extinction, like a stone causing numerous, growing ripples in a lake. With just one death, an incalculable number of paths for society slam shut, never to open again.

What is the significance of a life? What does society lose when a human being dies? In *We Who Are About To*, these complex questions help form the basis of the conflict; they are what drive the group to harm the narrator for "the greater good." However, whether one agrees with the narrator or with the group, it is undeniable that so much is lost with a single death. In short, society loses doors to both the past and the future; these doors are locked, the keys are thrown away, and society will never know what they have lost.