

How A-theoretic Deprivationists Should Respond to Lucretius

Natalja Deng

(Journal of the American Philosophical Association 1/3: 417-432. Please cite published version, available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2015.1>)

Abstract: What, if anything, makes death bad for the deceased themselves? Deprivationists hold that death is bad for the deceased iff it deprives them of intrinsic goods they would have enjoyed had they lived longer. This view faces the problem that birth too seems to deprive one of goods one would have enjoyed had one been born earlier, so that it too should be bad for one. There are two main approaches to the problem. In this paper, I explore the second approach, by Anthony Brueckner and John Martin Fischer, and suggest that it can be developed so as to meet deprivationists' needs. On the resulting view, metaphysical differences between the future and the past give rise to a corresponding axiological difference in the intrinsic value of future and past experiences. As experiences move into the past, they lose their intrinsic value for the person.

Keywords: A-theories, death, deprivationism, symmetry problem

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to address a certain puzzle that arises in the philosophy of death, using resources from contemporary metaphysics of time.

Most contemporary philosophers hold that Epicurus was wrong to think that death is never bad for the deceased. Instead they claim that death is bad for the deceased iff, and to the extent that, it deprives them of goods they would have enjoyed had they lived longer (deprivationism). The deprivationist faces a so-called symmetry problem (based on remarks by Lucretius), which is that birth (or prenatal nonexistence) too seems to deprive one of goods that one would have enjoyed had one been born earlier, and therefore it too should be bad for one.

There are two main approaches to the problem in the literature, neither of which is unproblematic. A good number of deprivationists now bite the bullet and accept that in the relevant sense, there is an evil of birth as well as an evil of death. In this paper, I explore the second approach to solving the problem, the one put forth by Brueckner and Fischer, and argue that it can be developed so as to meet deprivationists' needs.

I start by outlining some preliminaries (section 1) and then explain deprivationism (section 2) and why it faces a symmetry problem (section 3). I then briefly discuss the first solution (section 4), before turning to the second, by Brueckner and Fischer (section 5). Next, I develop what I take to be the most promising version of their solution (section 6). Finally, I respond to a number of objections (section 7).

1. Preliminaries

The question at issue between a deprivationist and his or her Epicurean opponent is whether (and if so, why) death can be bad for the one who dies. I'll construe Epicureanism as a position about the badness (or lack thereof) of death, rather than about whether we should fear death. I don't know to what extent this is a faithful construal of Epicurus's actual writings. Clearly, he at least also held a view on whether we should fear death (see Warren 2004). I'll assume that in this context, 'bad', 'evil', and 'harm' can be used interchangeably. The question might thus also be expressed as whether (and if so, why) death can be an evil for the deceased, or whether death can harm the deceased. I'll mostly speak of 'badness'.

The badness in question is person-relative: the question is whether death can be bad for the person who dies, not whether it can be bad *simpliciter* or bad for the world as a whole.

Note that neither the deprivationist nor his or her opponent denies that someone's death can be, and often is, bad for others. Also note that deprivationists don't hold that death is always bad for the one who dies, but only that there are cases in which it is. Their Epicurean opponent holds the correspondingly strong position that death is never bad for the one who dies.

The term 'death' is somewhat ambiguous in that it could mean at least any of the following: (a) the dying process, (b) the event this process culminates in, (c) the state (if it is one) of nonexistence that follows, or (d) the fact that we're mortal. I'll suppose that of these four, only (b) is at issue. That is, we're concerned with the (dis-)value of the event that marks the end of life. Alternatively, I'll speak of the badness of the state of affairs of someone's death

occurring. I'll briefly reconsider the relevance of (c) when we get to the symmetry argument, below.

I'll further assume that death marks the end of a person's existence. That excludes, on the one hand, views on which we continue to exist as immortal souls or Cartesian egos and, on the other hand, views on which we continue to exist as (dead) bodies (e.g., because we're animals, and animals continue to exist as dead animals after their death). Incidentally, it would also exclude any view of time on which persons (and other seemingly temporary existents) 'exist permanently', if 'existence' is here used in its ordinary sense. But I take it that neither the minimal A-theory (Sullivan 2012) nor the B-theory as usually understood (e.g., Sider 2011: ch. 11), nor even the B-theory as understood by Le Poidevin in 1996: ch. 10 has this implication.

Finally, note that the question of death's badness is not directly a question about which attitudes we have or should have toward our death. So whether we should, for example, fear death is a related, but distinct question.

2. Deprivationism

Few anti-Epicureans hold that the event of death is intrinsically bad for the deceased. (I'll take intrinsic bads to be things that are bad not just in virtue of leading to something else that's bad or preventing something good.) In fact, the most widely accepted anti-Epicurean view can accommodate hedonism, the view that the only intrinsic goods are pleasures and the only intrinsic bads are pains. This is deprivationism. It says that an event is (extrinsically) bad for someone iff, and to the extent that, that person would have been intrinsically better off if the event hadn't occurred. In particular, deprivationism says that death is bad for the one who dies iff, and to the extent that, it deprives that person of intrinsic goods he or she would have enjoyed had the person not died.

What is meant here by 'had the person not died'—had the person died of a different cause or had he or she died at a slightly different time, or had he or she been immortal, or something else? According to the deprivationist, that depends on which counterfactual comparison is conversationally salient. Suppose we interpret the counterfactual involved in terms of possible worlds. Then to say that had someone's death not occurred that person would have enjoyed more intrinsic goods is to say that in the closest possible world in which the death doesn't occur, the person enjoys more intrinsic goods than in the actual world. But whether the closest world is

one where the person dies of a different cause, or a millisecond later, or not at all, depends on the conversational context.

If death is an evil of deprivation, then it's bad for the one who dies in a quite specific way. It isn't intrinsically bad for that person nor does it cause something intrinsically bad to happen to him or her. Rather, the badness of death consists in its preventing something. Death is thus comparable, in terms of the kind (though not, typically, the extent) of badness it involves, to never receiving baseball tickets meant for one, for example, and never finding out about it (Bradley 2009: 178). The harm consists in not being as well off as one would have been had one gone to the game.

3. The Symmetry Problem

There are actually several symmetry problems based on, or inspired by, Lucretius's writings. The one that will occupy me here, namely the one specifically aimed at deprivationism, can be put as follows.

1: If deprivationism is right, then birth too is bad (for some), since by its lateness it deprives one of intrinsic goods one would have enjoyed had one been born earlier (Note that strictly speaking it's the event of one's coming into existence in the womb that's in question, rather than birth).

2: But it isn't, so

3: deprivationism is mistaken.

Often, the problem is instead formulated as a problem about prenatal nonexistence. If deprivationism is right, then prenatal nonexistence too is bad (for some), since it deprives one of intrinsic goods one would have enjoyed had one been born earlier. But it isn't, so deprivationism is mistaken (see Johansson 2005: 107). One reason to formulate the argument this way is that it's closer to what Lucretius actually said. But then what Lucretius actually said was clearly not specifically aimed at deprivationism, and we're concerned with the version of the argument that is (rather than, say, one about our attitudes toward past and future nonexistence). Deprivationists typically evaluate not future nonexistence, that is, the state (if it is one) of being dead, but rather the event that leads to it, namely, the event of death. Nor is this emphasis on the event of death rather than on post-mortem nonexistence accidental. Rather, it corresponds to the conviction

that an Epicureanism which says merely that being dead is not in any way bad for one, is ‘of academic interest only’ (Olson 2013). In order to be interesting, so goes the conviction, Epicureanism has to hold also that the event of death is not bad for one. That’s what deprivationists deny. They hold that the event of (early) death is bad because the intrinsic value of one’s life in the actual world is less than it is in the closest world where the event doesn’t take place. By parity of reasoning, then, it should be the event of (late) birth whose value is in question. Therefore, I’ll stick to the first formulation.

Why might one hold that (late) birth typically deprives one of intrinsic goods? That is, why think that one would have enjoyed more intrinsic goods had one’s actual birth not taken place? Clearly, a proponent of the argument has a particular counterfactual comparison in mind, and that particular comparison may not be the most salient in any ordinary context. It’s natural to make a comparison with a world in which one isn’t born at all, and of course on that interpretation one’s birth doesn’t deprive one, on the contrary. But the intended comparison is with a world in which one is born earlier, namely, by as much as one would have lived longer had one not died. Moreover, the world in question is supposed to be one in which one’s death date is the same as in the actual world. So if I live from 1981 to 2046 and I would have lived until 2056 had I not died, the world in question is one in which I live from 1971 to 2046. The same extra time is added to my life, but at the beginning instead of at the end. Typically (for example, if one wasn’t born right after a major war that would have overshadowed much of one’s childhood had one witnessed it), that extra time would have involved as much pleasure as the extra time at the end, and thus, typically, birth too deprives one. In fact, given this particular counterfactual comparison, late birth is typically as bad as early death.

Thus, deprivationism as it stands implies that birth too is typically bad for one. Should we then become more distressed about the fact that we were born when we were, rather than earlier? At this point, deprivationists usually insist on a substantial divide between what’s bad for one and what it’s all-things-considered rational to feel distressed about. Your late birth *merits* bad feelings, but all things considered, you shouldn’t feel bad about it. Similarly, world poverty merits bad feelings, but one can’t be miserable all the time, so one shouldn’t feel bad about it.

I admit that this may be the right result. But I think it’s still worth exploring other avenues. Prima facie, world poverty seems bad (*simpliciter*) in a way that one’s late birth doesn’t seem bad (for one).

Johansson offers the following explanation of why we don't see that it's bad for us to have been born when we were. Usually, things that are bad for us are things we have reason to try to prevent. So we're misled into thinking that all things that are bad for us are things we have reason to try to prevent. But we don't have reason to try to prevent being born late, because we can't. So we mistakenly infer that being born late isn't bad for us.

It seems true that there are things that are bad for us that we can't affect, and if we have no reason to try to prevent those, then there are things that are bad for us that we have no reason to try to prevent. But even on reflection, late birth doesn't seem to be one of them. The bad things we are powerless to affect, and hence have no reason to try to prevent, are still things we have reason to want to, or wish we could, prevent. To use one of Johansson's own examples, supposing God doesn't exist and supposing that that fact is bad for (some of) us, we may have no reason to try to prevent God's nonexistence because we can't, but we still have some reason to regret it. It's not clear that one's late birth (or even the lateness of one's birth) is like that.

4. First Solution: Impossibility

Let me briefly pause to mention a solution to the symmetry problem that I'll set aside (I take these problems from the literature, especially Johansson 2005, 2008, 2013). The solution says that a given person *couldn't* have been born (much) earlier than he or she was; that is, the solution says that one's time of birth, but not one's time of death, is essential to one. This idea is originally due to Nagel (who later expressed doubts about it); another version of it was then developed by Kaufman. I'll briefly note the main problems with Kaufman's version (see Kaufman 1996).

The first problem is that it's not clear that deprivationism requires genuine possibility for its counterfactual comparisons even if it's often expressed in terms of possible worlds. What it says is that something is bad for you iff you *would* have been intrinsically better off without it, not that you *could* have been without it.

The second problem is that Kaufman hasn't made a convincing case that one couldn't have been born earlier. He tries to establish this by showing that we are 'thick' (rather than 'thin') persons, namely, persons with particular psychologies, projects, values, and so on. But, as Johansson argues, he hasn't shown why it should follow from this that we couldn't have very different psychologies (i), nor why it should follow from *that* that we couldn't have been born earlier (ii).

As for (i): Suppose you had a close shave with a car accident as a toddler. If you'd been injured, you'd have had a very different psychology.

As for (ii): Even if it's the case that had you been born earlier, you would have had a different psychology, it doesn't follow that you couldn't have been born earlier and still have the same psychology. It's just that none of those worlds is (in an ordinary context) the closest world in which you are born earlier.

5. Second Solution: Bias toward the Future

I'll now turn to Brueckner and Fischer (henceforth B&F). They respond to the symmetry argument using the Parfitian idea of a 'bias towards the future' (Parfit 1984: p. 160). Consider Parfit's thought experiment in *My Past or Future Operation* (Parfit 1984: 165–66). A person wakes up in a hospital and is told that either they already underwent a long and painful operation and have now forgotten it, or they are still to undergo a shorter and less painful operation, which they will subsequently be made to forget. The person naturally hopes the operation is already over and done with. So they even prefer to undergo more pain overall, if the pain is in the past rather than the future.¹ In general, the idea is that we have temporally asymmetric attitudes toward our experiences: we care more about those that lie in our future. This is not a claim about our attitudes toward the fact that our life contains such and such experiences. I may regret the fact that I had such a painful operation just as much as I regretted (or was distressed) that I would have to have it. The asymmetry lies in our attitudes toward the experiences themselves: I am much more distressed at having yet to undergo the painful experience than I am at having already undergone it. Similarly, I am much happier about being about to undergo a pleasurable experience than I am at having already undergone it.

How does this help with the symmetry problem? Here is B&F's original suggestion:

¹ One might worry that it's the anticipation of future pain that drives the asymmetry (Brink 2011), but it seems the asymmetry is robust even if one removes such factors (Caruso et al . 2008; Suhler and Callender 2012).

Death is a bad insofar as it is a deprivation of the good things in life. . . . If death occurs in the future, then it is a deprivation of something to which we look forward and about which we care—*future* experienced goods. But prenatal nonexistence is a deprivation of *past* experienced goods, goods to which we are indifferent. Death deprives us of something we care about, whereas prenatal nonexistence deprives us of something to which we are indifferent. (Brueckner and Fischer 1986: 219)

Note that this suggestion involves something stronger than a bias, namely, complete indifference toward past experiences. I'll return to this point in objection 4. There has been much discussion of B&F's position, including a lively recent debate as to what the position amounts to in more detail. Both Feldman and (especially) Johansson have considered and criticized a number of different interpretations of the proposal (Feldman 2013; Johansson 2005, 2013, 2014a, 2014b).

In one of B&F's replies to Johansson, it emerges that they would, among other things, be sympathetic to a reading on which they are actually biting the bullet on the symmetry problem:

The Brueckner/Fischer approach to replying to Lucretius is completely compatible with the contention that one's 'late' birth can be a bad thing for an individual. Our point would then be that it is a bad thing to which it is rational to have a *different sort of attitude, when situated at a specific point in time*, than towards the prospect of our early death. (Brueckner and Fischer 2014a: 9)

The idea is that, given a clear survival benefit of caring especially about (present and) future experiences, the general temporal asymmetry in our attitudes is rational; thus, since the asymmetry in our concern about (early) death and (late) birth is a special case of the general asymmetry, it too is rational (Fischer 2006).

Again, I'm not sure that deprivationists should be content with biting this bullet. For one thing, unless B&F are right to speak of complete indifference (as opposed to a bias), the rationality of our attitudes can at most justify caring *less* about late birth. For another, in a broader sense of 'rational' it's still entirely rational to feel just as distressed about late birth. Late birth still *merits* great distress.

B&F are also sympathetic to a different reading of their view:

BF*(dd)*(D): When death is bad for an individual X, it is bad for X because it is rational for X, *from the perspective of certain times during his life*, to care about having pleasant experiences after t (where t is the time of his death), and his death deprives him of

having pleasant experiences after t (whereas prenatal nonexistence is not bad for a person, because, even though it deprives him of having had pleasant experiences before t^* [where t^* is the time at which he came into existence], it is not rational for him, *from the perspective of those times during his life*, to care about having had pleasant experiences before t^*). (Brueckner and Fischer 2014c: 329)

However, Johansson has pointed out the following problem with this. If the rationality of one's attitudes makes a difference to how intrinsically well off one is, it makes a difference to how intrinsically well off one is *in the world in which the attitudes are rational*. Specifically, it can't make one better off in a world in which one is born earlier than in the actual world, that in the actual world it's not rational for one to care about pleasures before one's (actual) birth (Johansson 2013, 2014a, 2014b).

B&F's response, as I understand it, is to maintain that the point is irrelevant, because in that other world, too, it's not rational for one to care about past pleasures, including the extra ones one has thanks to the earlier birth. The reason B&F say this is that they hold the present time constant in comparing worlds, and note that in the world in which one is born earlier, too, those pleasures lie in the past. Thus, even though one did experience them in that other world, it's (now) rational for one to be indifferent to them. To suppose, as Johansson does, that in that world, it *is* rational for one to care about those pleasures, is to illicitly shift the time back to when those pleasurable experiences took place or else to inappropriately take up an atemporal perspective (Brueckner and Fischer 2014a, 2014b, 2014c).

But why hold the present time constant in comparing worlds? According to Johansson, the only good reason to do so would be to posit time-relative value, that is, to maintain that the disvalue of death holds relative to times. Although B&F are unsympathetic to this idea, Johansson is right that it's the only way to make sense of the insistence to hold the present time constant when comparing worlds. Johansson has also criticized such a time-relative conception, concluding that B&F's approach is a nonstarter. In what follows, I'll motivate and develop a time-relative conception of the disvalue of death on the basis of A-theoretic approaches to time. I then turn to criticisms of this kind of view, arguing that contrary to Johansson and others, it's defensible and doesn't have any clearly absurd consequences.

6. An A-theoretic Answer

To start with a concrete example of a deprivation theory, consider Feldman's version (Feldman 1991). (Nothing hangs on this choice; the basic idea is applicable to all versions.) Feldman assumes a very simple hedonistic axiology for the purpose of his argument, according to which pleasure is the only intrinsic good and pain is the only intrinsic bad. He defines the intrinsic value of a world w for a person s to be the amount of pleasure experienced by him or her during his or her lifetime in that world, minus the amount of pain experienced by the person in that world: $V(w, s)$. (I'm following Feldman in assuming for simplicity that it makes sense to speak of amounts here and to represent them numerically. Feldman notes that in interesting cases, it won't be possible to calculate the value of a world for a person.) The overall (extrinsic plus intrinsic) value of a state of affairs p for s is then the intrinsic value, for s , of the closest p -world, minus the intrinsic value, for s , of the closest not p -world. Accordingly, the overall value of the state of affairs of s dying at t , for s , is the difference in the intrinsic value, for s , of two different possible worlds: the closest world in which s dies at t , and the closest world in which s doesn't die at t . That value may be negative in many cases; in these cases, s 's death is bad for the person.

How might one modify this account along B&F's lines? A natural first thought would be to relativize the intrinsic value of worlds not only to persons, but also times. One might take the intrinsic value at a time t of a world w for a given person s , $W(s, w, t)$, to be the amount of pleasure experienced by s in w at times that are present or future at t , minus the amount of pain experienced by s at those times. Accordingly, we would then speak of the overall value for s , of a state of affairs p , at a given time t :

- (4) The overall value for s , at t , of a state of affairs p = the intrinsic value for s , at t , of the closest p -world, minus the intrinsic value for s , at t , of the closest not p -world.

(Note that I'm assuming it makes sense to speak of the same time in different worlds, just as the original account assumes it makes sense to speak of the same person in different worlds.)

One might worry whether it really makes sense to relativize intrinsic value to times as well as to persons. While it's easy to think of a world containing both more intrinsic goods than bads for one person and more intrinsic bads than goods for another, it's a bit harder to imagine the temporal analogue. After all, a given world contains all the pains and pleasures a person undergoes during his or her lifetime. How can a given pleasure/pain be intrinsically good/bad for the person relative to one time of evaluation, and not intrinsically good or bad for them

relative to another time of evaluation? How can it be both intrinsically valuable and not intrinsically valuable, even relative to different times?

Consider the A-theoretic conviction that the passage of time is a robust metaphysical change. A-theoretic views of time are those that metaphysically privilege the present in some way, for example, by taking it to be all that exists or the latest time that exists or by taking events to move from the future into the spotlight of the present and then into the past. B-theorists, by contrast, don't think there is anything metaphysically fundamental about the perspective of the present; every time is 'present' relative to itself. Intuitively at least, this allows A-theorists to give a metaphysically robust account of the passing of time. B-theorists can point to nothing more than the succession of one time by another, while A-theorists can point to a change in what exists or in which time is present. (Elsewhere I have argued that this view of the debate is unfair to B-theorists, but I won't insist on that here; I'll also sidestep the question of whether the various challenges A-theoretic views face can be met.)

A process that is as metaphysically fundamental as A-theoretic passage is usually thought to be might be expected to have axiological effects as well. It could obliterate the intrinsic value of experiences as one after another relentlessly moves into the past, never to be experienced again. As I see it, (4) isn't sufficiently congenial to this A-theoretic picture yet. After all, it could easily be reformulated without any mention of A-properties (pastness, presentness, or futurity). Just let $W'(s, w, t)$ be the amount of pleasure experienced by s in w at times that are *simultaneous with or later than* t , minus the amount of pain experienced by s at those times.

The following formulation improves on (4) in this respect. It's still a time-relative conception of value, but the time of evaluation doesn't function as an explicit parameter. Rather, let the (current) intrinsic value of a world w for s , $Y(w, s)$, be the amount of present or future pleasure s experiences in that world, minus the amount of present or future pain s experiences in that world.

- (5) The (current) overall value for s , of a state of affairs p = the (current) intrinsic value for s of the closest p -world, minus the (current) intrinsic value for s of the closest not p -world.

(5) equates intrinsic and overall value with current intrinsic and current overall value, respectively. It thereby mirrors the A-theoretic privileging of the present. According to A-theorists, there is something metaphysically important about the present, and time's passing involves a fundamental metaphysical change, for example, in which time is present. Why not think that this metaphysical change gives rise to a corresponding axiological one?

Before I turn to objections to this view, let's look at how it deals with the symmetry problem. Suppose I am thinking of taking a flight across the Atlantic, and I am slightly worried about dying en route. Suppose I think dying en route would be bad for me. Whether this is so depends on how the (current) intrinsic value for me of the closest world in which I do die en route compares to the (current) intrinsic value for me of the closest world in which I do not. In the closest world in which I die en route, I have only a few more pleasures and pains (including some terminal pain) ahead of me because I die in the near future. Let's suppose that world is now worth +100 to me; +100 is the result of subtracting the amount of pain still coming up from the amount of pleasure still coming up. Suppose that in the closest world in which I do not die en route, I have many happy years still to come, so that that world is now worth rather more to me: +1000, say. Thus (5) implies that my death en route is now such that it would be very bad for me: it has a value of -900.

But the same is not true of a possible earlier birth that I might have had, which also would have resulted in many extra happy years. In this case, the relevant comparison is between the intrinsic value for me of the following two worlds: the closest world in which I was born earlier than I was actually born (and in which I die at the time I actually die), and the closest world in which that is not the case (i.e., in which I am born and I die at the actual times). For a fair comparison, we may suppose that the amounts of future pleasures and pains in these two worlds do not differ. The significant difference is that in the first world, I experience many extra pleasures that I don't experience in the second. But because these pleasures all lie in the past, they don't affect the (current) intrinsic value for me of either world. That is why the (current) intrinsic values for me of the two worlds are the same, so that my late birth is not now bad for me.

7. Objections and Replies

Objection 1: The proposed view delivers a value asymmetry between birth and death, but only during one's lifetime and for a little while after that.

Reply: True. Before one's birth, both (late) birth and (early) death are evils. During one's life, only (early) death is. And as soon as one has died, or rather as soon as it's not the case that one would still have present or future intrinsic goods to enjoy if one hadn't died, neither is an evil anymore. I don't think that's such a bad result.

But perhaps the objection is rather to specific elements of the result. Take for instance the evil of death; on this view, it obtains before one is born. Isn't that odd? Maybe. But suppose one is moved towards an A-theoretic view partly because one is impressed by various asymmetries between the past and the future. These asymmetries may give one reason to think that what is still to come is metaphysically significant. Perhaps what makes someone's death an evil for someone before they are born is that it and the possible pleasures it makes them miss are still future, and the future *matters*, metaphysically speaking. Similarly for the evil of birth. Of course, one could insist that a satisfactory solution has to do away with the evil of birth entirely, rather than relegating it to before one is born. I admit that that would be preferable. But note that on one interpretation of the view that deprivative evils obtain 'eternally' (held by Feldman himself, for example), they obtain at all times. On that view, it's also the case that birth and death are evils before birth—it's just that they stay evils thereafter.

A deprivationist might also claim for independent reasons that things can only be bad for a person s if there has been a time at which s existed. I leave aside here the question of whether such a requirement is admissible. Just note that if it is posited, then one consequence will be that neither birth nor death is bad for anyone before they are born. If deprivationism is then modified along the lines of (5), the problem disappears. The result is then that birth is never bad for one, while death is bad for one during one's lifetime and for a little while after that. During that time, there is a real value asymmetry between birth and death. Note also that it's not the case that all the important work is now being done by the existence requirement. That requirement, on the original deprivation account, still entails that for anyone now alive or dead, (late) birth is bad.

Objection 2 (Johansson 2005;:ch. 5, 2013, 2014a, 2014b): As Moore said, intrinsic value depends only on intrinsic features (Moore 1922: 260). Futurity is not an intrinsic feature, so intrinsic value can't depend on futurity. Moreover, it can't depend partly on futurity and partly on the experience's hedonic quality, that is, on how it feels; after all, these never obtain simultaneously.

Reply: Let's start with the second point. Johansson anticipates the reply that future pleasures exist timelessly, as pleasures. He says that this would only help if futurity was also had timelessly, which it isn't, of course. But why think that? Suppose futurity characterizes the experience not timelessly but currently, and pleasantness characterizes the experience timelessly (even if it doesn't feel like anything except when one undergoes it). Can't its intrinsic value then depend on both? If partial grounds have to obtain simultaneously (do they?), isn't it enough that when the experience is future, it is also pleasant?

There have been many challenges to the Moorean principle, but I won't enter that debate here (see e.g. Kagan 1998). Suppose the principle holds. Does it then follow that intrinsic value can't depend on futurity? Only if futurity must be regarded as extrinsic. Johansson just assumes this ('something's being future depends on its relations to present events'). But it's not clear that futurity must be regarded as extrinsic, especially by A-theorists. In fact, it's more congenial to A-theories to regard futurity (and pastness for that matter) as intrinsic in the relevant sense. Futurity accrues to an event not just from the perspective of the present, but *simpliciter*, because the present perspective is the only perspective. Even on an eternalist A-theory like the moving spotlight view, futurity is likely to be seen as a monadic, nonrelational property of events (and in this context 'intrinsic' is often equated with 'nonrelational').

Objection 3 (Johansson 2005: ch. 5, 2013, 2014a, 2014b;;Bradley 2009: chs. 1, 3; Bykvist 2007): Feldman calls $V(w, s)$ not only 'the intrinsic value of w for s ', but also s 's welfare level at w . That's because V measures how much pleasure and pain s experiences in w . It's how well off s is in w . That suggests that $Y(w, s)$, the (current) intrinsic value of w for s , should be understood as s 's current welfare level in w ; in other words, it should be taken to reflect how well off s is currently in w . But that's absurd. How well off s is currently in w can't depend on what *will happen* to s in w . Suppose Al and Bob have experienced exactly the same intrinsic goods and bads so far, but Bob will continue to do so, while Al has only intrinsic bads in his future. Surely we want to say that the two have been, and are, exactly equally well off. Or just consider Al's life up to now. Suppose

every day involved exactly the same intrinsic goods. Surely he wasn't worse and worse off, at each of those times, just because he had fewer and fewer goods still to come?

Reply: Granted that deprivationism is concerned with how intrinsically well off one would have been, so that a time-relative version of the view must concern one's current level of well-being in worlds. But there are different ways of thinking of the latter notion. One is to think of it as the intrinsic value of the present time in that world (for one), another is to take it to be the current intrinsic value of that world (for one)—where future, not just present, experiences make a difference to that latter value.

The intrinsic value of (previously) present time(s) for Al and Bob has been the same (in this world), and the intrinsic value of the present time is the same for both (in this world). But there is more to be said about their situations. The intrinsic value of the world for Al has been decreasing steadily, just like for the rest of us, merely by virtue of time's passing. Time's passage diminishes our store of yet-to-come pleasures and thereby diminishes the intrinsic value of the world for us. The intrinsic value of the world for Al has differed from the intrinsic value of the world for Bob by virtue of the different futures in store for them.

Objection 4: Still, the idea of passage-induced loss of value is highly counterintuitive. Consider a painful experience you underwent as a child. Isn't it still intrinsically bad for you even though it's in the past? If not, why should you still feel bad about it (see Belshaw 2000a, 2000b)?

Reply: Recall that B&F make the very strong claim that we're indifferent toward past pains and pleasures. The first point I'd like to make is that I think that when properly understood, the claim is actually less implausible than it sounds. Keep in mind that what's at issue is our attitudes toward the experiences, not toward the fact that we underwent them. Thus, the claim is compatible with still feeling badly or feeling glad about the fact that one underwent a particular experience, that is, about the fact that one's life story includes such an experience. What I take B&F to claim is just that we're indifferent toward past experiences *qua* experiences. And aren't we? After all, we'll never have them again.

But suppose B&F are wrong, and we're not indifferent toward past experiences. One might still think that such past-directed emotions should actually provide some support for (5), just like they have been thought to provide support for A-theories (the locus classicus is Prior 1959).

However, this style of argument is problematic for at least two reasons. One is the obvious complexity of our past-directed emotions. It's not so clear which of these actually supports A-theoretic ideas such as the nonexistence of the past. Perhaps relief (which Prior focused on), regret and even nostalgia do provide such support. But bitterness or satisfaction, for example, *prima facie* pull in the other direction. The second reason for caution is that it seems doubtful that ontology will do much explanatory work here. There are better evolutionary explanations available (Maclaurin and Dyke 2002; Suhler and Callender 2012).

Thus, our past-directed emotions are unlikely to lend much support to the idea of passage-induced loss of value. However, I think the idea gains some support directly from an A-theoretic metaphysics. If one thinks that the passage of time is a deep and fundamental process, a process that may even continually make the difference between existence and nonexistence, then why not also think it makes an axiological difference? One can think that without claiming that our attitudes neatly track that difference.

The resulting view is not as counterintuitive as it may seem. It still allows one to acknowledge that the past experience *had* (intrinsic) value. The situation here is somewhat similar to the situation with respect to the passage of time. Only one time is present, but past times *were* present. That claim is commonly formulated with the help of tense operators: the NOW is located at t and WAS (the NOW is located at a time earlier than t). Similarly, a given past pain P has no intrinsic value but WAS (P has negative intrinsic value), namely at all times leading up to, and in particular, at the time it was suffered. Naturally, this doesn't change the result (which is, after all, as intended) that the pain (now) lacks negative value for the subject. But it does to an extent make it broadly rational to still feel resentment over a past pain as well as joy over a past pleasure: in remembering the experience, one is remembering a time that was once present and at which the pain had (negative or positive) value for one.

Which specific kind of A-theoretic view can lend support to (5)? Admittedly, the view that would *ontologically* mirror a complete loss of value, namely, the shrinking block view, which says that the past doesn't exist but the present and future do, is rarely defended (for a recent defense, see Casati and Torrenco 2011). However, it's not clear that the proposal requires there to be an ontological difference between the future and the past, as opposed to another metaphysically fundamental difference. Consider an eternalist A-theory, like the moving spotlight view. Intuitively, the view is that future experiences are continuously moving 'toward' the spotlight of the present, while past experiences are forever out of that spotlight and moving continuously

‘away’ from it. This difference, too, provides a rationale for assigning objective intrinsic value only to present and future experiences. Those are the experiences still to come, the ones that we rightly still look forward to or dread. The passage of time, the moving of the spotlight, annihilates this intrinsic value even though it doesn’t annihilate the events themselves. Similarly, consider a ‘thinning tree’ view according to which the passage of time consists in the dropping off of unactualised branches. As a branch loses its alternatives (or shortly after that), it becomes part of the immutable past; why not think that this same process results in a loss of intrinsic value of any experiences that lie on that branch? After all, these experiences are not now and can never again be *bad*, that is, experienced.

Finally, it should be noted that the idea of passage-induced value loss is in principle independent of the claim that past experiences have no intrinsic value for the subject. Weaker versions might discount the intrinsic value of past experiences by a constant amount or, alternatively, by an amount proportional to the pastness of the experience. On the first view, one’s (late) birth would still be bad for one, but much less bad than one’s (early) death. On the second view, the badness of one’s birth would decrease over time.

Objection 5 (Johansson 2005: ch. 5, 2013): It’s strategically undesirable to give up on straightforward hedonism to answer Lucretius (and Epicurus).

Reply: Agreed. But note that this is nowhere near as big a deviation from straightforward hedonism as is involved in paradigmatic nonhedonistic answers to Epicurus. The latter involve claims like that death is bad for one in the way nasty rumors of which one doesn’t learn, or the failure of one’s projects, can be bad for one. On the view proposed here, it’s not the case that one’s well-being depends on things that happen outside of one’s lifetime.

Conclusion

I’ve explored a view on which metaphysical differences between the future and the past give rise to a corresponding axiological difference in the intrinsic value of (present or) future and past experiences. As experiences move into the past, they lose their intrinsic value for the person. As a result, deprivationism no longer has the counterintuitive consequence that there is an evil of

birth as well as an evil of death: it no longer implies that one's (late) birth is bad for one in the same way that one's (early) death is. During one's lifetime, and for a little while after that, one's (early) death is bad for one, but one's (late) birth is neither good nor bad for one. There is a real value asymmetry between birth and death. I've also suggested that this is the only deprivationist view still in the running on which late birth is not bad for one.

It may be that biting the bullet is preferable. Perhaps being born later rather than earlier really is bad for one in just the same way that dying sooner rather than later is, as long as one would have had more happy times overall. But, a proponent of the symmetry argument might then insist, is that really all there is to the badness of death? And if it is, is death really *bad* for one? Maybe it's just less good, like having been born in 1971 is less good than having been born in 1961 (given a death in 2057), a view that is defended in Smuts (2012). Maybe Epicurus was right after all.

References

- Belshaw, C. (2000a) 'Later Death/Earlier Birth'. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 24/1, 69–83.
- Belshaw, C. (2000b) 'Death, Pain and Time'. *Philosophical Studies*, 97/3, 317–41.
- Bradley, B. (2009) *Well-being and Death*. Oxford University Press.
- Brink, D. (2011) 'Prospects for temporal neutrality'. In Craig Callender (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 353–81.
- Brueckner, A., and J. M. Fischer. (1986) 'Why is death bad?'. *Philosophical Studies*, 50/2, 213–221.
- Brueckner, A., and J. M. Fischer. (2013) 'The Evil of Death and the Lucretian Symmetry: A Reply to Feldman'. *Philosophical Studies*, 163/3, 783–89.
- Brueckner, A., and J. M. Fischer. (2014a) 'Prenatal and Posthumous Existence: A Reply to Johansson'. *Journal of Ethics*, 18/1, 1–9.
- Brueckner, A., and J. M. Fischer. (2014b) 'Accommodating Counterfactual Attitudes: A Further Reply to Johansson'. *Journal of Ethics*, 18/1, 19–21.
- Brueckner, A., and J. M. Fischer. (2014c) 'The Mirror-image Argument: An Additional Reply to Johansson'. *Journal of Ethics*, 18/4, 325–30.
- Bykvist, K. (2007) 'Comments on Dennis McKerlie's "Rational Choice, Changes in Values over Time, and Well-being"'. *Utilitas*, 19/1, 73–77.

- Caruso, E. M., D. T. Gilbert, and , T. D. Wilson. (2008) ‘A Wrinkle in Time: Asymmetric Valuation of Past and Future Events’. *Psychological Science*, 19 (8), 796–801.
- Casati, R., and G. Torrenco. (2011) ‘The Not so Incredible Shrinking Future’. *Analysis*, 71/2, 240–44.
- Feldman, F. (1991) ‘Some Puzzles about the Evil of Death’. *Philosophical Review*, 100/2, 205–27.
- Feldman, F. (2013) ‘Brueckner and Fischer on the Evil of Death’. *Philosophical Studies*, 162/2, 309–17.
- Fischer, J. M. (2006) ‘Earlier Birth and Later Death: Symmetry through Thick and Thin’. In Kris McDaniel, Jason Raibley, Richard Feldman, and Michael Zimmerman (eds.), *The Good, the Right, Life and Death* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing). Reprinted in John Martin Fischer (2009), *Our Stories: Essays on Life, Death and Free Will* (Oxford University Press).
- Johansson, J. (2005) *Mortal Beings: On the Metaphysics and Value of Death*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Johansson, J. (2008) ‘Kaufman’s Response to Lucretius’. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 89/4, 470–85.
- Johansson, J. (2013) ‘Past and Future Nonexistence’. *Journal of Ethics*, 17/1–2, 51–64.
- Johansson, J. (2014a) ‘Actual and Counterfactual Attitudes: Reply to Brueckner and Fischer’. *Journal of Ethics*, 18/1, 11–18.
- Johansson, J. (2014b) ‘More on the Mirror: Reply to Brueckner and Fischer’. *Journal of Ethics*, 18/4, 341–51.
- Kagan, S. (1998) ‘Rethinking Intrinsic Value’. *Journal of Ethics*, 2, 277–97.
- Kaufman, F. (1996) ‘Death and Deprivation; Or, Why Lucretius’s Symmetry Argument Fails’. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 74/2, 305–12.
- Le Poidevin, R. (1996) *Arguing for Atheism*. New York: Routledge.
- Maclaurin, J., and H. Dyke. (2002) ‘“Thank Goodness That’s Over”: The Evolutionary Story’. *Ratio*, 15/3, 276–92.
- Moore, G. E. (1922) *Philosophical Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Olson, E. (2013) ‘The Epicurean View of Death’. *Journal of Ethics*, 17/1–2, 65–78.
- Parfit, D. (1984) *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Prior, A. (1959) ‘Thank Goodness that’s Over’. *Philosophy*, 34/128, 12–17.
- Sider, T. (2011) *Writing the Book of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Silverstein, H. (2000) ‘The Evil of Death Re-visited’. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 24/1, 116–134.
- Smuts, A. (2012) ‘Less Good but not Bad: In Defense of Epicureanism about Death’. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 93/2, 197–227.

- Suhler, C., and C. Callender. (2012) 'Thank Goodness that Argument is Over: Explaining the Temporal Value Asymmetry'. *Philosophers' Imprint*, 12/15, 1–16.
- Sullivan, M. (2012) 'The Minimal A-theory'. *Philosophical Studies*, 158/2, 149–74.
- Warren, J. (2004) *Facing Death: Epicurus and His Critics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.