

A Puzzle About Death's Badness: Can Death Be Bad for the Paradise-Bound?

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Goin' up to the spirit in the sky
That's where I'm gonna go when I die
When I die and they lay me to rest
I'm gonna go to the place that's the best.
— Norman Greenbaum, "Spirit in the Sky"

Abstract Since at least the time of Epicurus, philosophers have debated whether (and how) death could be bad for the one who has died, since (it is typically assumed) death is a permanent experiential blank. But a different (and hitherto unexplored) puzzle about death's badness arises when we consider the death of a person who is paradise-bound. The first purpose of this paper is to develop this puzzle. The second purpose of this paper is to suggest and evaluate several potential attempts to solve the puzzle. After rejecting two seemingly attractive suggestions, I argue that there are two types of solution to the puzzle that can succeed. The first type of solution simply denies that death can be bad for the paradise-bound. I argue that the main worry for this type of solution, namely that it gives up (with respect to the paradise-bound) the common-sense view about death's badness, is only a *prima facie* worry. The second type of solution maintains that death can be bad for the paradise-bound because it can deprive her of certain goods, which allows those who are attracted to this type of solution to adopt the deprivation account of death's badness. I consider three views of the relation between the paradise-bound and paradise that are consistent with the deprivation account, connecting my discussion of paradise with the extant literature on death's badness.

Keywords Death, Deprivation Account, Epicureanism, Paradise

1. Introduction

In the extant philosophical literature on how death might be bad for the one who has died, death—the state of one who has died—is typically assumed to be a permanent experiential blank. Given this assumption, many wonder how it could be that death could be bad for (or how it could harm) the one who has died, since, *inter alia*, the person no longer exists to be the subject of unpleasant experiences. Yet that death is a bad thing for the one who has died is also taken to be a common-sense belief about death. This is puzzling.

But this paper is mainly concerned with a different (though related) puzzle: denying the assumption that death is a permanent experiential blank and replacing it with the assumption

that, upon dying, one is paradise-bound, how can death be bad for the one who has died?¹ While many philosophers writing on the subject of death's badness might be more inclined toward the assumption that death is a permanent experiential blank, this is not the majority view, at least not in all parts of the world. In the United States, for example, belief in heaven ranged from 72% to 83% from 1997-2004, and a recent (2013) study found that 68% of those polled believed in heaven.² Given that the majority view, at least in the United States, is that death is not a permanent experiential blank, it is worth considering whether (and how) death can be bad for the paradise-bound.

I begin with a brief look at the contemporary philosophical literature on death's badness, with a special emphasis on the most popular philosophical account of death's badness, the “deprivation approach,” as this account will feature in one type of solution to the main puzzle of this paper. After this brief discussion, I consider the puzzle about death's badness for the paradise-bound. I then suggest and evaluate several potential attempts to solve the puzzle. Two of these potential attempts are rejected as unsatisfactory. One might suggest that since certain projects are only possible in this life, death might be bad for the one who has died because it precludes the continuation of such projects. A second suggestion is that death can be bad for the one who is paradise-bound because it prevents her from being able to make this world better for those she leaves. I argue that both of these suggestions fail to solve the puzzle.

¹ I use the locution ‘paradise-bound’ both adjectivally and as a noun, always describing or referring to the person who we are assuming is headed for paradise.

² The former statistic is from Winseman (2004), and the latter is from The Harris Poll 97, December 16, 2013, <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/NewsRoom/HarrisPolls>, retrieved September 24, 2014. It may well be that belief in heaven is on the decline in the United States, but it remains the majority view there. An additional complication is that the latter survey included additional options that might be thought to be rival conceptions of life after death (such as reincarnation and the survival of the soul after death), none of which accept the assumption that death is a permanent experiential blank.

Having shown these potential attempts to be unsatisfactory, I then suggest two types of solution to the puzzle, each that will be more or less appealing depending on one's other philosophical and theological commitments.³ The first type of solution simply denies that death can be bad for the paradise-bound. I argue that the main worry for this type of solution, namely that it gives up (with respect to the paradise-bound) the common-sense view about death's badness, is only a *prima facie* worry. The second type of solution maintains that death can be bad for the paradise-bound because it can deprive her of certain goods, which allows those who are attracted to this type of solution to adopt the deprivation account of death's badness. I consider three views of the relation between the paradise-bound and paradise that are consistent with the deprivation account, connecting my discussion of paradise with the extant literature on death's badness.

2. Background on Death's Badness

In the contemporary literature on death's badness, some take the “Epicurean view” and deny that death can be bad for the one who has died.⁴ Epicurus succinctly states the position in his *Letter to Menoeceus*: “Therefore that most frightful of evils, death, is nothing to us, seeing that when we exist, death is not present, and when death is present, we do not exist. Thus it is nothing either to the living or the dead, seeing that the former do not have it, and the latter no longer exist” (Long and Sedley 1987: 24 Ad Men. 125). For Epicurus and his followers, to be dead is not to exist. At the moment of one's death and at every subsequent moment, one no

³ Indeed, the discussion is limited to suggestions that some philosophers and theologians will find antecedently plausible; my aim is not to suggest merely logically possible ways of solving the puzzle.

⁴ See, for example, Rosenbaum (1986) and Mitsis (2012).

longer exists and so is no longer able to experience pleasure, pain, or anything else.⁵

Furthermore, on the Epicurean view, a state of affairs in which one no longer exists cannot be a bad state of affairs for the one who does not exist since she cannot (in virtue of her non-existence) experience any pain (or any other evil). Versions of this argument are commonly used to show that it is not rational to fear death, given that we will not exist to be the subject of any bads associated with death and thus that death is not a fitting object of fear, but our concern here is specifically with the badness of death. The Epicurean view thus denies the common-sense belief that death can be, and often is, bad for the one who has died.⁶

Arguing that one's non-existence cannot be a bad state of affairs for oneself is not the only way to argue for Epicureanism about death's badness. Another way to argue for the Epicurean view, inspired by Lucretius, is the “symmetry argument” (sometimes called the “mirror-image argument”): since we do not regret having been born later than we could have been born, and since posthumous non-existence is the mirror image of prenatal non-existence, we should not regret dying earlier than we could have died.⁷ As with the previous argument, versions of the Lucretian symmetry argument are commonly used to show that it is not rational to fear death, given that prenatal non-existence is not a fitting object of fear and given that posthumous non-existence is no different in this respect. For our purposes, however, the version of the argument that is relevant is one specifically about the badness of later birth and earlier

⁵ This is, perhaps, a good point to highlight the distinction between death and dying. Dying is the process that leads to death and ends right at the moment of death; death is the state of being dead, which begins when one ceases to be alive. Dying can be, and too often is, extremely painful, and thus a bad state of affairs for the one who is dying; however, *death* cannot be painful, since one no longer exists to suffer any pain.

⁶ I am not alone in taking the belief that death can be bad for the one who has died to be a common-sense belief. According to Harry Silverstein, for example, “The common-sense view is that a person’s death is one of the greatest evils that can befall him” (1980: 401).

⁷ For a discussion of this argument, see Nussbaum (1994) and Fischer (2006).

death. Since being born later than one could have been born is not a bad thing for the one born later, and since an earlier death is no different in this respect, one's death cannot be bad for her.

The most popular account of how death can be bad for the one who has died, the “deprivation approach,” provides a reply to both challenges.⁸ On the deprivation approach, death can be bad for the one who has died by depriving her of certain goods that she would have received had she remained alive. So, with respect to pleasant and unpleasant experiences, even on the assumption that one goes out of existence upon death (and therefore no longer has any unpleasant experiences), one’s death can deprive one of many pleasant experiences and thereby be a bad thing for her. Additionally, on the deprivation approach, an earlier death can deprive us of something that a later birth cannot. One way of spelling out this approach is to argue that it is rational to have asymmetric attitudes toward prenatal non-existence and postmortem non-existence. Anthony Brueckner and John Martin Fischer defend a view of this type (1986; Fischer and Brueckner 2014a). On their view, a later birth can deprive us of pleasures just as an earlier death can, but it is rational to care about the latter pleasures and not to care about the former. To motivate the rationality of such asymmetric attitudes, Brueckner and Fischer provide the following thought experiment:

Imagine that you are in some hospital to test a drug. The drug induces intense pleasure for an hour followed by amnesia. You awaken and ask the nurse about your situation. She says that either you tried the drug yesterday (and had an hour of pleasure) or you will try the drug tomorrow (and will have an hour of pleasure). While she checks on your status, it is clear that you prefer to have the pleasure tomorrow. (Brueckner and Fischer 1986: 218-219)

⁸ See, for example, Nagel (1979), Brueckner and Fischer (1986), Feldman (1992), and Fischer (1997; 2006).

Given that our preference patterns favor future pleasures over past pleasures, it is rational to care about the pleasures of which an earlier death might deprive us without caring about the pleasures of which an later birth might have deprived us. Despite the main claims made by proponents of the Epicurean view, therefore, the puzzle about how death can be bad for the one who has died can be solved while maintaining the assumption that death is a permanent experiential blank.⁹

3. A Different Puzzle

For the sake of the remainder of this paper, let us give up the assumption that death is always a permanent experiential blank; let us instead assume that some are paradise-bound.¹⁰ For one who is paradise-bound, how can it be that her death is bad for her? To see the force of this puzzle, a bit more needs to be said about what paradise is often taken to be. Here are two assumptions concerning existence in paradise that I propose that we adopt.¹¹ First, one's existence in paradise is a temporal existence, notably an everlasting one.¹² Second, each moment

⁹ Not all will agree that the puzzle has been solved. For a recent discussion of Fischer and Brueckner's attempt to provide a response to the Lucretian symmetry argument, see Johansson (2013; 2014a; 2014b), Fischer and Brueckner (2014a; 2014b; 2014c), Cyr (2014; Forthcoming), and Purves (2015).

¹⁰ As stated here, this assumption is quite general. Perhaps death is a permanent experiential blank for those who are not paradise-bound, or perhaps every person is paradise-bound. I do not take a stand on these issues here. The puzzle arises from the mere assumption that someone is paradise-bound.

¹¹ I do not take these assumptions to be particularly controversial in, for example, Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, but I grant that these assumptions are not ubiquitous.

¹² Following McDannell and Lang (1990), Walls distinguishes between the "theocentric" view of heaven and the "anthropocentric" view of heaven. According to "the most extreme" version of the theocentric view, "heaven is a timeless experience of contemplating the infinitely fascinating reality of God in all of his aspects" (2002: 7). For simplicity's sake, I am going to maintain the assumption that existence in paradise is a temporal one, but I do not think that the puzzle described in this paper depends on this assumption (since, presumably, it will still be better to have entered timeless paradise than to have remained in one's temporal existence). Furthermore, I do not think the extreme version of the theocentric view is widely accepted, nor it should it be, given the widely held doctrine of the resurrection of the body. For more on this doctrine, and for the claim that it is widely held, see Merricks (2009).

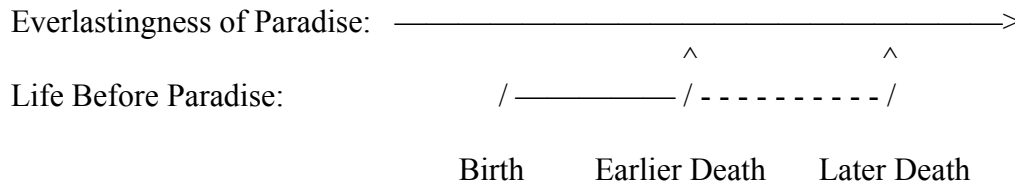
of one's existence in paradise is better for her than any moment not in paradise. Neither of these assumptions entails that one's existence in paradise must be an embodied existence, nor does either rule out an embodied existence in paradise.

Once we grant that one is paradise-bound and that each moment of her everlasting existence in paradise will be better than any moment of her life before death, it becomes readily apparent that the common-sense belief that death can be bad for the one who has died gives rise to a puzzle. In fact, if one is paradise-bound, death seems to be a *good* thing for the one who has died. Moreover, paradise will be better than this life even for the person who currently has the best life, so it appears that death will always be good for the one who is paradise-bound.¹³

At this point one might suggest that, because paradise is everlasting, no one misses out on the joys of paradise by being alive longer. In other words, it might seem that, since paradise is going to be there no matter when one dies, and since it goes on forever, one will get all of the same goods from paradise whether one dies earlier or later. And if one gets the same goods from paradise no matter when one dies, death could be bad for the one who has died for the reasons suggested by the deprivation approach, namely that death can deprive one of certain goods that she would have received had she remained alive. But this suggestion will not work, given our assumptions about the nature of existence in paradise, and perhaps a diagram will help to show why not. In the diagram below, the unbroken line extending infinitely to the right represents the everlastingness of paradise, the unbroken line segment below that represents one's life before paradise, and the broken line segment represents the extension of one's temporal life that one would have lived had she not died earlier:

¹³ This is not to say that rationality demands taking one's own life, for there might always be overriding reason not to take one's own life.

Figure 1: A Typical Conception of Entering Paradise



For each point on the broken line, there is a corresponding point on the unbroken line above.

Given our assumptions about paradise, each of these corresponding points on the unbroken line are better for a person than the points on the broken line. So it cannot be the case that one who is paradise-bound will receive the same goods even if she dies later, for, by stipulation, she will have missed out on some of the goods of paradise at the times she continued living.¹⁴

4. Unsatisfactory Answers

With this puzzle in mind, let us now consider two suggestions for solving it. The first gives more egoistic reasons for thinking that death can be bad for the paradise-bound, while the second gives more altruistic reasons.

4.1 Projects Limited to This Life

¹⁴ Some might object to the way that I have compared various amounts of goods in this context, since the paradise-bound will receive an infinite number of goods (and here I am talking about the goods of paradise) whether she dies earlier or later. When comparing two infinite sets, we might ask (in order to gage the magnitude of the two infinite sets) whether the elements of the sets can be put into a one-to-one correspondence with each other, and (plausibly) it will turn out in the case of the paradise-bound that the goods received in paradise after an earlier death can be put into a one-to-one correspondence with the goods received in paradise after a later death. Even if these two sets of goods are infinite to the same magnitude, however, there is a clear sense in which it would be better for the paradise-bound to have started receiving the goods of paradise earlier than she would if she died later. For the person in paradise, it will always be the case that her earlier death secured for her more goods of paradise than she would have received had she died later. In other words, the goods of paradise will endlessly be “tacked on” to goods already received, so we can always ask about a certain time how many goods a person has received up to that point; for the person in paradise who died later, she will always have received fewer goods than if she had died and entered paradise sooner. Thanks to Zac Bachman and Jonah Nagashima for discussion on this point.

On some accounts of paradise, there will not be opportunities to pursue certain types of projects that are available to us in this life.¹⁵ For example, it might be that, in paradise, no one is married or becomes married.¹⁶ One who is paradise-bound, then, if she dies before becoming married, will never have an opportunity to do so. Given that being married can be a good for her, her death can preclude her from ever having this good. And likewise for other familial relationships and other projects that might not feature in paradise.

Here we need to distinguish between what I will refer to as *pro tanto* goods for a person at a time and an all-things-considered good state of affairs for a person at a time.¹⁷ The former are goods to the extent that they benefit the person for whom they are goods at a time. To be an all-things-considered good state of affairs for a person is for a state of affairs to have one or more *pro tanto* goods counting in favor of that state of affairs *and* for the *pro tanto* good(s) not to be undermined by other considerations at the time. It might be *pro tanto* good for me to have a slice of cake now, given that I will enjoy it very much, but it might not be all-things-considered good for me to have a slice of cake now, given that I have just eaten a slice of cake and another slice would be worse for my health. And, it is important to note, all-things-considered good states of affairs can vary in the extent to which they are good. In other words, there might be two all-things-considered good states of affairs, one of which is a better state of affairs than the other.

Once this distinction is in place, however, it becomes apparent that, given our assumptions about existence in paradise (and in particular that each moment of one's existence in paradise is better for her than any moment not in paradise), being in paradise is a better all-

¹⁵ Presumably all evil pursuits will be off-limits, but, presumably, it would be better for a person not to pursue any evil anyway.

¹⁶ See Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, and Luke 20:35.

¹⁷ I mean for this distinction to be an intuitive one, though, to some degree, I am fine with the distinction being a purely stipulative one.

things-considered good state of affairs than any all-things-considered good state of affairs in this life. We must compare, with respect to some person *S*, the following two states of affairs:

(1) *S* dies at age 25, enters paradise, but never has the opportunity to have the *pro tanto* good of marriage, though *S* would have married at age 30 had *S* not died at age 25.

(2) *S* marries at age 30, and *S*'s marriage is an all-things-considered good state of affairs. *S* later (at age 80, say) dies and enters paradise.

No matter how good the state of affairs in (2) is stipulated to be, the state of affairs in (1) is going to be all-things-considered *better* than the one in (2). This is because the goods of paradise are better than any goods of this life, including the projects that are only available before entering paradise.

4.2 Making This World a Better Place

A more altruistic suggestion is that it is good to make this world better, and this is not a good one can achieve or to which one can contribute once one has died. Providing aid for those in need, researching cancer and other diseases, and working to solve global crises are just a few examples of ways one can achieve or contribute to goods of making this world better.¹⁸ Since none of these pursuits are possible in paradise, perhaps one's death can be bad for the one who dies and enters paradise on account of no longer being able to make this world better.

But as good as it is to make the world a better place, the puzzle we are considering is how death can be bad *for the one who has died*, and given that we are taking every moment in paradise to be better than any moment of this life, even the best goods of this life (of which finding a cure to cancer might be one) do not match the goods of paradise.

¹⁸ Alternatively, on some religious views, proselytization is a good that is not accessible after death.

5. One Solution: Deny Death's Badness

Having considered some potential attempts to solve the puzzle and having found these to be unsatisfactory, I now suggest two broad types of solution to the puzzle, each of which will be more or less appealing depending on one's other philosophical and theological commitments. The first broad type of solution, which is the subject of this section, simply denies that death can be bad for the paradise-bound.¹⁹ I argue that the main worry for this type of solution, namely, that it gives up (with respect to the paradise-bound) the common-sense belief that death can be bad for the one who has died, is only a *prima facie* worry. In the next section, I consider alternative solutions to the puzzle which allow for the retention of the common-sense belief that death can be bad for the one who dies, even if she is paradise-bound. But first things first: let us consider the plausibility of denying that death can be bad for the paradise-bound.

Perhaps someone moved by the failed attempts at solving the puzzle discussed in the previous section would concede that death cannot be bad for the paradise bound. Since every moment of paradise is better than any moment of this life, it might seem best to concede that the common-sense belief that death can be bad for the one who has died should be given up.²⁰

There is precedent for thinking that death can no longer be a bad thing for someone once she is paradise-bound. Some of St. Thomas Aquinas's claims about "holy souls" (who will enter paradise immediately upon death) seem to indicate that he took death not to be bad for them.²¹

¹⁹ This is a solution to the puzzle insofar as it countenances abandoning (with respect to the paradise-bound) the common-sense belief that death can be bad for the one who has died. The solution discussed in the next section allows for the retention of that common-sense belief and so, perhaps, is more aptly called a solution.

²⁰ In fact, many people do give up what I have been calling the common-sense belief with respect to the paradise-bound, and this is often mentioned at funerals of those who are believed to be in paradise.

²¹ As we will see in the next section, Aquinas also apparently thought that death could be bad for one entering purgatory.

According to Eleonore Stump, “Aquinas uses the bliss of the redeemed separated soul immediately after death as a way of showing that death is not to be feared” (2006: 158). Now, to say that death is not to be feared is not to say that one’s death cannot be bad, but Aquinas discusses a Pauline passage of scripture in which the badness of death is at issue:

But if someone wants to object that the Apostle did not say that immediately when the body is destroyed, we will have an eternal home in heaven in actuality, but rather only in hope—[...] this is clearly contrary to the Apostle's intention [...]. The point is made even more clearly [in the Pauline lines] that follow: “[...] we are confident and are willing, with a good will, to be absent from the body, and to be present to the Lord”[...]. But we should be willing in vain “to be absent from the body,”—that is, separated [from the body]—unless we were to be present immediately to the Lord... Immediately, therefore, when the holy soul is separated from the body, it sees God by sight [...]. Therefore, the Apostle was hoping that immediately after that destruction of his body he would come to heaven. (Stump 2006: 158-159, quoting Aquinas’s *Summa contra gentiles* IV.91)

In the passage Aquinas quotes, paradise is the object of the will of the paradise-bound since it is better to be absent from this life and present in paradise. Aquinas says more about being present in paradise:

[...] when the body is destroyed, the soul is brought to an eternal and heavenly home, which is nothing other than the enjoyment of the deity, as the angels enjoy it in heaven [...]. And so, immediately, when the holy soul is separated from the body, it sees God by sight. And this is the final beatitude. (Stump 2006: 158, quoting Aquinas’s *Summa contra gentiles* IV.91)

At the moment of death, then, holy souls are brought to the presence of God and experience the beatific vision. This is paradise for such souls, and this state is better for them than any possible state in this life.²²

The apparent problem facing those who deny that death can be bad for the paradise-bound is that they are abandoning the common-sense belief about death's badness. I claim that this is only a *prima facie* worry since it is often rationally permissible, sometimes rationally required, for one to give up a common-sense belief in light of the totality of the evidence. When Neo discovers the nature of the Matrix, it is rationally permissible (and perhaps rationally required) for him to give up many of his common-sense beliefs about his world (which he had previously been justified in holding, let's say). Similarly, when a person's trajectory changes such that she becomes paradise-bound, it is permissible for her, in light of her new condition (and the rest of her evidence), to give up the common-sense belief that her death can be bad for her.²³ Given the precedent for this approach, which I have already discussed, it is not implausible to think one is justified in giving up the common-sense belief that (with respect to the paradise-bound) death can be bad for the one who has died.

It is worth noting, before considering alternative solutions to the puzzle, that it is open to those who opt for the present solution to maintain that there is a sense in which death can be bad for the paradise-bound. While our puzzle concerns whether death can be *overall* bad for the

²² Note that in the passage Aquinas quotes (2 Corinthians 5:8), St. Paul claims that the paradise-bound are *willing* to be absent from the body (that is, to have died), which I take to imply that being absent from the body is the object of the wills of the paradise-bound, not merely that the paradise-bound are fine with being absent from the body. Elsewhere (Philippians 1:21), St. Paul says that, for the paradise-bound, to die is *gain*. In these passages, it sounds like the common-sense view about death's badness is left behind.

²³ What is the evidence that justifies abandoning the common-sense belief in this case? Well, presumably it can involve, *inter alia*, any or all of the following: the testimony of others, the fact that others have given up the belief in the past, and perhaps a coherence of the new belief that death cannot be bad, now that one is paradise-bound, with the rest of one's beliefs about reality.

paradise-bound, one might think of death as being a mere *pro tanto* bad for the paradise-bound in virtue of (*inter alia*, perhaps) its thwarting various projects limited to this life. Of course, death would not always be such a *pro tanto* bad, but it is easy to see how it could be such a bad, even for the paradise-bound.²⁴

6. Alternative Solutions

Given our assumptions about paradise, apparently death cannot be bad for the one who dies and immediately enters paradise, and I have argued that denying death's badness for the paradise-bound is not as much of a problem as one might think. There is a precedent, however, for rejecting the simple picture illustrated in **Figure 1**, and I will consider three alternatives. The first alternative is to subscribe to the Christian doctrine of purgatory. The second alternative is to maintain that there is a temporal gap in the paradise-bound's conscious experience between death and paradise. The third alternative is to posit what I will call distinct "levels" of paradise, with the simplest picture being one in which there are two levels of paradise, each better than life before death, but one of which is superior to the other. I argue that all three of these alternatives (each of which are antecedently accepted by some philosophers and theologians) allow for a consistent position that retains both our assumptions about paradise as well as the common-sense belief that death can be bad for the one who dies, even if she is paradise-bound. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate with respect to each alternative, these positions can account for the possibility of death's badness for the paradise-bound by showing that death can deprive even the paradise-bound of goods that she would have received had she remained alive, which is to say that these

²⁴ Furthermore, it might be the *pro tanto* badness of death that is being mourned at funerals of those taken to be paradise-bound, and this practice would be consistent with the denial that death can be overall bad for the paradise-bound. Thanks to John Fischer for this suggestion.

positions can accept the deprivation account of death's badness even with respect to the paradise-bound. Let us consider each of these positions in turn.

6.1 Pains of Purgatory Surpass the Pains of This Life

Some philosophers and theologians are committed to the doctrine of purgatory.²⁵ Without delving into the details of purgatory, it will be helpful to have in mind some idea of what the doctrine is typically taken to be.²⁶ In the appendix of the constitution affirmed by the Second Council of Lyons (in 1274), we find what Jerry Walls calls a “landmark in the official promulgation of purgatory”:

...those who fall into sin after baptism must not be rebaptized, but that through a genuine penitence they obtain pardon for their sins. That if, truly penitent, they die in charity before having, by worthy fruits of penance, rendered satisfaction for what they have done by commission or omission, their souls, as brother John has explained to us, are purged after their death, by purgatorial or purificatory penalties, and that, for the alleviation of these penalties, they are served by the suffrages of the living faithful, to wit, the sacrifice of the mass, prayers, alms, and other works of piety that the faithful customarily offer on behalf of other of the faithful according to the institutions of the Church. The souls of those who, after receiving baptism, have contracted absolutely no taint of sin, as well as those who, after contracting the taint of sin, have been purified either while they remained in their bodies or after being stripped of their bodies are, as was stated above, immediately received into heaven. (Le Goff 1984: 285)

²⁵ Most of those who are committed to the doctrine are in the Catholic tradition, but, for a Protestant take on the doctrine, see Walls (2011).

²⁶ For my familiarity with the doctrine of purgatory, I am especially indebted to the work of Jerry Walls (2011) and to a work that Walls cites in his survey of the history of the doctrine: Jacque Le Goff (1984).

The basic idea is that not all of those who have received baptism will immediately be received into paradise, for some will still have need of being purged of what they have done by commission or omission.²⁷ Vatican II provides a succinct, official statement of the doctrine:

The doctrine of purgatory clearly demonstrates that even when the guilt of sin has been taken away, punishment for it or the consequences of it may remain to be expiated or cleansed. They often are. In fact, in purgatory the souls of those “who died in the charity of God and truly repentant, but who had not made satisfaction with adequate penance for their sins and omissions” are cleansed after death with punishments designed to purge away their debt. (Quoted in Walls 2011: 31-32)

For our purposes, then, it is worth noting two things: first, purgatory takes place between the death of the person who is paradise-bound and her actual entrance into paradise; second, the punishments for or consequences of commissions and omissions done in this life may be absolved in this life, such that an earlier death might result in more punishments and consequences in purgatory than might have resulted had one died later (and, through penitence, obtained pardon).²⁸

In order for the doctrine to be of any help in solving the puzzle about death's badness for the paradise-bound, one's theory of purgatory must satisfy the following constraint:

²⁷ The language of “satisfaction” for sins is common (and can be seen in the passage from the Second Council of Lyons), but others prefer the notion of “sanctification.” For a recent discussion of these various “models” (as they are often called), see Barnard (2007) and Judisch, (2009). Both models (if they are distinct models) are consistent with the claims I make in this section.

²⁸ This latter point, according to Walls, is one of the favorable factors (for the doctrine of purgatory) around the time that the doctrine caught on: “The important point of emphasis is that guilt (*culpa*) can be pardoned or remitted through contrition and confession, but the debt of punishment (*poena*) remains, and can only be satisfied by undergoing the penance levied by the Church. If the penance is not satisfactorily completed in this life, due either to negligence or *untimely death*, then the punishment must be undergone in purgatory” (2011: 21, emphasis added).

Badness of Purgatory Constraint (**BPC**): At least in some cases, the pains of purgatory are more severe than the pains involved in having one's punishments absolved in this life rather than in purgatory.

Unless a theory of purgatory satisfies **BPC**, nothing about the theory will guarantee that it is possible for a person's death to be bad for her.²⁹ By requiring that (at least in some cases) one's purgatorial punishments could have been avoided by experiencing something less painful in this life, it is easy to see how an earlier death could be bad for someone headed to paradise (via purgatory), for she could have avoided more severe pain by living longer and experiencing something less painful in this life (e.g., penance).

As it turns out, many of those who accept the doctrine of purgatory have theories of purgatory that satisfy **BPC**. A possible reason for this is that St. Augustine (who was influential in the development of several Christian doctrines), in his Commentary on Psalm 37, claims: "Although some will be saved by fire, this fire will be more terrible than anything that a man can suffer in this life" (Le Goff 1984: 68). Even the pains of absolving some of the punishments one would face in purgatory, then, since they would be suffered in this life, would be less terrible than the pains of suffering purgatorial fire. According to Walls, this passage from Augustine "was widely cited in subsequent discussion...The rigorist intent of this principle is clear. No one should put off reforming his life with the thought that it will be more painless to do so after death. *To the contrary, any suffering in this life will pale in comparison to the pain of*

²⁹ On some conceptions of purgatory, "purgatorial fire" is not so severe, and it might not be the case that such theories of purgatory satisfy **BPC**. Such views might still allow for a solution to the puzzle about death's badness by maintaining that death might deprive one of opportunities to minimize one's time in purgatory and thereby secure a quicker entrance to paradise. For the sake of simplicity, I will set aside this type of conception of purgatory here and focus on theories that satisfy **BPC**, but what I say here may well apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to certain theories of purgatory that do not satisfy **BPC**. Thanks to Jonah Nagashima for raising this point.

postmortem fire” (2011: 16, emphasis added). Note that the comparison being made here is between the pains of reforming in this life (and thus avoiding pain in purgatory) and the pains of being reformed in purgatory; in both cases, the pains achieve the same salutary result, yet the latter are far more severe.

Various others who accept the doctrine of purgatory have theories satisfying **BPC**. According to Walls, Aquinas endorses the Augustinian position “that any pain of purgatory is worse than any suffering in this life. Not only are the negligent not exempt from the punishment due them, but it will be worse than any punishment in this life would have been” (2011: 62-63, endnote omitted).³⁰ Sir Thomas More adopts this view as well, especially in the following passage, written from the perspective of souls in purgatory: “never have you known pain comparable to ours, whose fire as far surpasses in heat all the fires that ever burned upon the earth as the hottest of all those surpasses an imaginary fire painted on the wall” (2002: 190).³¹ So there is precedent among those who accept the doctrine of purgatory to have a theory of

³⁰ See, for example, Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae*, Appendix 1, Question 2, Article 1.

³¹ To support his theory of purgatory, More appeals to the biblical story of king Hezekiah:

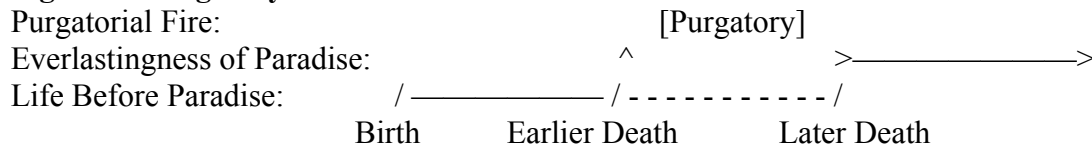
First, it seems very probable that when the good king Hezekiah wept at the warning of his death given him by the prophet Isaiah, it was for no reason other than fear of purgatory...Now he considered the seriousness of his offense to be such that he thought and esteemed the mere loss of this present life to be far too little to be a just and fitting punishment for it, and therefore he fell into a great dread of far worse punishment afterward. Being a good, faithful king, he could not lack a sure hope of receiving through his repentance such forgiveness as would preserve him from hell. But with his time being so short that we would have no opportunity to do penance for his transgression, he therefore feared that the rest of his rightful punishment would be carried out in purgatory. And therefore he wept bitterly and longed to live longer, that his satisfaction done there in the world in prayer and other good, virtuous deeds might gradually eliminate and cancel out all the punishment that would otherwise be coming to him here among us. (2002: 138-139.)

It is worth noting that More not only reveals that his theory of purgatory satisfies **BPC** but also that he took Hezekiah to be able to eliminate the punishments he would experience in purgatory through prayer and other good done in this life.

purgatory according to which **BPC** is satisfied and according to which, as I mentioned above, the punishments for or consequences of commissions and omissions done in this life may be absolved in this life, such that an earlier death might result in more punishments and consequences in purgatory than might have resulted had one died later (and, through penitence, had obtained pardon). And, on such accounts of purgatory, death can be bad for the one who has died even if she is paradise-bound, since many who are paradise-bound will undergo purgatorial fire before entering paradise.

We can contrast this alternative conception of the relation between the paradise-bound and paradise itself by modifying the diagram used to portray the typical conception of entering paradise. Here is the modified diagram:

Figure 2: Purgatory



In stark contrast with the previous model, an appeal to purgatory allows one to deny that the paradise-bound always enter paradise immediately upon dying. In some cases, an earlier death can deprive one of opportunities to absolve purgatorial punishments and thereby result in a stint in purgatory before entering paradise. In the case portrayed in **Figure 2**, a later death provides such opportunities to absolve purgatorial punishments, and an earlier death deprives one of the goods of having these opportunities to avoid the pains of purgatory.

6.2 Temporal Gap in Conscious Experience

The second alternative we will consider is to maintain that there is a temporal gap in the paradise-bound's conscious experience between death and paradise.³² Peter van Inwagen defends this type of position, maintaining that the paradise-bound do not cease to exist during the time between death and resurrection but that they exist merely as corpses:

It is of course true that men apparently cease to exist: those who are cremated, for example. But it contradicts nothing in the creeds to suppose that this is not what really happens, and that God preserves our corpses contrary to all appearance...Perhaps at the moment of each man's death, God removes his corpse and replaces it with a simulacrum which is what is burned or rots. (1978: 121)

If I continue to exist as a corpse (as a result of God's snatching my body at the moment of my death) until some future time at which I am resurrected and enter paradise, there will be a temporal gap in my conscious experience between my death and my entrance to paradise.³³

Another way of construing the temporal gap in the paradise-bound's conscious experience is to maintain that there is a gap in the person's existence.³⁴ Trenton Merricks develops this type of view:

³² Typically, on these views, the temporal gap ends upon the resurrection of the person's body, and she then enters paradise. For some interesting discussions of the metaphysics of resurrection, see Zimmerman (1999), Baker (2005; 2007; 2011), and Merricks (2009).

³³ It is hard to see, given van Inwagen's later view (1990), how a human organism could exist as a corpse, since organisms are essentially living things. Zimmerman makes this point: "My corpse is not even a *candidate* for being me [on van Inwagen's view], since it does not participate in a Life" (1999: 206). For this reason, materialists about human persons might be better off adopting the view I consider next, suggested by Zimmerman (1999) (and defended by Merricks (2009)). My aim here, however, is not to object to any particular account of the metaphysics of human persons; rather, I want to consider the prospects of some such accounts for solving the puzzle about death's badness.

³⁴ As I have already noted, Zimmerman (1999) suggests a view like this for materialists about human persons. Although not himself a materialist, Zimmerman thinks that his suggestion provides dualists, like himself, with a way of explaining how the immaterial soul can be united with one and the same body before death and upon the resurrection of that (very same) body. For

To better understand what a temporal gap is supposed to be, consider the following story. You build a time machine that can send you—and your body—to “the future.” You push the start button. You disappear. You then reappear at some later date. That is, this machine sends you to some future time, allowing you to “skip” all the times between now and then. Thus this machine causes a temporal gap in your life, and also in the career of your body. (2009: 477)

What the time machine story is supposed to show is that it is possible for the paradise-bound to be sent into the future, to the time of her resurrection, upon her death. Given this temporal “gappiness” in the existence of someone who is paradise-bound, there is a period in which she is not consciously experiencing anything. And, during that time, she lacks access to the goods of this life as well as to the goods of paradise.

Common to both van Inwagen and Merricks’s accounts of the temporal gap in conscious experience between death and paradise is the implication that, had the person lived any longer, she would have been able to have more pleasant experiences (or other goods) during her life with no loss to the goods she receives in paradise. This can be contrasted with an account we have already considered according to which the paradise-bound immediately enter paradise upon dying, in which case the continuation of life is also, for the time being, the forgoing of paradise’s goods.

Since these accounts allow for the possibility that death can deprive the paradise-bound of goods, they are able to adopt the most popular philosophical account of what makes death bad for the one who dies, namely, the deprivation approach, which we considered in section II. Given

our purposes, though, we need not consider Zimmerman’s dualist picture, since presumably the immaterial soul would, upon the death of the body, be present with God in paradise, and we have already considered views of this type.

such views, an earlier death can deprive someone (even someone who is paradise-bound) of various goods, it is possible to maintain that death can be bad for the paradise-bound.

6.3 Levels of Paradise

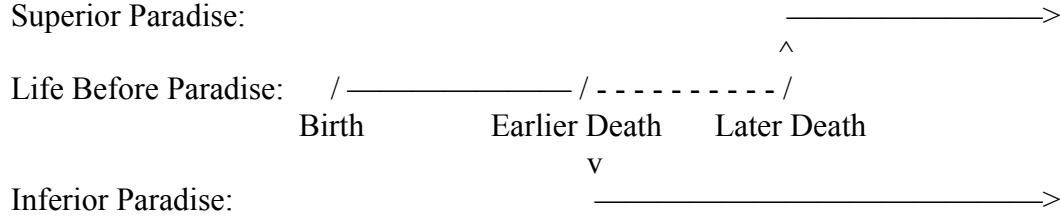
The final alternative we will consider, which I will only briefly mention, posits that there are distinct levels of paradise, with some level(s) being better than another.³⁵ To keep things simple, we need only consider a model with two distinct levels of paradise, one of which is better for a person than the other.³⁶ In order to accommodate the belief that death can be bad for the paradise-bound, someone who took there to be levels of paradise might claim that death can deprive someone who is paradise-bound of opportunities to secure entrance to the superior level of paradise. As a result of an earlier death, despite having entered a level of paradise at an earlier time, one might be overall worse off as a result of her death and entrance into the inferior level. The reason for this is that a later death would have resulted in a better state of affairs for the person, since there would be some point at which, despite entering (the superior level of) paradise later, she would have received more goods in the long run than if she had died earlier

³⁵ Some might balk at using ‘paradise’ to refer to what I will call inferior levels of paradise, since paradise is typically taken to be something like the best state or place to be in, and there will be superior states/places. Although I feel the force of this concern, I will continue using ‘paradise’ to refer to each of these levels, but note that, in keeping with one of our assumptions about paradise, each level of paradise, even the inferior ones, must be such that to be there is better for a person than to be in this life.

³⁶ There will be a plethora of ways to spell out what the levels of paradise are and how one goes about getting to one level rather than another. For example, a Kantian may say that the goods of paradise are proportionate to one’s good deeds in this life. For another example, Aquinas claimed that one person might be happier than another in paradise (since, following Augustine, he took the promise of “many mansions” as signifying varying degrees of merit in paradise; see Book V, Article II of Aquinas’s *Treatise on Happiness*), though everyone will be as happy as they are capable of being. Still another example is that, on some religious traditions, a separate (and better) level of paradise is reserved for saints and/or martyrs. What I say about this type of position’s ability to account for death’s badness for the paradise-bound can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to any of the plethora of ways of spelling out the position.

and been forever limited to the goods of the inferior level of paradise. We might diagram this possible view in the following way:

Figure 4: Levels of Paradise



Provided that one would receive more goods in the superior level of paradise, and provided that an earlier death can deprive one of opportunities to ensure entrance into the superior level, one’s death can be bad, on this view, even for the paradise-bound.

7. Conclusion

It is a common-sense belief that death can be bad for the one who has died, and this is a common belief even among those who think that death is a permanent experiential blank. If we instead adopt the assumption that paradise awaits some of those who will die, it becomes puzzling to maintain the common-sense belief (that death can be bad for the one who has died) with respect to the paradise-bound. There is some precedent for denying the common-sense belief about death’s badness for those who are paradise-bound, but I have argued that there are three ways of resolving the puzzle without giving up the common-sense belief. Interestingly, we discovered that all three of these alternative positions can appeal to the most popular account of death’s badness for the one who has died (namely, the deprivation approach), even with respect to the paradise-bound.

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